

2019 Annual Conference Report

Name of conference: **West Virginia Annual Conference**

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

Dates of conference gathering: **June 13, 2018 to June 16, 2019**

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: But now, God's Message, the God who made you in the first place, Jacob, the One who got you started, Israel: Don't be afraid, I've redeemed you. I've called your name. You're mine. When you're in over your head, I'll be there with you. When you're in rough waters, you will not go down. When you're between a rock and a hard place, it won't be a dead end—Because I am God, your personal God, The Holy of Israel, your Savior. —Isaiah 43:1-3a (The Message)

Theme: Invitational – is the theme under which we gathered for the 2019 West Virginia Conference. God calls us to be an invitational people, to be people who invite others to the light, hope, and life that only Christ can give. Christ invites us to be invitational leaders, to be a people who invite others to be baptized, to grow in discipleship and to gather around Christ's table to share the good news, to be nourished, and to gain strength and assurance for the Christian journey.

We came expecting to experience the presence of our host, Jesus Christ. We came to the table seeking to connect to the source of hope and life, seeking to draw our love from God, so that we, together, may be empowered to help each other love both God and neighbor, become a Christ- led spiritual breath of fresh air in anxious times, and more effectively make disciples who make more disciples and transform the world.

Guest speakers and memorable points or quotes by speakers:

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball led a teaching session Thursday evening, inviting the conference into a time of prayer and anticipation that the Holy Spirit is up to new things in The United Methodist Church. She also invited us to stay focused on the main thing – making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world!

Ken Willard (Director of Discipleship, Leadership and Congregational Vitality) led a teaching session on Saturday morning called Invitational Discipleship. He shared with us information and statistics about our conference and the total mission field of our area; an overview of making disciples by focusing on spiritual disciplines and one-on-one conversations; and six ideas for local churches to reach new people.

Rich Shaffer, Conference Lay Leader brought the laity address dressed in clothes from his youth. He shared his faith story and encouraged the conference to mentor those who feel separated from the love of God, to new life and discipleship. (You may watch Rich's address at wvumc.org/ac2019).

Ecumenical Greetings from Rev. Jeff Allen, Executive Director of the West Virginia Council of Churches.

State of the Church Address by Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, highlighted the Ministries in the Conference that invite others into the saving love of God.

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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 \$95,000 this year (to date).
- 2) CCYM Chair Bree Moll highlighted youth events including Fall Workshop and Youth 2019 and shared that the Friday evening contributions to the Youth Service Fund was over \$900.
- 3) Shea James, Director of Young Disciples and Outdoor Ministries shared the story of Campus Ministries across the West Virginia Conference.
- 4) The Lay Denman Award was given to Helen “Sammy” Martin and Joan “Johnny” Wetherholt of Oak Grove UMC in the Potomac Highlands District for their work in starting a feeding ministry that serves over 300 people each week and provides an opportunity for relationship building as they share the love of Christ.
- 5) The “One Matters” Discipleship Award was given to Rev. Tom Jeffrey and the congregation of West Hamlin UMC for their work in making disciples in their community. Rev. Jeffrey had planned to retire last year but was drawn by the Holy Spirit to remain and make disciples of Jesus Christ.
- 6) Ken Willard, Director of Discipleship, Leadership and Congregational Vitality invited all local churches to participate in the Congregational Vitality Initiative. The initiative includes coaching, leadership development, church self-study, church survey, mystery guests and workshops. There is also an option of on-site consultations. More details will unfold throughout the fall.
- 7) The Trustees Report and resolutions enabling the Trustees work were presented and approved.
- 8) The conference adopted a budget of \$12,877,355 for 2020. This is an increase of \$441,193 or 3.55% from the 2019 budget.
- 9) We recognized retiring superintendent Frank Shomo and his spouse, Michelle, and new conference superintendent, Loretta Isaiah, and her spouse, Ravi. Loretta will serve the Little Kanawha District. Joe Hill, who has been serving in Little Kanawha District, will continue as a conference superintendent serving the Midland South District.
- 10) The Conference heard from Dr. Walter Lee from South Carolina, ambassador for the Black College Fund, and Dr. Cynthia Bond Hopson, Global Board of Higher Education Ministries Assistant General Secretary, The Black College Fund & Ethnic Concerns.
- 11) Loretta Young, who is the new chair of Black Methodists for Church Renewal (BMCR), presented the bishop with an award for the conference’s support.

