



The Methodist Messenger
JULY 2019
Whiteville United Methodist Church



Sunday School - 9:00 a.m.
Sunday Worship Service - 10:00 a.m.
Wednesday Communion Service - 6:00 p.m.

TOO LENGTHY A REPORT ON A PASTOR'S OBSERVATIONS AT THE
2019 SESSION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

1. On July 12, a Wednesday, just over 1,600 United Methodists, half laity and half clergy, registered for the 2019 North Carolina Annual Conference at the Greenville Convention Center. The **partisan nature of this Annual Conference** was made obvious from the get-go by rainbow signs, mostly stoles draped around the neck, worn by a significant minority of laity and clergy. Each person who wore such a sign declared without words: I am here to advance in the North Carolina Conference the acceptance of sexual expression outside the covenant of one-man-one-woman marriage, same-sex marriage, and ordination in which the sexual preferences and practices of the ordained are not considered. This means that The Great Debate on human sexuality, which had been largely confined to General Conference, has now come home to roost in the Annual Conferences -- including the North Carolina Conference.

2. **The Opening Worship Service and Celebration of Holy Communion** started the Annual Conference. The Opening Prayer lifted our voices and hearts to God: "Grant us, O Lord, to worship you in spirit and in truth; that our consciences may be quickened by your holiness, our minds nourished by your truth, our imaginations purified by your beauty. Help us to open our hearts and lift our praises to you in selfless adoration and love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord." (by John Chrysostom [an early Church Father and Archbishop of Constantinople, who died in 407]) The Anthem, "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name," which was sung inspiringly by a Mass Choir and by the Annual Conference, almost lifted the congregation toward heavenward.

Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, resident bishop of The Raleigh Area, preached the sermon. Her sermon signaled what was to come later that week. The sermon was based on Psalm 8, titled "Only a Little Lower Than God," and delivered with the clarity, winsomeness, and energy that Bishop Hope always demonstrates in the pulpit (though actually she walks when she talks). This opening sermon lifted up the greatness, goodness, and generosity of God. Creating mankind "only a little lower" (or "only a little less," as she repeatedly said) than the Almighty, God intended that humanity honor each other in all of life.

It must be said that this sermon mostly neglected the Second Person of the Trinity. So this pastor did not hear about Christ participating in creation, redeeming the world through His death and resurrection, sending His Spirit into the Church and world, reigning now over the Church and the world, or coming again in glory and victory at The End of History. Likewise, references to humanity's sins and God's forgiveness of sins were in short supply. Everything came back to God's great goodness and to humanity's great potential. (This way of narrowing Christian theology is hardly new. Recently more popular in The United Methodist Church, it has a centuries-long tradition in the history of Christianity.)

The service concluded with Holy Communion. It was disappointing that some Communion servers, including the bishop, wore rainbow signs of one kind or another. Even so, it was so very good to receive the real presence of Jesus Christ among the brothers and sisters of the Annual Conference.

3. **The Youth Storm Fund** special offering, which was received during the opening worship service and which will help advance hurricane relief across the North Carolina Conference, totaled \$33,000.

4. **The Clergy Executive Session**, which concentrates on matters related to the clergy, was fairly routine. During **the Laity Executive Session**, the lay candidates -- who were running to be elected as delegates to General Conference 2020 and/or Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference 2020 -- were introduced to all the laity of the Annual Conference.

5. Since the Whiteville United Methodist Church has so many accounts with the **United Methodist Foundation** in Garner (Carillon Fund, Christian Action Fund, Earl and Mildred Robbins Endowment, Parsonage Fund, Preaching Mission Fund, and Schulken Endowment), Marsha and I attended the foundation's luncheon. Several interesting stories were told during the hour. For example, the building and property of Asbury United Methodist Church in Chapel Hill was recently sold for \$1.8 million to St. Thomas More Roman Catholic Church.

6. **Voting for the 2020 General Conference and the 2020 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference delegates**, which involved pushing buttons on hand-held digital devices (during multiple ballots), took place during this Annual Conference.

The laity elected 8 delegates to General Conference, 8 delegates to the Jurisdictional Conference, and 5 alternates to the Jurisdictional Conference. Likewise, the clergy elected 8, 8, and 5. To be elected, a candidate had to receive just over 50% of the votes cast in a ballot.

