

2017 North Alabama Annual Conference Report

6/5/2017



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Sunday - June 4

The 2017 North Alabama Annual Conference gathered at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville on the afternoon of Sunday, June 4, for an opening celebration of Pentecost. The Conference began as those gathered sang "And Are We Yet Alive."

After calling the Conference to order, the Conference elected Rev. Dr. Dedric Cowser as Conference Secretary. They also elected assistant secretaries (Rev. Nancy Cole, Karen Long, Rev. Tim Tatum, and Rev. Matt Reed), Conference Parliamentarian (Rev. Sherill Clontz) and set the consent agenda. The consent agenda consists of reports that require action from the Conference floor for which we expect a positive vote.

The Conference then moved into a time of worship. Reflecting the story of Pentecost, worship began with a variety of languages sharing the good news, "Jesus Christ is Lord and has risen from the dead, just as he promised! We are witnesses to his power and now bring the good news to you. Receive the Lord!" A mass choir comprised of members from many local church choirs led music and liturgical dancers helped tell the story of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Bishop Robert Schnase, bishop of the Rio Texas Conference, preached a message entitled “Nibbling Our Way Lost” based on the parable found in Luke 15:1-7. He noted three purposes of the parable. First, we are like the lost sheep and all are lost. Just like sheep that graze and unknowingly leave their shepherd, we tend to disconnect from God and others. However, secondly, the parable also tells us we have a God that pursues us, loves us and never gives up on anybody. Bishop Schnase noted that the third thing the parable tells is that God has placed our churches like mission stations and the Church has a mission to search for the lost.

Following the sermon, the Conference received a special offering for the Conference priority of Ministry with the Poor and the summer Exploration internships.

Worship ended with Conference members and guests sharing in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Young adult and youth members joined retiring clergy to serve the elements.

After a dinner break, the Conference then divided into the Clergy Executive Session and the Laity Session - the only time clergy and laity meet separately.

Monday - June 5

Monday morning began with Rev. Dr. Andy Wolfe, chair of the Conference Episcopal Committee, greeting the Conference and welcoming Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett and her family back to North Alabama for four more years. He presented her a gift of framed pictures of Alabama landmarks.

The Conference then lifted their voices in praise singing music led by the Cove UMC praise band.

Bishop Robert Schnase spoke to the Conference. During his teaching time he noted five things churches needed to work toward the United Methodist mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World — Christ-centeredness, fruitfulness, excellence, accountability and collaboration.

Conference Secretary Dedric Cowser led the Conference through adopting the consent agenda.

Rev. Bob Alford, Executive Director of Healthy Congregations, introduced the theme priority of this Annual Conference - Healthy Congregations. He noted that throughout the Conference members would hear about tools for church health available to their congregation, as well as, stories and testimonies from congregations currently working with these tools.

Rev. Vaughn Stafford shared the first tool for church health describing how the L3 model developed by Spiritual Leadership, Incorporated, has worked at ClearBranch UMC. L3 groups meet together and focus on loving, learning and leading.

The Camp Sumatanga Trustees, led by Rev. Mike Densmore, took the stage and shared with the Conference that earlier this year Sumatanga’s Executive Director Lee Padgett had received the Legacy of Leadership award from the United Methodist Camp & Retreat Ministries Association. This is a

recognition of lifetime achievement in camping ministry.

Rev. Bob Alford returned to the podium to focus the Conference back on the theme of Healthy Congregations. Referring to [a video](#) of testimonies from North Alabama United Methodists sharing their stories of how they first came to their local church and what keeps them active and growing in their faith, he discussed relational evangelism and the importance of discipleship in local congregations. Rev. Alford noted, “Our church bubbles need to be expanded.”

The Conference heard a presentation from young adult members of the Annual Conference. Marian Royston (Southeast District) and Micah Shelton (South Central District) shared three requests of how local congregations can help discover, develop and deploy young adult leaders - “teach us, involve us, and invest in us.”

