



Western North Carolina Annual Conference Notes 2022
Jack Harrison & Diane Rutledge - Lay Delegates
Skyland United Methodist Church

In emotional remarks to an audience of WNC clergy and lay delegates, Bishop Ken Carter called on United Methodists to remain committed to the denomination as it faces division over the issue of homosexuality.

“If we don’t do the work, we leave it for those that come after us to do it.”

Bishop Carter, presiding over his first Annual Conference, urged listeners to adopt a counter-cultural mindset that commits the Church to the urgent work of dismantling racism and injustice.

This is a difficult time for the denomination. After decades of rancorous debate over the ordination and marriage of LGBTQ United Methodists, traditionalist groups in May announced plans for a new denomination called the Global Methodist Church.

“If you are here,” Bishop Carter told the audience in Stuart Auditorium, “we’re asking you to remain.”

“Be together in the journey to holiness, we cannot be holy apart from each other.”

In the Saturday morning business session, delegates approved the Conference’s 2023 budget and heard an update on efforts to reduce the salary gap between clergy of color and white clergy as well as the gap between female and male clergy.

Approval of 2023 budget: The \$13.3 million budget represents a decrease of 10 percent from 2022 while still advancing a core group of priorities, including an equitable compensation adjustment, a continuing focus on new church starts and an increase for the Board of Laity to support training and programs.

The past two years have brought substantial challenges resulting from the pandemic, an uncertain economy, international conflicts, and questions over the future of The United Methodist Church.

“Every person is important.”

“Hard Conversations invite hard conversations, don’t be wary of doing what is right.”

Churches have to pay less in apportionment, which means they get to keep more.”

As many general agencies make budget cuts, the Council on Finance and Administration recommended a return to the general church apportionment amounts from 2021. This will result in an approximate \$1 million reduction from the WNCC budget. Further, the conference apportionment segment of the budget is a five percent reduction.

Race and gender salary gaps: Rev. Brandon Lazarus presented a joint report from the Just Compensation Task Force and Commission on Equitable Compensation.

Commissioned in 2020 by Bishop Leeland, the Just Compensation Task Force is charged with responding to salary inequality based on race, gender, and years of service.

Female clergy make, on average, about \$7,000 less than their male counterparts and clergy of color make, on average, about \$13,000 less than their white counterparts, according to data presented Saturday.

People of color also only represent 8 percent of active clergy in local churches even though 35 percent of North Carolinians are people of color. A petition was put forward to add longevity increases to Base Minimum Compensation. At five, 10, 15, and 20 years of service, clergy will see an increase of the base minimum compensation by about .75 percent per year of service.

For Elders and Deacons in full connection, this equates to:

- 0-5 = \$43,260.00
- 6-10 = \$44,931.65
- 11-15 = \$46,732.50
- 16-20 = \$48,672.52
- 21+ = \$50,762.47

Transformation Journey is expanding to all churches to be eligible for participation.

Next, Conference Chancellor Greg Huffman presented eighteen congregations for disaffiliation on behalf of the conference board of trustees. Huffman reiterated that each congregation had completed due diligence, and were in compliance with paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church. The disaffiliations of Bellview UMC, Bethlehem (Cherryville) UMC, Burnett's Chapel UMC, Carson's Chapel UMC, Cornatzer UMC, Grassy Creek UMC, Gray's Chapel UMC, Lafayette Street UMC, Ledford's Chapel UMC, Lineberry UMC, Maple Springs UMC, Martin's Creek UMC, Mary's Grove UMC, Midway UMC, Nesbitt's Chapel UMC, New Union UMC, Pleasant Grove (Denton) UMC, and West Marion UMC were approved by the delegation, and Bishop Carter offered a blessing releasing each congregation, pledging to never disparage anyone for their choice, and asking for the same in return. He then invited anyone in any disaffiliated congregation who wished to remain United Methodist to participate in an initiative aiming to help with reconnection and restoration. These churches represent less than 2% of the churches in the Western NC Conference and less than 1% of the UMC membership.

Business resumed as Petition 17 (Process of Disaffiliating) was brought to the floor and ruled out of order due primarily to a pending declaration by the Judicial Council on a

ruling which could affect the validity of the proposed pathway to disaffiliation. Out of respect, Bishop Carter allowed Jennifer Linebery to speak on behalf of the petition.

In further business, Petition 18 (Request for Special Conference for Disaffiliation) was presented, which was met (after debate) with an approved revision which held disaffiliating congregations responsible for clergy compensation and benefits. This petition was ultimately voted down, though there was some debate from the floor.

With the Annual Conference theme of “Connect, Imagine, Engage” churches were also made aware and invited to use some resources that are available. Information on them can be found on the conference website www.wnccumc.org

Mission Engagement actively invites members to volunteer for disaster relief, creation care, Congregations 4 Children, and other missions. They are still taking volunteers to work in the Clyde area after the flooding on the Pigeon River.

United Methodist Foundation of WNC gives grants for Equity and Justice ministries, loans for churches, seminars in leadership for clergy and laity, scholarships, etc.

Partners in Health and Wholeness provides resources, regional staff and financial support to launch or expand health initiatives within congregations and their communities.

Cross and Key prison ministry involves ministers connecting with prisoners to bring the word of God to them.

BOTH/AND Hybrid Worship Cohort is a Great Commission Moment cohort with 5 dates a year to share resources and ideas in hybrid worship (in person and on YouTube) to encourage at-home viewers to become more engaged in the service. We were excited that a few of the suggestions were already being used at Skyland UMC.