

2018 West Virginia Annual Conference Report

Location of conference gathering: West Virginia Wesleyan College, Buckhannon, WV

Dates of conference gathering: June 7, 2018 to June 10, 2018

Officiating bishop: Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball

Vision: We are a Christ-led, spiritual breath of fresh air that changes the world!

Mission: We discover, develop and deploy passionate spiritual leaders who make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!

Theme Verse: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams. Acts 2:17

Theme: Innovation - Jesus was innovative as he walked among the people instead of lodging himself in a Temple; and not only was he innovative in going out to the people instead of expecting the people to come to him, he innovatively shared God's word using parables or stories to make God's word relevant and understandable to the lives of the people among whom he walked. Jesus was innovative. He ate with sinners instead of condemning them. He touched people and spent time with people who were mentally and physically ill. He recognized the beauty and the value of forgiveness – even among those whom society would want to condemn to death. He told a group of people, "You, you who are without sin, cast the first stone." He offered to one who had to go to the well alone because she was an outcast, "living water." He told others, your faith has made you well. Jesus was innovative in that he not only gave life, but literally gave his life as a ransom for others, for us! As followers of Christ, we are called to be innovative leaders as Christ was and is innovative. We desire to expand our vision and goals to include having 2400+ new persons engaged in intentional and innovative discipleship learning and growth opportunities.

Guest speakers and memorable points or quotes by speakers:

Rev. Julius Dotson, General Secretary, Discipleship Ministries brought to West Virginia Annual Conference important teaching on Intentional Discipleship. Last year WV brought 2400+ people to professions of faith, not all of whom took membership in a congregation where they could actively learn to be disciples. We desire to expand our vision and goals to include having 2400+ new persons engaged in intentional and innovative discipleship learning and growth opportunities, while still focusing on increasing professions of faith.

"If you run by first base without touching it, nothing else counts. Intentional Discipleship is first base!"

"Discipleship begins with relationship."

"Remember your Why!"

Bishop Peter Weaver, Bishop in Residence at Drew University Theological School, with a special video guest appearance from Bishop William Boyd Grove with the children's message, celebrated the birthday and 50th Anniversary of The United Methodist Church, which included Holy Communion.

Rich Shaffer, Conference Lay Leader brought the laity address dressed in fishing gear to share his fishing story. He compared a fishing trip to how we witness – we need to know our context – what people we are trying to reach, the kind of water in which they are swimming, and we need patience.

Ecumenical Greetings from Rev. Ed Thompson, General Presbyter, Presbytery of West Virginia.

State of the Church Address by Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, highlighted the Ministries in the Conference that bring hope. She emphasized, "Together we continue to make disciples, and to provide shelter, clothing, food, medical care to those whose lives have been disrupted by floods, poverty, drug addiction. Together we care for both the very young and the very old – seeking to advocate for our most vulnerable members of society. Together we continue to fight against racism and sexism and other isms – fulfilling our baptismal commitment to oppose the oppression and injustice of the world in whatever form that these things happen to take. I am proud that together we continue to discover, develop, and deploy passionate spiritual leaders for the sake of Christ and we continue to focus on being faithful members of the body who contribute our unique gifts to the building God's Kingdom."

Main actions enacted by the conference:

