

2017 North Alabama Conference Wrap-Up

The North Alabama Annual Conference gathered at the Von Braun Center in Huntsville, Alabama, on June 4-6, 2017. Presiding Bishop Debra Wallace-Padgett called the Conference to order under the theme of “Singing God’s Song in Tune and Rhythm.”

The Opening Celebration reflected the story of Pentecost. Worship began with a variety of languages sharing the good news. A mass choir 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. 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.

Throughout the three days together, North Alabama United Methodists focused on the Conference ministry priority of Healthy Congregations. Guest speakers Bishop Schnase and Bishop James R. King Jr. offered teachings and sermons focusing on church health.

Throughout the Conference Executive Director of Healthy Congregations Rev. Bob Alford and local church leaders introduced tools for church health available to local congregations, including the L3 (loving, learning, leading) group model of leadership; relational evangelism; the Antioch Project, a process for aligning the vision, mission and accountability in context toward church health and growth; MissionInsite, an online system to help learn about a congregation’s local community, its needs and ministry opportunities; Abide, an L3 process especially for the small membership church; and Fresh Expressions, a way to move outside the walls of the church to reach those who do not know Jesus Christ.

The Conference received a special offering of \$40,000 for the Conference priority of Ministry with the Poor. This offering was designated to support Exploration summer internships for those discerning a call to ministry with the poor and other initiatives related to this priority area of the Conference.

On Tuesday, 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 King preached a sermon “From best to better” encouraging each person and each congregation to grow better in discipleship and ministry.

During times of business the Conference

- Elected the Reverend Dr. Dedric Cowser as Conference Secretary.
- Adopted a budget for 2018 of \$10,155,717. This recommended budget has not changed since 2015. The recommended 2018 budget includes seven General Conference apportioned funds comprising 33.6% of the total budget and also includes significantly higher reserves.
- Once again adopted 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.
- Celebrated the 37 new faith communities formed over the last year. Bishop Wallace-Padgett led the Conference in praying over the church planters.

- Ordained 12 elders and recognized the elder orders of one person; commissioned eight provisional elders; presented licenses to 12 new local pastors.
- Honored 26 retiring clergy.
- Recognized the recipients of the Harry Denman Evangelism Award: Tamya DeWitt (youth), Rev. Terry Bentley (clergy) and Stephen Stroud (laity).
- Recognized the recipient of the annual Louise Branscomb Barrier Breaker Award Allison Dearing creator of One Place, a collaboration of coordinated services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Recognized 30 clergy and clergy spouses who have died in the last year during the annual Memorial Service. Rev. Sherry Harris preached a sermon titled, “Don’t Miss the Miracle” based on John 13:34-35.
- Adopted the Planned Parenthood Resolution Follow-Up, the Resolution Concerning Ban the Box and the Resolution Concerning Domestic Violence.
- Did not adopt the Resolution Concerning Medicare Supplemental Health Insurance Premium.
- Voted on five amendments to the UMC Constitution.
- Gave thanks for the ministry of the ten congregations that had closed in the last year.
- Recognized three charter churches (active United Methodist Churches that were founded before the North Alabama Annual Conference came into existence): Bethlehem UMC in Dolomite, New Hope UMC in New Hope and Hopewell UMC in Valley.
- Heard an address from young adult members Marian Royston (Southeast District) and Micah Shelton (South Central District) sharing three ways local congregations can help discover, develop and deploy young adult leaders — “teach us, involve us, and invest in us.”
- Adopted an updated Disaster Response plan and learned of new resources that will be available to local congregations during times of disaster.
- Affirmed that its 2016 General Conference delegation will represent North Alabama at the special session of General Conference in February 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri.
- Celebrated Sumatanga’s Executive Director Lee Padgett receiving the Legacy of Leadership award from the United Methodist Camp & Retreat Ministries Association earlier this year.
- Heard 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.

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