Rev. Stephen Benefield presented the Statistician’s Report noting that participation in Christian formation groups and involvement in missions continue to grow to the highest in recent memory.

Rev. Lewis Archer shared about the Conference Priority of Ministry with the Poor. He noted that more than \$36,000 had been collected during Sunday night’s Opening Celebration for the 2017 Annual Conference Special Offering designated for Exploration and other Ministry with the Poor initiatives. He also reported that the 2016 Annual Conference mission project, the Bazillion Book Drive, had resulted in more than 100,000 books in the hands of children throughout North Alabama. He invited Annual Conference members and their congregations to participate in training opportunities provided by the Ministry with the Poor Operational Team such as poverty simulations offered throughout the year and Immersion at Camp Sumatanga on June 25-30, 2017.

Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries Becky Walker shared about this leadership development process for lay people. The presentation included a [video of testimonies](#) from leaders involved in Lay Servant Ministries.

Rev. Bob Alford shared another tool for church health called the Antioch Project. This is a process for aligning the vision, mission and accountability in context toward church health and growth.

The Council on Finance Report was presented by Vice President of the Council on Finance Mary Frances Guthrie and Conference Treasurer Scott Selman. The Council presented a budget for 2018 of \$10,155,717. This recommended budget is the same total budget as the Conference has had for 2017, 2016 and 2015. The recommended 2018 budget includes seven General Conference apportioned funds totaling \$3,412,198, or 33.6% of the total budget. The 2018 budget also includes significantly higher reserves. The budget was adopted by the Conference as presented.

The Conference also approved the Council’s recommendation that the 2018 Conference budget be funded using a proportional giving based funding model — each local church to remit 10% (a tithe) of its unrestricted receipts on a monthly basis in support of the Conference budget and the applicable district budget. Local churches will not be asked to remit separate or additional amounts for district budgets in 2018.

Brant Sanders presented the report from the Board of Pension and Health Benefits. The Board recommended *HealthFlex* premium rates for 2018 of the following: Individual insurance - \$740 per month; Dependent insurance - \$740 per month for a Family Total of \$1,480 per month. These rates are a 6% increase over the rates in 2017, but are the first premium rate increases since 2011. Sanders noted the level premium rates for seven years was possible due to the good health care stewardship of *Healthflex* participants and strong reserve funds. The Conference adopted the recommended 2018 premium rates.

Rev. Peter von Herrmann presented a report from the Adult Discipleship team noting resources the team makes available to local churches and individuals.

Rev. Dr. Clinton Hubbard, Executive Director of Ethnic Ministries, and members of the Ethnic Ministries Operational Team shared a report about this Conference priority area. They highlighted three opportunities the team sponsored over the last year - the Black Church Summit, offering North Alabama youth an opportunity to attend the annual Harambee event and the Know to Grow Leverage Workshops.

Rev. Brandon Harris presented the report from the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry. He explained that the Conference has campus ministries in place to serve 62,000 college students in the North Alabama area. However, he also noted there are approximately 79,600 students on campuses not served by a United Methodist campus ministry. This means 41% of college students in North Alabama are served by a United Methodist campus ministry. However, at the present time, only 0.4% of those students are engaged in a United Methodist campus ministry. He encouraged local churches to partner with the Board to help more of their students engage with current campus ministries and to develop ministries to under-served campuses. The report closed with the Board recognizing one campus minister, Sherry Bassham, who, over the years, started not one but two different campus ministries on under-served campuses. Sherry is retiring this year alongside her husband Rev. Jimmy Bassham.

In a continuation of reports presenting tools for church health, Rev. Brian Erickson shared about Mission Insight, an online system provided *free* to each North Alabama congregation to help learn about their local community, its needs and ministry opportunities.