- 1) Many areas of growth were celebrated: Global Ministries, the ministries of our young adults and youth, The West Virginia Foundation. Contributions to the Celebration of Mission Events totaled \$98,900 and the Friday evening contributions to the Youth Service Fund of over \$3,700 were lauded.
- 2) The body received a Report on A Way Forward as a follow-up to District meetings held by the Bishop this year. Then the entire conference broke into small groups, Circles of Grace, for discussion.
- 3) Rev. Ken Ramsey (Senior Pastor Bridgeport UMC), Ross Thornton (Laity, Assigned Supply 4th Ave. UMC, Huntington), and Max McGinnis (youth – Johnson Memorial UMC, Huntington, WV) were given the Denman Awards for creative evangelism efforts. Erin Sears and Rev. Tim Allen were each given a Council of Bishops Ecumenical Award for participating in the United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training. Rod Blackstone, a lay person from St. Mark's UMC, Charlestown, was given the Francis Asbury Award. Lisa Fox and the congregation of Dallas UMC, Northern District, told their story of how they have prayerfully expanded reaching people for Christ and were given the One Matters Award. We also recognized Rev. Dr. Lawrence Sherwood for receiving the "Ministry of Memory" Award, from the General Commission on Archives and History.
- 4) Sexual Ethics & Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures as updated were presented and adopted.
- 5) The Trustees Report and resolutions enabling the Trustees work were presented and approved.
- 6) Eligible laity and clergy voted on the Constitutional Amendment (Proposed Constitutional Amendment I, 2016 General Conference, Corrected Ballot) that was returned from General Conference for a clerical error. This vote will be turned in to the Council of Bishops and was not reported at this Annual Conference session.
- 7) The budget was approved in the amount of \$12,436,162 which is an increase of 0.59% from 2018.
- 8) A special Sunday with offering was added on February 3, 2019, for Black Methodists for Church Renewal and on March 10, 2019, Disabilities Awareness.
- 9) The process for laity and clergy nominations to General Conference 2020 was presented.
- 10) Two outgoing and incoming District Superintendents and spouses were recognized along with the outgoing Director of Connectional Ministries. Outgoing Superintendents are: Michael Estep (being appointed to Suncrest UMC) and Rick Sale (Retirement). New Superintendents: Amy Shanholzer (Mon Valley District) and Scott Ferguson (Potomac Highlands District).
- 11) The Conference received report from the Equitable Compensation Task Force, which explored the impact of Minimum Salary adjustments on clergy and churches over the last several years. Through discussion and debate, the minimum compensation levels were not raised this year. West Virginia has raised salary levels 16% over the last 6 years.
- 12) Health insurance costs and solvency was a major discussion. The Board of Pensions presented four recommendations to ensure there would be adequate funds to pay claims without pulling from the reserves. Of those four recommendations, one was amended. The results were: 1) Deductible will be raised to \$2,000 per individual and \$4,000 for families for all participants; 2) establish a policy that working spouses of participants who have health insurance available by their employer will not be eligible to participate in the Conference Plan; 3) A participant must work 30 hours per week to be eligible for participation; and 4) The prescription drug co-payment was raised to either \$35 or 30% of the cost with a \$100 maximum, whichever is greater. Because of the amendment to the prescription drug co-pay, the Board of Pensions brought back an additional recommendation to raise the premiums by 20%. There was another vigorous debate and motions to revise the percentage and to recommend a pension holiday. In the end, the amount of 20% was approved by the body without amendment. This is the first raise in premiums since 2011.

Resolutions adopted by the conference:

- 1) Recommended Revision of the Social Principles language on Abortion, as amended.
- 2) A resolution on United Methodist Teaching Regarding Human Sexuality was referred to the delegation to General Conference 2019.
- 3) Advocating for the Rights of Children Living Under Israeli Occupation

2018 West Virginia Annual Conference Report

- 4) Urging the West Virginia Conference to be Seekers of Knowledge and Advocates of Understanding Among Adherents of Abrahamic Faiths
 - 5) De-list Pitcher UMC as a Historic Site
- Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership**
- Twenty-two will be newly licensed pastors as of 7/1/18
 - Three were commissioned as provisional elders.
 - Five were ordained elders in full connection.
- Number of people retired:**
- Thirteen Licensed Local Pastors
 - Two Deacons
 - One Associate Member
 - Thirteen Elders

Statistics:

- 1) Membership stands at 1.07% down from the previous year.
- 2) Church school attendance stands at 3.29% up.
- 3) Professions or reaffirmations of faith 1,210 in 2017
- 4) Adults and young adults in church school and small groups 17,289 for 2017

What did your annual conference do to reinforce the Four Areas of Focus, and what commitments has the conference made for the coming year:

