

Annual Conference Report

The three people from Aldersgate who attended Annual Conference this year in Puyallup, WA the last week of June were Pastor Laura Baumgartner, Jean Harris, and Dorothy Beeman. You may be wondering why Pastor Brad didn't go, but he was sick and sent his regrets. Below, each of this year's attendees shares a brief summary of their favorite parts.

From Laura:

This year, the theme of Annual Conference was "Do This and You Will Live! Do What?" Each worship service and many of the addresses explored various approaches to the story of the Good Samaritan, which Jesus uses as an example to explain what we are to do, in order to live. One of the most powerful speakers about the theme was Rev. Dr. Leroy Barber, who spoke during the commissioning and ordination service on Sunday morning. He explained that Jesus was speaking to people on the margins of his society and the message that he had for them was to be like a Samaritan. Jesus instructed the people who were oppressed in his day to try to love the way their enemy loved in the parable. This was probably not what they were expecting to hear. This was probably a disruptive message for them. No one wants to be told that the enemy is the one who loves and gives life. Jesus' message disrupted business as usual. It defied their expectations and their norms. Dr. Barber went on to talk to those commissioned and ordained in that service, instructing us that our job is to disrupt the status quo today for the sake of love, with Jesus as our example. Since I am one of those who was commissioned this year in that service, I am reporting for service now as one commissioned for disruption. I have been commissioned to disrupt the patterns that keep people marginalized, that keep doors closed, that keep outsiders out and insiders in. I hope that I am not the only one. I hope that each of us in our own ways hears the gospel message that what is, is not the best it can be, with God's help. I hope that we all find the courage to partner with the Holy Spirit in our midst to make our own worlds more just and more loving. I hope that together we can be disruptors for Christ in South Bellevue.

From Jean:

The last two Annual Conferences have been very different from previous years but for different reasons. Last year I expected it to be different because we were meeting with the Oregon-Idaho conference for the first time. I fully expected this year to be back to the mood of previous years. However, I found us to be much more harmonious. One of the reasons may have been that we had an ad hoc focus on the plight of separated families. It was very exciting to have so many people at the SeaTac detention center in the very early morning to stage a protest. Everyone I spoke with felt it was an appropriate stand for our church conference to take.

I think another reason for this harmony was our excellent plenary sessions on the book "The Anatomy of Peace" which were presented by Rev. Dr. Brian Brown who was outstanding. We had three different sessions on this book after which we broke into small groups of 5 or 6 diverse persons. My table leader was excellent in getting everyone to participate in very intense and personal discussions. My greatest learning was how attitudes are changed when we are outwardly motivated rather than inwardly motivated. That is when our actions are not all about ourselves and our needs but what effect they may or could have on those around us both personally and in not only the community but even world.

I came away from this conference spiritually renewed and untroubled about the future of our denomination.

From Dorothy:

This was my first time attending Annual Conference as a lay delegate. I was surprised by how much I enjoyed the experience. The atmosphere was congenial, upbeat and meaningful. Time spent discussing and voting on amendments and working through other business was well-designed, and the decisions that were made were

important. Delegates were elected to General Conference: Rev. Elizabeth Ingram Schindler was elected as the clergy delegate with Rev. Gregg Sealey as clergy reserve. A. Skylar Bihl was elected as lay delegate to General Conference with first reserve as Brant Henshaw. Dr. Brian Brown's sessions on Inward Thinking vs Outward Thinking were excellent and the information he offered gave new perspective to how I see my work at the church and at the Preschool. The small group time helped me make new acquaintances and connections that otherwise I would not have made. Attending Annual Conference confirmed for me that the United Methodist Church is indeed a connectional system. The people I shared those three days with are truly committed to feeding the poor, welcoming the stranger and helping those in need. It was an experience that helped me to understand the United Methodist Church a little better and I look forward to the opportunity to attend again in the future. I would encourage anyone interested in finding out more specifics to visit the Conference website pnwumc.org/ac2018/updates/ for more information.

Respectfully submitted by Laura, Jean, and Dorothy