The final results of the voting demonstrated how highly organized the centrists and progressives were at this Annual Conference. The overwhelming majority of laity who were elected most probably oppose the Traditional Plan adopted by the 2019 General Conference. Likewise, the overwhelming majority of clergy, perhaps all of them, probably oppose the Traditional Plan. (FYI: Rev. Belton Joyner, who will be the 2020 Carolyn T. High Preaching Mission preacher and who has been elected to General Conference 8 times [!], was the first elected on the clerical side.) Our Annual Conference's 2020 delegation features more women, people of color, and young people than might have been guessed. This election probably surprised many delegates of the Annual Conference.

However, this did not necessarily indicate a radical shift. Here is why. During the 2019 General Conference in St. Louis, all those who voted against the Traditional Plan were asked to stand. It has been said that 12 of 16, in the North Carolina Conference's delegation, were seen standing. Again, 12 out of 16 voted against the Traditional Plan. Most, if not all, of the 12 were probably centrists (or liberals). Therefore, it is probably fair to say that these 12 were simply more discreet (or secretive) in 2016 and 2019, than the presumably more progressive 2020 delegates will be, about where they stand on the matters at hand. Again, the 12 tended to keep their theological-moral commitments under cover. The 2020 delegation will probably be more up front about where they stand and how they will vote.

In electing the 2020 delegation, the 2019 North Carolina Annual Conference voted against both the conference's institutional-liberal establishment (which seeks middle ground on all matters, avoids in-your-face disagreements, and out of politeness/niceness prefers not to talk about difficult subjects) and the conference's evangelical-orthodox establishment (which simply did not have enough voters). Establishment types on both sides of the aisle, who perhaps had grown accustomed to winning these elections, failed to attract enough votes for election. Some of them must have felt more than a little jilted by this throw-out-the-establishments election.

7. **Dr. Edgardo Colon-Emeric**, who teaches at Duke Divinity School, noted that, according to history's big picture, Christianity is never as strong as it looks, and it is never as weak as it appears. That sobering, and yet hopeful, comment is quite helpful at this time.

8. Mr. Al Miller heads up **the North Carolina Conference's disaster-response efforts**. With Hurricane Matthew (October 2016) and Hurricane Florence (September 2018) leaving over 100,000 structures damaged or destroyed in eastern North Carolina, Mr. Miller offered a plea for financial and hands-on assistance. To date, our conference has participated in the restoration of nearly 850 homes.

9. With sexual ethics continuing to present a challenge to local churches, the conference has established **a team that will assist congregations** that have gone through a crisis caused by sins, crimes, and/or improprieties of a sexual nature.

10. The **episcopal residence** -- that is, the parsonage for the bishop -- is owned by the North Carolina Conference. The conference voted to sell the property, which is worth over \$900,000, and to provide a housing allowance for the bishop's housing.

11. **The Commission on the Role and Status of Women (COSROW)** made a report on its recent Seneca Falls Pilgrimage. During the tour of historic sites, it was remembered that American reform movements of the 1800s -- Abolitionism, Temperance, and Women's Rights -- at times converged. Also, a video captured various male pastors responding to United Methodist comments -- sometimes silly, sometimes immoral, sometimes vicious -- made about female pastors; these pastors consistently said No! to what could be called The Methodist Return of Archie Bunker. The question "How would I want my friend, sister, wife, or mother treated as she moves to serve a new church?" deserves the answer: "With love and respect."

12. The **Memorial Service** recognized 18 clergy and 21 spouses who had crossed the Jordan since the 2018 Annual Conference. Led by Rev. Ray Broadwell preaching "How Can We Say Thanks?," we honored their ministries and heard some of their ministerial wisdom.

13. This year's **Duke Divinity School luncheon** on Thursday gave the microphone to Dr. Warren Smith, an associate professor of historical theology. Dr. Smith noted that The Divinity School, like all of Duke University's schools and colleges, pays an annual assessment fee to the university. It covers lawn care, building maintenance, and the like. That helps drive up the annual tuition at The Divinity School, which now stands at \$17,000 per year. Ouch. By the way, Dr. Smith is exemplary: he is committed to the Church's faith; he is a dedicated scholar; and he is faithful to Christ's Church, even The United Methodist Church. In other words, this guy seems to be hitting

SOME NOTES FROM THE 2019 NCC ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Just over 1,600 lay and clergy members of the North Carolina Annual Conference gathered from June 12-15, 2019 for the Annual Conference session. Worship and teaching were part of each day. In opening the Annual Conference, Bishop Hope Morgan Ward focused on Psalm 8. Bishop Ward proclaimed the wondrous intent of God for humanity to be “a little less than God,” possible through the work of grace in our lives. She dreamed that Methodists might aspire to such gracious love of others and have people ask, “What is it at work in those Methodists that causes them to love, welcome and bless all people and all the world? How might I experience that graciousness of life?”