Conference Disaster Response and Recovery Coordinator Rev. Randy Burbank shared the updated Conference disaster response plan and other resources that will be available to local congregations to help the conference, "to be the caring presence of Jesus Christ in order to offer hope, healing and help in times of disasters."

The morning session closed with a recognition of Laura Sisson, who is retiring later this month after 23 years as Birmingham-Southern College's Director of Church Relations. She offered a blessing before the Conference observed a lunch break.

Monday afternoon began with the annual Memorial Service. Rev. Sherry Harris preached a sermon

titled, "Don't Miss the Miracle" based on John 13:34-35. During the service the Conference remembered the following clergy and clergy spouses who have died in the last year.

- Mrs. Barbara P. Archer
- Mrs. Annie Joyce Joiner Brown
- Reverend Buddie Ralph Brown Sr.
- Mrs. Lois Eilene Harris Byrum
- Mrs. Beverly Louise Cole
- Mrs. Faye Cotton Crumpton
- Mrs. Faye Margaret Curl
- Mr. Charles Ray Felkins
- Mrs. Blanche Ellis Freeman
- Reverend John G. Galloway
- Reverend Neil Gilbert Goss
- Reverend Woodfin Kirk Grove
- Mrs. Burmah Maelene Hardin
- Reverend C.S. "Mike" Hendon
- Mrs. Sarah B. Johnson
- Reverend Clyde M. Jones
- Mrs. Sarah Ann Robinson Kimbrough
- Reverend Gerald C. "Jerry" Krueger
- Reverend Rogers Lancaster
- Reverend Willie Joe Mallory
- Reverend F. Burnen Martin Jr.
- Mrs. Driscoll Bell Proctor
- Reverend Hughey Lavelle Reynolds
- Mrs. Margaret Mizzell Shaw
- Mrs. Lillian Arnette Smotherman
- Mrs. Mary Sue Spinks
- Reverend Leroy Tidwell

- Reverend Frank Lee Turnbow
- Reverend Ronald R. Winterberg
- Reverend Clyde Herman Yates

After an ice cream break sponsored by Educational Opportunities, the Conference returned to business and approved the Nominations Report presented by Director of Connectional Ministries and Leadership Development Linda Holland.

The Evangelism Team presented one of the highlights of every Annual Conference as chair Rev. Michael Miller announced the recipients of the Harry Denman Evangelism Award. As each person was announced a short video describing their passion and ministry for evangelism was shown. The 2017 winners are [Youth: Tamya DeWitt](#); [Clergy: Rev. Terry Bentley](#) and [Laity: Stephen Stroud](#).

Dr. Richard Hunter presented the report for the Conference priority area of New Church Development during which he noted that over the last year, the people of the North Alabama Conference had helped begin 37 new communities of faith. He encouraged each congregation to think of starting a Fresh Expression - a way to reach people in their community not currently a part of a church community. During the report he shared [a video telling stories of new congregations](#). People who have started or will start new faith communities in the next year were also introduced. Bishop Wallace-Padgett prayed over the church planters after they were introduced.

The Board of Ordained Ministry presented a report and took time to recognize those clergy who are retiring. Each retiring clergy had his or her name called and received a certificate as her/his picture and appointment history was projected on the screens. The 2017 class of retirees include the following clergy:

- W. Carroll Andrews - PL
- James W. Bassham, Jr. – FE
- Charles J. Calhoun - PL
- Paula M. Calhoun - FE
- David John Carboni - FE
- Patricia David Carlberg - FE
- Nancy W. Cole - FE
- John Darrell Garrett - AM
- Daniel B. Hallman - FE
- John Wesley Hallman, Jr. - PL
- Sherry N. Harris - FE

- John L. Hassell, Jr. - FE
- Jerry C. Hastings - FE
- Gary Dean Heathcock- FE
- George Robert Hundley, Jr. - PL
- Michael D. Jackson - PL
- Paul D. Messer - FE
- Richard L. Mize, Sr. - PL
- John S. Mooney - PL
- John Perkins Mount, Jr. - FE
- Alfred Thomas Moye, Jr. – FE
- James Milton Newton - PL
- Edgar L. Plunkett, Jr. – FL
- Carol Annette Poupore - PL
- Suzanne H. Pruitt - FD
- Vicki Tonini – PL

Rev. Dr. Bill Morgan presented another tool for church health. He discussed the L3 Groups (Loving, Learn, Leading) happening with pastors in the South Central District. He noted that the connection, accountability and encouragement of the groups help clergy in their ministry.