- 1) **Ministry with the Poor:**
 - a. The House of the Carpenter, a mission site of the West Virginia Annual Conference, broke ground on a new youth center in an area where the youth and children are surrounded by drugs and poverty. \$98,900 has been raised so far this year to ensure continued support for the Conference's 10 Mission Centers. The Board of Global Ministries is pulling together a passport project and challenge to encourage our congregations to visit all 10 of the Mission Centers to get a better sense of the ministry and mission and the 1,000's of persons these Centers reach.
 - b. The House of the Carpenter and Burlington United Methodist Family Services have committed to joining their resources to provide community care for families and children in the Northern District of WVUMC.
 - c. The conference provides for hunger grants and celebrates each ministry that is feeding people in their community. Many of our churches stepped up to feed children and families during the teacher work stoppage in February.
 - d. One of the offerings at conference was dedicated to helping foster children attend Spring Heights, the Conference Camp.
 - e. We continue to support Church and Community Workers and their work in our mission projects.
 - f. West Virginia is committed and has taken steps through a Lenten Project and prayer initiative to interrupt the cycle of addiction. Rev. Barry Ball, is a major leader, facilitator and coordinator of the Conference's expanding efforts in this area of ministry and mission.
 - g. This conference continues to look for innovative ways to be in ministry with the poor, the hungry, the struggling and those families who are affected by the opioid epidemic.
- 2) **Improving Global Health**
 - a. This conference has taken an active role in educating our churches and communities on the opioid health epidemic and creating new and innovative places for health to occur for those who are addicted, their families, and communities.
 - b. The Council of Bishop's Day of Health and the Abundant Health initiative was shared with the conference and a mini-Hulapalooza was held. Resources were distributed.
 - c. Under the leadership of Jeff Matheny, the Conference missions coordinator, work continues in Zimbabwe with the Old Mutare mission especially in upgrades and work with the hospital and clinic facilities.

- d. VIM groups continue to do work in Bungoma, Kenya, with Living Hope High School. The results of new bridge structures and building of a clinic are providing for greater ability to address and treat health concerns and education in the area.
 - e. Spruce Street UMC, Morgantown, has a lay led ministry in the harm reduction program in downtown Morgantown. And congregation after congregation participated in the "What If?" Lenten study program and challenge to begin to hear God's call to begin ministries in response to the Opioid Epidemic.
- 3) Developing Leaders**
- a. A new program for supporting those who are discerning what God is doing in their lives, began with a program entitled DiscoverU. This is being funded by a grant through the Young Clergy Initiative of the UMC.
 - b. The graduates of Course of Study were recognized and the conference has increased its financial support for COS students.
 - c. Excellence in Clergy Leadership Scholarship recipients were recognized and encouraged.
 - d. This conference also continues to seek out new leaders. In 2016, it was the intention of the Bishop that 30% of the leaders would be new leaders. This was successful, and the nominations committee continues to seek new leadership.
 - e. A new emphasis and effort has been placed on further development of a Conference wide CLM program, recognizing the great and largely untapped treasure of the lay leadership and gifts in the West Virginia Conference.
- 4) Creating New Congregations**
- a. The restart of Johnson Avenue by Bridgeport UMC, is significant – creating a multi campus congregation. Together Tuesdays – an outreach service taking place at a local Pizza restaurant in Lewisburg under the leadership of previous Denman award winner and associate Lewisburg UMC Associate pastor Rev. Bev Columbo - has brought 100s of people together for Christ that the congregation didn't regularly see or see at all in Sunday worship services.
 - b. Rev. Chip Bennett and the community of Point Pleasant – a joint ministry of more than one of our congregations – doing innovative ministry by taking one of our Church buildings that no longer has a Sunday morning worshiping congregation, and opening it all week for those seeking help and support for substance use disorder – hosting AA and NA groups and more during the week. This new community includes worship experiences and gatherings.
 - c. Rev. Dustin McCune and Temple UMC, Clarksburg have supported members of the congregation in the Door to Door community building ministry and developing a sober living duplex next to the Church.
 - d. Spruce Street has a lay led ministry in the harm reduction program in downtown Morgantown. And congregation after congregation participated in the "What If?" Lenten study program and challenge to begin to hear God's call to begin ministries in response to the Opioid Epidemic.
 - e. The Annual Conference held a Barbeque for the community on Friday evening. There was intentional invitation to the entire town of Buckhannon, West Virginia, and the conference was educated on true hospitality. There was also training on intentional discipleship during the Conference sessions and the invitation was made to use the skills taught during the evening by meeting as many people as we could, by eating with someone different than we usually would, and people were encouraged to be open to hearing the stories of others. There were 811 people who were served a meal. There were others who came by and did not eat, yet joined in the music, play and fellowship. Rev. Dr. Junius Dotson gave a brief message, the praise band converted to an oldie's band, and then were followed by a bluegrass band. There was also a dunking booth, games, and ice cream. Bishop Steiner Ball and most of her cabinet volunteered to be dunked by people eager to support the Youth Service Fund.
 - f. The conference is committed to empowering leaders in the conference to worship in different places and different ways and support those ministries.

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