

## ***Lay Delegate Report from 2025 North Georgia Annual Conference***

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The theme to the 2025 North Georgia Annual Conference was “Come, follow me” from Matthew 4:19. As usual, the conference is a great place to see prior TFUMC ministers, such as Debbie Carlton, Jimmy Moor, Gerald Varner, Anne Cumings, and Liza Marler. Since we have passed the disaffiliation decision, key topics promoted and discussed were:

### **Focus on UMC colleges and universities and collegiate programs (Wesley Centers)**

#### **Celebrating 100 years of Camp Glisson**

**Thriving Leadership Initiative** - a mission to develop and deploy effective United Methodist lay and clergy leaders who can strengthen ministry in existing settings or be deployed to launch new, healthy, and self-sustainable ministries across Georgia.

**Constitutional Amendments** – all 127 annual conferences must vote before any decision is made. Must be passed by 2/3 of all votes to become effective.

- **Regionalization** → currently 8 central conferences + US would become 9 regional conferences. Same structure and authority for existing central conferences, but the US would now also have this authority with regard to standard practices, regulations, hymnals, Book of Worship. All keep the same general Book of Discipline, same social principles, no changes to the first 5 sections of the BoD. All regional conferences still attend General Conference for global issues and direction. All conferences voting this year.
- **Inclusiveness** → add gender and ability as characteristics that would not exclude membership in the UMC (“protections” of membership, no exclusions).
- **Racial Justice** → already in place. Stronger language to “commit” to confronting and eliminating racism, racial inequality, colonialism, white privilege, and white supremacy.
- **Clergy Voting** → clarifying educational requirements for licensed local pastors for election to General or Jurisdictional conferences.

#### **One Georgia Task Force report**

- Exploring unification of the North Georgia and South Georgia conference → new structure versus merging existing operations
- Bishop Dease was appointed as leader over both North and South Georgia conferences in July 2024.
- Timeline for analysis is this year with a potential vote at the 2026 annual conference and a combined conference in 2027.

There was a strong focus on the future, the next generations, throughout the sermons. Whether it was noting this is not the same church many of us grew up in, reminding ordinands

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to focus their careers on love (“they don’t care what you know until they know that you care.”), or recognizing that the purpose of the church is to build Christian character (of compassion, empathy, and justice) and that to show your love of God, show love to your neighbor.

With regard to the “business” of the church, various committees submitted their annual reports. On the financial side, there was a 5% reduction in apportionments. Apportionments typically run 6.5% of a church budget (down from 6.9% last year). Benefits are moving to a new Compass system on 1/1/26 with a potential additional 1% in pension benefits. There were several compensation votes to align North Georgia and South Georgia clergy minimums.

Overall, there was a very active youth presence (20% of the comments from the floor were from youth). There appeared to be fewer attendees than last year, the first year after disaffiliation. There were an additional 14 church closures, but as one attendee noted, her church closure was really a merger with another congregation. The One Georgia concept was quite concerning for many people. It will be interesting to see how that task force progresses and the recommendations it makes.

Being a lay delegate enables us to learn so much about the operations of the UMC and about future plans. Thank you for allowing us to represent you at this year’s annual conference.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren L. Ledford and Nick Frutiger

Conference Lay Delegates