The United Methodist Children’s Home presented a report. Rev. Stephanie Arnold, Associate Pastor of Birmingham First UMC, shared how UMCH walked along beside the congregation of Birmingham First when an act of domestic violence took the life of a mother and injured four of her children. The connection with UMCH allowed congregation members to receive training to become foster parents and also provided opportunities – such as visiting a college and meeting Coach Nick Saban – for the children recovering from the tragedy. UMCH President/CEO Dr. Blake Horne shared about the crisis Alabama faces regarding foster children. He shared the need for more foster families and the need for ministries, such as UMCH group homes, for teenagers.

The Conference welcomed a special visitor – Bishop Francis Asbury, one of the first bishops of American Methodism. Bishop Asbury, portrayed by Rev. George Cobb, presented the report of the Commission on Archives and History. During the report he recognized the ordination class of 1967 on the 50th anniversary of their ordination and reminded the Conference of the Glynn and Annie Ford Wheeler Award for preserving and advancing Church History. He also recognized three charter churches. Charter churches are currently active United Methodist Churches in the North Alabama Conference that were founded before the Annual Conference came into existence. The charter churches recognized this year include Bethlehem UMC in Dolomite, New Hope UMC in New Hope and Hopewell UMC in Valley.

Rev. Dorothy Ann Webster shared another tool for church health – Abide. Abide is an L3 group based process designed specifically for the small membership church. She shared how leaders of Lineville First UMC had met together, read books that sparked their imagination and intentionally took steps to get to know their community, its needs and its hopes. Discovering the two greatest needs included economic development and education, the congregation began to take steps to build bridges with their community and partner with the community for ways to address the needs – such as developing a group of reading tutors for elementary students and sharing information about college applications and scholarships with families that helped students to find the means of attending college they never knew was possible. She closed noting the congregation has become known as “the helping church” to its neighbors.

Rev. Sherill Clontz shared another tool for church health by discussing Fresh Expressions, a movement defined as “a form of church for our changing culture established primarily for the benefit of the community who are not yet members of any church.” Fresh Expressions is a way to move outside the walls of the church to reach those who do not know Jesus Christ. A Fresh Expression takes the form appropriate to the community – such as meeting in a coffee shop or a truck stop or an apartment clubhouse. The goals of the group include to reach those not currently in church and to help them grow into disciples of Jesus Christ.

On Monday evening, the Conference gathered at Trinity United Methodist Church for the Service of Ordination, Commissioning and Licensing.

Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett preached the sermon “Singing God’s Song in Tune and Rhythm.” It was an invitation to those clergy receiving credentials, as well as the entire congregation, to let your entire life share God’s love and grace.

During the evening

Twelve people were ordained Elder:

- James Kevin Barrett
- Joseph Scott Coats
- Namon Andrew Curtis
- Clay Alexander Farrington
- Stephen Chase Fincher
- Caitlin Elizabeth Harper
- Garrett Lee Harper
- Thomas Wayne Hicks
- Tyler Bryant Hopkins

- Roger Ryan Karr
- William Vaughn Stafford
- William David Teel

One person had elder orders recognized:

- Dwight Ellis Geist

Eight people were commissioned provisional elders:

- Ted David Amey
- William Daniel Garrett
- Carol Suzanne Gullatt
- Yohan Hong
- Joseph Leslie Riddle
- Christopher Lane Stallings
- John Reid Turner
- Holly Jeneen Woodall