Bishop Leonard Fairley of the Kentucky and Red Bird Missionary Conferences said God showed generosity and used holy imagination to create life. “Since God is generous,” he asked, “how could we be any different?” He challenged the conference to live into the mandate that “generosity is not an option for those of us who are water-washed and spirit-born.” Making ourselves available to God should be an intentional practice in our daily lives.

Many good things happening within our conference were celebrated, among them: Disaster Response after hurricanes Matthew and Florence; having six new faith communities launched this year; generous giving to benevolences. (a total of \$18.6M was given to local and United Methodist benevolences, an increase of \$888,000) the years of service in ministry by those retiring; that 91.58% of churches paid their apportionments in 2018; and that the NC Conference was one of 26 annual or missionary conferences that fully paid apportionments to the General Conference.

The proposed NCC Annual Conference budget for 2021 represents a 23.13% decrease from the approved 2020 budget. All celebrated this reduction, which was largely due to meeting funding goals for retiree pension and health care and removing the need to fund an episcopal residence. Annual conference members approved the request for \$16,205,448 for the 2021 annual conference budget; these funds are to be raised in 2020. The large reduction in budget will have an immediate effect in lessening local church apportionments in 2020.

The North Carolina Annual Conference elected 21 lay and 21 clergy delegates and alternates for the 2020 General and Jurisdictional Conferences. More than 38% of the laity and clergy elected are under the age of 40, and the average age for the eight General Conference clergy delegates is 48. Candidates were suggested by the Evangelical Fellowship which supports the Traditional Plan adopted by the 2019 General Conference, and by the Brighter Future group, which rejects the Traditional Plan and supports full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ people throughout the UMC.

Of the delegates elected, all but one or two alternates reflect the view of the Brighter Future group.

Among the resolutions approved was Resolution 15 to be submitted to the 2020 General Conference which is Supporting Full Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ Persons and Rejecting the Traditional Plan. After some amendments and lively debate, Resolution 15 passed by a vote of 60.31% Yes to 39.69% No.

During the closing day, Ordering of Ministry led by Bishop Ward reflected new persons going into ministerial appointments. Rev. Paul Stallsworth was re-appointed to serve Whiteville UMC.

If you have questions or would like additional information, I'd be happy to share what cannot fit into this article.

– Carolyn Hankins, Delegate to NCAC
(Portions of this article were taken from “2019 North Carolina Annual Conference Report,” an unsigned article from [https://nccumc.org/ac2019/latestupdates/.](https://nccumc.org/ac2019/latestupdates/))

HELP WANTED

The SPRC has created a new position: Substitute Administrative Assistant. This will be a paid position and includes paid training time. If you would like more information, please call Rob Conway, Chair of SPRC, at 640-1395.

JULY BIRTHDAYS

3rd - Martha Border
7th - Nadia Lancaster
8th - Annette Daniel, Thetus Sessions
9th - Shirley Kennedy
10th - Lewellyn David, Ann Pait
11th - Addison Gilmore
13th - Brad Leggett
16th - Terry Simmons
17th - Julie Daniel, Pat Lancaster
20th - Ann Worthington, Dee Waddell
24th - Olive Shuping
25th - Emily McLam
29th - Dial Gray, III
30th - Anne Yellott
31st - Betty Gray



Whiteville United
Methodist Church
902 Pinckney Street
Whiteville, NC 28472

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U. S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 38
WHITEVILLE, NC

Mrs. Kathy Graham, Administrative Assistant
July and August
Monday-Thursday/8:30 a.m.- 12:30 p.m.

Mr. Layton Dowless, Custodian
Monday-Friday/7:30-11:30 a.m.

Ms. Tammie Anderson, Treasurer
Friday/4:00-6:00 p.m. (or later)

Rev. Paul T. Stallsworth, Pastor

Whiteville United Methodist Church
email: wumc@whitevilleumc.org
mail: 902 Pinckney Street/Whiteville, NC 28472
telephone: (910) 642-3376

The Whiteville United Methodist Church Service of Worship is broadcast on WTXY 1540 AM and 103.9 FM from 10:00 a.m. until 11:00 a.m. on Sundays. Also it is available online at www.wtxy1540.com: click on "Click to Listen Live" under "United Methodist Church of Whiteville" at 10:00 a.m. to hear the complete audio of the service.

Mission Statement of Whiteville United Methodist Church
As people of the body of Christ, we will gather for and be strengthened by Word and Sacraments, participate in loving fellowship, grow in discipleship, and serve our community and the world in Christ's name.