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The West Virginia Annual Conference completed the election of the 2020 General and Jurisdictional Conference delegations:

General Conference Clergy: Amy Shanholtzer, Jeff Taylor, *Lauren Godwin

General Conference Laity: Judi Kenaston, Rich Shaffer, *Erin Sears

Jurisdictional Conference Clergy: Mary Ellen Finegan, Mike Estep, Joe Hill.
Clergy Alternates: Sharletta Green, Joe Kenaston

Jurisdictional Conference Laity: *Rachel Flynn Fulton; Kristi Wilkerson, Royce Lyden;
Laity Alternates: *Bree Moll, Judy Raines

* denotes delegates who are under the age of 35

Resolutions adopted by the conference:

A resolution on Voting Values was adopted.

Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership, and average age:

- Fourteen will be newly licensed pastors as of 7/1/19
- Seven were commissioned as provisional elders.
- One was commissioned as provisional deacons.
- Five were ordained elders in full connection.
- One was ordained deacon in full connection.

Number of people retired:

- Eleven Licensed Local Pastors
- One Deacon
- Eight Associate Members
- Fourteen Elders

Statistics:

- 1) Membership stands at 1.76% down from the previous year.
- 2) Church school attendance stands at 1.15% down from previous year.
- 3) Professions or reaffirmations of faith 846 in 2018
- 4) Adults and young adults in church school and small groups 16,195 for 2018

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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) Pat Mick, Chair of Global Ministries, announced that collections for the spring Celebration of Mission Events total almost \$95,000.
- b) New personnel: Kristi Wilkerson will become the new director of Upshur Parish House.
- c) Anna Troy was introduced as the new Church and Community Worker at Clarksburg Parish.
- d) One of the offerings at conference was dedicated to helping foster children attend Spring Heights, the Conference Camp.
- e) 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.
- f) West Virginia is committed to working 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) A special offering was taken for the addiction recovery program at UMC Temple Clarksburg Sober Living Home.

Leaders from local churches, community organizations, and state government continue to work together to name the harm done by substance abuse disorder. They also continue to work toward the hope possible in recovery for people and communities. In the last two years the people of West Virginia Annual Conference have heard stories through programs like "What If" and "Day of Hope". We have an opportunity today to honor those stories and the people who live them by supporting the Sober Living Home in Clarksburg, WV. Offerings made to the Sober Living Home will be used to open this new facility.

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. 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.
- c. Two VIM groups have traveled to Puerto Rico in the past year and another is preparing to return to Puerto Rico in 2020.

3) Developing Leaders

- a. Excellence in Clergy Leadership Scholarship recipients were recognized and encouraged.
- b. 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.

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- c. A special offering was taken for: Africa University Scholarships
Africa University, in its bid to make higher education accessible to as many students as possible, and being aware of the low-income status of the average African family, offers funding to deserving students to assist with payment of their University fees. The money given for this ministry will be used for student scholarships, with preference toward students studying theology.
 - d. A special offering was taken for WV Conference youth attending Youth 2019
Youth from all over the United Methodist Connection will gather in July for 4 days of discipleship, worship, bible study, service opportunities, and life-changing fun. Participation in the event allows youth to experience the global nature of the church while building relationships with others seeking to be disciples in a fast paced and always changing world. Offerings given to WV Conference Youth will be used to offset the cost of attendance for youth from the West Virginia Conference, as they travel to the event taking place in Kansas City, Missouri.
 - e. A main component of our new Congregational Vitality Initiative will be focused on leadership development.
Two of the first elements to come online with our new initiative are basic coach training and leadership groups. Each of these will be open to both laity and clergy leaders. Our focus is on equipping all of our leaders to use these new skills in their ministries to make disciples and engage with their mission field.
- 4) Creating New Congregations
- a. The conference is committed to empowering leaders in the conference to worship in different places and different ways and support those ministries. To this end the Congregational Vitality Initiative was shared with all those present.

For more information, www.wvumc.org