Twelve people received a Local Pastors License:

- Steven Barber
- Tyler Cantrell
- Matthew Cook
- Samuel Eldridge
- John Fleischauer
- Charles Hornyak
- Preston Irving
- Morgan Hones
- Benajah Nelson
- Brandon Rodgers
- Bryan Keith Smith
- William Vaden

Tuesday - June 6

Tuesday morning began with a teaching session led by Bishop James R. King, Jr. He opened the session noting, “The weakest link in the church is the lack of basic training.” He shared the process churches can take to share Christ and grow disciples of Jesus Christ. He noted, “It is not the size of the congregation that determines its health. It’s the size of its Christ-like vision.”

The Conference turned to business as Rev. Kelly Clem, Secretary of the Cabinet, presented the Property Resolutions. The resolutions noted the ten churches that had closed or were closing. They include the following:

Central District

- Sandusky

Cheaha District

- Fruithurst

Northeast District

- Bostick Hill

Northwest District

- Ninth Street
- St. Luke

Southeast District

- Midway (Lafayette)

Southwest District

- West Scottsville
- Pine Springs
- Bethlehem Station
- Sulligent

The Conference turned its attention to the report of the Committee on Petitions and Resolutions and voted on four resolutions submitted to the Annual Conference this year.

- Resolution 1: Planned Parenthood Resolution Follow-Up – The conference adopted this resolution.
- Resolution 2: A Resolution Concerning Ban the Box – The conference adopted this resolution.
- Resolution 3: A Resolution Concerning Domestic Violence – After a time of discussion, the conference adopted this resolution.

- Resolution 4: A Resolution Concerning Medicare Supplemental Health Insurance Premium – The conference did not adopt this resolution.

Rev. Kelsey Grissom presented the COSROW report. The highlight of the report was the awarding of the annual Louise Branscomb Barrier Breaker Award to Allison Dearing. Allison is a member of First UMC Birmingham, and creator of One Place, a collaboration between the Jefferson County District Attorney's Office, City of Birmingham-Birmingham Police Department, YWCA-Central Alabama, and the Crisis Center, Inc. to provide coordinated services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The Conference voted on Amendments to the UMC Constitution. Conference Lay Leader Steve Lyles and Rev. Robin Scott, the lead delegates of North Alabama's 2016 General Conference delegation, presented each amendment for vote. The five amendments passed by $\frac{2}{3}$ or greater vote at the 2016 General Conference. Now each Annual Conference is voting upon them. To be ratified, a constitutional amendment first requires at least a two-thirds vote at General Conference, then, it must win at least a two-thirds majority of the total votes at annual conferences around the world. Due to the fact that Annual Conferences and Central Conferences will meet and vote throughout the year, the Conference did not announce vote totals on the Amendments. The final results will be announced once the Council of Bishops certifies the results after the voting concludes.

After viewing a video from the Commission on a Way Forward, the Conference voted to affirm that the 2016 General Conference delegation will represent North Alabama at the special session of General Conference in February 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.

The morning concluded as Conference Lay Leader Steve Lyles presented the Laity Address encouraging those gathered to sing God's song and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with their community.

The Conference closed just as it began with members, visitors and guests joining together for worship. During the service, District Superintendents read the names of clergy and churches involved in appointment changes and each District Lay Leader offered a prayer for all the churches in their District. Bishop Wallace-Padgett then declared the [clergy appointments](#) fixed.

Bishop King preached a sermon "From best to better" encouraging each person and each congregation to grow better in discipleship and ministry.

The Conference closed with Northeast District Superintendent Tom Parrish offering an invitation for the Annual Conference to return to Huntsville next year. The 2018 Annual Conference will be held in Huntsville on June 3-5, 2018.

- See more at: <http://www.umcna.org/postdetail/8393343#sthash.CSdpt21A.dpuf>