

REPORT FROM BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Our 231st Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference Session was held in Baltimore on May 28 through 30 at the Marriott Waterfront Hotel. The conference provides an opportunity for United Methodist from 640 churches or charges in Maryland, the District of Columbia, the panhandle of West Virginia and Bermuda to establish ministry priorities, set a budget, ordain clergy and share in several different worship services.

This year's session, presided by Bishop Marcus Matthews, drew 1,200 clergy and lay members, along with many guests, for holy conferencing and revival as the church conducted its business, set a vision for the future, worshipped, prayed, took communion and learned together.

Our theme was "Dare to Believe." Bishop Matthews' inaugural sermon was based on Matthew 14 and the story of Peter walking on the water where he stated that "our capacity to recognize Jesus ...will be tested by the turbulent waters of our lives" wherein he also made reference to the unrest in Baltimore in late April and early May.

Some of the conference highlights included:

- witnessing the ordination of seven elders and one deacon and the commissioning of thirteen provisional elders and two deacons;
- being inspired by the preaching and teaching of our special guests -- Bishop Jonathan Holston of the South Carolina Annual Conference, Bishop Peggy Johnson, a daughter of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, now serving in the Philadelphia area, and Rev. Laurie Haller, a pastor in the West Michigan Conference but who serves in the Detroit Conference;
- electing by electronic voting six lay and six clergy delegates to represent us at the 2016 General Conference which will be held in Portland, Oregon on May 10-20, 2016;
- electing by electronic voting an additional six lay and six clergy delegates to attend the Northeastern Jurisdictional Conference on July 11-15, 2015 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania as well as electing four clergy and four lay alternates;
- music from the choirs of Eden Korean St. UMC and St. Paul UMC in Oxon Hill as well as accompanist for the session, Stanley J. Thurston, who is the director of music ministries at Foundry UMC in Washington, an artist in residence at the National Cathedral, and a classically trained pianist, composer and arranger of extraordinary range and depth;
- a warm greeting from Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake, who grew up in St. Matthews UMC in Baltimore, and who thanked the United Methodist Church for its leadership in recent weeks following riots throughout the city spurred by the death of Freddie Gray;
- a presentation from the laity and clergy who serve in the Sandtown-Winchester neighborhood, where the riots occurred, which included a stirring biblical interpretive poem by the Rev. Michael Parker who lives in the neighborhood but who pastors Ames UMC in Bel Air;
- that Sunday, June 7, 2015, be designated as "Dare to Believe in Baltimore City Sunday" and each local church was invited to take a special offering for the Dare to Believe: Stronger Churches, Stronger Relationships, Stronger Communities Campaign for the ministries of the six United Methodist Churches in the Sandtown-Winchester, and Harlem Park Communities;
- passing a \$17.2 million budget to call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders;
- participated in "Circles of Grace" which is a way of holy conferencing and was used at the 2014 conference whereas the following four petitions were presented:

- to remove the language “The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching” from the Book of Discipline (approved and will be sent to General Conference);
- readopt a resolution in the Book of Resolutions around “God’s Creation and the Church” (approved and will be sent to General Conference);
- opposing the teaching of creationism in public schools (defeated and may still be sent to General Conference but will not have the support of the BWC Session);
- climate change (defeated and may still be sent to General Conference but will not have the support of the BWC session).

Members also:

- collected money for the Susanna Wesley House and other ministries in Baltimore and one for Africa University, a United Methodist school in Zimbabwe;
- honored sixteen retirees whose years of service totaled 490.5 years;
- remembered and celebrated the lives of the saints who died since the 2014 annual conference;
- learned that our Bishop Matthews will be retiring on September 1, 2016 and during the coming year, a variety of farewell events will be held and, at his request, that any and all love offerings given to him in honor of his retirement in 2016 be donated to Africa University; ;
- celebrated that 82 percent of BWC congregations paid 100 percent of their apportionments in 2014;
- visited exhibits of ministries, the Cokesbury bookstore and other displays;
- participated in times of fellowship at special lunches and dinners;
- enjoyed time in the city where, just blocks away, Methodism began in America 231 years ago.

The 232nd Session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference will be held Wednesday, June 1, 2016 through Friday, June 3, 2016 at the Warman Park Marriott Hotel in Washington, DC.

Paul and Carol Williams
Lay Members to Annual Conference