

Summary of UM Annual Conference in Lakeland FL, June 8-11, 2022 (From Your Pastor's Perspective)

John and I spent 4 days at Florida's Annual Conference in Lakeland, seeing many people for the first time in 3 years, as we've been unable to meet in person due to COVID. There were at least 1100 delegates attending from more than 800 churches in Florida. We had excellent speakers, including several bishops, inspiring worship services, and we learned more about the wonderful ministries of the United Methodist Church in Florida, the US and internationally. We are truly the hands and feet of Christ. Our own church's Bishop offering was given during the Communion worship service, destined for technology for rural churches and evangelism in Latin America (thank you for your support). We voted on budgets and administrative issues. We passed a resolution on gun violence and another resolution on equity in clergy compensation and congregational development for churches of color. We approved the licensing of Local Pastors for ministry and the Ordination of Deacons and Elders.

The other business that took place was not all on a pleasant note. As you have been aware, some Methodists prefer a more conservative, fundamental theology than that which is practiced in most United Methodist churches. Their interpretation of Scripture around inclusion, specifically for people who are LGBTQ, differs enough from the majority of those in our denomination, that they have formed a new splinter denomination called the Global Methodist Church. They are concerned that in Sept. 2024, at our worldwide, General Conference, there will be a vote to change our Book of Discipline to be accepting and inclusive to LGBTQ people. They do not want to wait for this decision to be made so some are leaving the denomination ahead of time for the new splinter group. At Annual Conference, we approved 14 churches to leave the denomination, more than half of which were small (as few as 12-14 people in them). There will be more down the line.

The difference in theology about whether to be loving to all and inclusive to all in the life of the church (regardless of sexual orientation), has caused much division amongst pastors and laity. When it came time for fellow clergy to approve the slate of candidates to become Provisional Elders, the traditional, theologically conservative caucus denied approval to the entire slate of 16 candidates, because two were known to be LGBTQ. We were just 7 votes short of the 75% needed to pass all 16 who had just spent many years of hard work getting to this point, including seminary. There was an outcry among the rest of the conference attendees who then submitted and voted on a resolution apologizing to the 16 who had been denied commissioning. The outcry went nationally, with many other states' UM conference's drafting and voting on resolutions condemning what happened in Florida.

You will be hearing more on this, as time goes on, and the group who wants to leave becoming increasingly vocal. Please know that none of this affects our local church at this time, as there will be no changes in United Methodist polity until late 2024. Then and now, our church is not required to do anything in order to continue to be United Methodists. Anyone who is unhappy and wishes to leave always has that option, but

we will all have some discussions and talk more about this as we get closer to the General Conference in Sept. 2024. Remember, nothing changes in our polity or theology as a denomination, until after that Conference. If you are wondering, your pastor has always felt that inclusion, and loving others – ALL others – just like Jesus does, is the way to go. I accept that not everyone shares my theological views on this, or my interpretation of the Bible, but that is how I feel. I feel that we need to not let all of this noise be a distraction to focusing on what is really important – being Jesus' hands and feet in the world. Let's just keep moving on, serving God and loving others. Please feel free to reach out to me to learn more about what happened or to ask me questions about my views or to share yours. John Mayeux, your elected representative, will provide a shorter, verbal summary during announcements on Sunday.

Love and blessings,

Pastor Nancy