Episcopal Address

In his Episcopal Address, Bishop Mueller urged the Annual Conference to remember who we are:

“We are a family of vital, living congregations making a real difference in the lives of members, and increasingly in the community outside the church doors. Vital congregations fueled by the Holy Spirit so that people find themselves doing things they could never imagine doing on their own. Vital congregations that are vibrant, passionate, energetic, excited, enthusiastic, hopeful and fruitful in the midst of our unique context.”

Address by Lay Leader Karon Mann

“We have just over 700 clergy, and more than 128,000 professing members in our conference. Those numbers show that 99.5% of the Arkansas Conference is laity, compared to 0.5% clergy. One half of one percent is clergy. Let’s assume that there are exactly 1,000 people in the arena this morning, and these 1,000 people represent the Arkansas Conference. (Mann asks six youth to stand). Look around the room. If our conference were distilled to 1,000 people, these are our clergy – the six standing here - the rest of you are the laity. With this many laity in our conference, can you imagine the power the Holy Spirit could unleash if every single layperson in the Arkansas Conference actively said yes to God’s call and discerned where we were called to serve?”

Business

- Presentations were made by General Conference delegates regarding the five constitutional amendments on which every United Methodist conference world-wide will vote. Results of the votes will not be shared until the voting is completed by every conference; then the results will be shared online and in print.
- The conference affirmed the General Conference delegation to represent the Annual Conference at the 2019 called General Conference.
- A resolution was passed encouraging every local church in the Arkansas Annual Conference to support adoption efforts through recruitment of potential adoptive parents and the celebration of National Adoption Awareness Month in November 2017.
- A resolution was adopted to establish a task force to assess the current and future facility needs of the Arkansas Conference. The task force will report its findings to the 2018 Annual Conference.
- The Conference adopted the proposed budget by the Committee on Finance and Administration as published in the Pre-Conference Journal.
- Bishop Mueller discussed the Commission on a Way Forward and outlined six issues he believes must be addressed and resolved successfully for the denomination to find a way forward.
  - Embody grace and Christian civility in a culture of discord and division.
  - Address the impact of the constitutional crisis brought about by significant principled disciplinary disobedience by church leaders.
  - Embrace the global nature of The United Methodist Church.
  - Keep intact the distinctiveness of connectionalism, the role of Bishops as General Superintendents, and our form of deploying clergy.
  - Craft a new understanding of unity in the face of a church comprised of widely divergent theological, cultural and moral beliefs.
  - Ensure that the ‘heart of Methodism,’ which makes up the vast majority of the church, is able to continue carrying out the church’s mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world without being torn apart by this issue.
- Rev. Jim Polk, Assistant to the Bishop and Rev. Dede Roberts emphasized that Vital! was more than the theme for Annual Conference. Lay members and clergy were encouraged to visit the vitaldisciples.org website to discover and download resources for local churches to implement Vital! ministries throughout the coming year.
- Six individuals were commissioned as elders and deacon. Provisional Elders are: Jody L. Farrell, Gary L. Maskell, Bradley Keith Moore, and Blake Schrepfer. Provisional Deacon: George Hull.

• Twenty-six individuals were recognized for their combined total of 692.5 years of service. The 2017 retirees are: C. “Dan” Brand (19 years); Steven W. Bush (13 years); Douglas Criss (28.5 years); Robert DeBaun (18 years); George E. “Eddie” Harris (16 years); Steven G. Holyfield (25 years); Lonnie M. Landers (6 years); J. Mark Lasater (42 years); Tom Letchworth (36 years); Mary “Love” Loftis (17 years); Steve Long (12 years); N. “Robin” Moore (23 years); Bonda and Norm Moyer (40 years); Charles Murry (42 years); Sara “Nan” Nelson (7 years); LaVon Post (37 years); C. Edward Pruett (40.5 years); William “Wade” Shownes (34 years); Walter L. “Bubba” Smith (42 years); Rockey E. Starnes (22 years); William “Bill” Steele (43 years); Judith Van Hoose (18 years); Garry Wiles (23 years); Walter “Mike” Wilke (17.75 years); Henry “Hank” Wilkins (40 years).

• Rev. Millie Bryant, pastor of Pottsville UMC, was presented with the One Matters Award from Discipleship Ministries. The award recognizes the difference one individual or church can make in the lives of those in the community.

• The Denman Evangelism Awards were presented to Andrey Archer (youth), FUMC Sheridan; Dante L. Shelton (lay), FUMC Maumelle; and Rev. John P. Miles (retired elder).

Notable Quotes from Annual Conference

• “Do not become so heavenly-bound that you do no earthly good.” Bishop Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Episcopal Area

• “As part of our discipleship journey, we are called to share God’s intersection in our life, where life and baggage happen. We have to get real and raw.” Kay Kotan, Unpacking Our Faith Stories Vital! Plenary

• “We want to know where Jesus is; we want to live out our love and faithfulness as a follower of Jesus. We want to be swept up by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Church, out in the mission field is where we are supposed to be!” Rev. J. J. Whitney, 200,000 Reasons to Fight Childhood Hunger Vital! Plenary

• “When I create space for God, God shows up every single time. What many of us want more than anything is we want to see God show up in our church. Simply create the space. Create the space and watch the Spirit bring us back to life.” Rev. Dr. Kevin Watson, Accountable Discipleship Vital! Plenary

• “Generosity is grounds in gratitude, revealed in prayer and lived in faith. Stewardship is not about getting more money. It’s about your church finding a bigger and better God. Set your expectations high and allow your church to meet it.” Rev. Dr. Clif Christopher, Personal Stewardship Vital! Plenary

• “Vitality is about being active and engaged. Vitality is about being energetic. CCYM events bring the youth of this state together to learn with and from each other and drastically change lives in our Church’s favor and in God’s favor. Then we take this out to our communities and share it with our brothers and sisters in Christ! This isn’t happening anywhere else. Our conference’s spiritual vitality brings excitement to our faith and our spirituality.” Lexie Burleson, CCYM President, Youth Address

• “When I came to UAM I was not a Christian. In the spring of 2014 I was introduced to the Wesley Foundation and by the end of that semester I had professed my faith in Jesus Christ as my savior. …My faith has only grown stronger and they have shown me what it means, not only to truly claim Christianity, but to live in my faith and to exemplify what it means to truly be a Christian.” Portion of a UAM Wesley Foundation student, read by Rev. Roy Smith, Higher Education and Campus Ministry

You may view recordings of the worship and business sessions of the 2017 Vital! Annual Conference by going to: http://www.ustream.tv/channel/arumc