

Annual Conference Summary – June 22-24, 2022

Wednesday

The Conference began on Wednesday evening with the Service of Licensing, Commissioning, Recognition, Restoration and Ordination. During the Service the Conference celebrated

18 newly licensed local pastors:

- Michael Bowman
- Griffen Fowler Cope
- Ann Deaderick
- Marty Hand
- Donovan Markus Harvard
- Mitchell Johnson
- Gail M. Joyner
- Matthew Kilpatrick
- Daniel W. Lee
- Daniela R. Peele
- Trent T. Salter
- Laura Ann Satterfield
- Pamela Rae Blank Seeley
- Rodney Seth Shamery
- Jeffery Randell Tate
- William A. Vaughn
- Gann Jeffrey Waters-Wright
- Michael Stephens Wilder

One commissioned provisional deacon:

- Jeanet Berruecos Xicohtencatl

Three commissioned provisional elders:

- Scott William Barnes

- John Richard Fleischauer
- Delaney Wray Holloway

Two ordained deacons:

- Kyle Bryan
- Philip Nathaniel Galyon

One ordained elder:

- Brittany Dawkins Camp

Two whose orders were recognized:

- Raul Dominguez
- Joey Karr

One whose orders were restored:

- Jeffrey Lee Ponder-Twardy

During the sermon, Bishop Wallace-Padgett acknowledged that The United Methodist Church is in a “challenging, ever-changing, stormy, tumultuous, uncertain, difficult season.” She noted that those who have answered God’s call to ministry during this time are signs of hope. She encouraged all in the Conference to recommit to prayer, community, generosity, service and worship. She reminded the new clergy, and all those gathered in worship, “it is always the right season to make disciples.”

Thursday

Throughout Conference, the worship, teaching and business occurred under the theme of *Disciples Celebrating Discipleship*. Bishop David Graves, resident Bishop of the Alabama-West Florida and South Georgia Conferences, was the guest preacher. During his morning messages he shared stories of his ministry of evangelism and disciple-making and encouraged those gathered “don’t give up on

anybody.” He said, “You have received power to be a light in Huntsville, Alabama . . . and throughout Alabama....and remember people are watching us.”

On Thursday morning, the Conference gathered for a time of Holy Communion. Clergy and lay members presented their individual and congregations’ contributions to this year’s Annual Conference Special Offering “Love and Support for Ukrainian Refugees.” The offering will be sent through The Advance to support United Methodist Churches in Baltic countries providing care and assistance for Ukrainian Refugees. The North Alabama Conference has partnered with United Methodists in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania on many ministry projects since the early 1990s. The offering collected Thursday morning was more than \$57,000. This is in addition to approximately \$100,000 already contributed to UMCOR to help Ukrainian refugees.

Bishop Wallace-Padgett opened Thursday morning business with a “State of the Church” address. She echoed her ordination sermon reminding those gathered that The United Methodist Church is in an uncertain and challenging season, but “any season is the right time to make disciples of Jesus Christ.” She also addressed how the community of the North Alabama Conference will navigate upcoming months and years together saying, “What we do is of critical importance. How we do it is of equal importance.” She noted that while the Conference will do its best to put in place grace-filled ways for churches who discern to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church, the Conference is also committed to being a place where diverse people can remain in ministry together in The United Methodist Church. She said, “With a renewed commitment and determination, we believe that we can be a biblically rooted, grace-filled diverse community of churches that focuses on how relationship with Jesus Christ helps us be a part of God’s movement that is changing the world.” She emphasized that North Alabama’s ministry will focus on discipleship. She added, “We will also emphasize what we have in common instead of our differences, because we all know we have way more commonality than dissimilarity.”

The Board of Ministry presented its report. Executive Director Rev. Ron Schultz memorably said he was “drunk on the Holy Spirit” following Wednesday evening’s powerful credentialing service. He introduced the Conference’s new clergy. Along

with Board of Ordained Ministry Chair Dr. Bill Brunson, he also recognized clergy who are retiring:

- Rev. Perry Marcus Allbritten - 28 years of service (PL)
- Rev. Gerald Wayne Baker - 31 years of Service (PL)
- Rev. Robert Terry Bentley - 43 years
- Rev. William H. Brown - 19 years
- Rev. Kelly Clem - 37 years
- Rev. David E. Holmes - 42 years
- Rev. Joel R. Maxwell - 24 years (PL)
- Rev. Shirley Jean Meddick - 11 years (PL)
- Rev. Alexander W. Oberneder - 30 years
- Rev. Mike Samuels - 23 years
- Dr. Robin B. Scott - 44 years
- Rev. Rock Stone - 37 years
- Rev. Michael Strong - 30 years (PL)
- Rev. Kim Marie Teehan - 16 years
- Rev. Hilda Walker - 18 years (PL)
- Rev. James Larry Walls - 16 years (PL)

The Board also invited congregations to participate in [Ichnos 2.0](#), an opportunity to partner a church's clergy and core lay leadership in a process to focus on discipleship and grow leadership habits. Rev. Schultz additionally invited laity to encourage their pastors to take advantage of the Conference's clergy care resources and opportunities to help clergy be the best and healthiest leaders possible. Thus, congregations will be healthier and stronger.

Rev. Sarah Smoot presented the COSROW report. She shared a [video message](#) from the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. She then gave an update on the 2018 resolution for parity in appointment making, which called for the Conference to appoint women clergy to equal representation in higher-salaried positions. She explained the 2021 data shows an improvement in the percentage of women earning the highest salaries. However, North Alabama still has not reached a percentage equal with the number of female full-time clergy. She told the Conference, "The church should be leading the way in closing the wage gap, in recognizing and valuing the gifts of people who are often under-

noticed and underutilized.” She then introduced the [2022 recipient of the Louise Branscomb Barrier Breaker Award Brittany Green](#). Mrs. Green is a member of Center Grove UMC, a healthcare worker and is active in the National Coalition of Black Women. Part of her work with that coalition is eliminating healthcare disparities among black women. Her husband Damein Green accepted the award on her behalf. He explained he nominated Brittany not just for what she does, but the way she does it. He explained that her art of “gentle persuasion” is an effective way to make needed changes in a world overwhelmed with conflict and anger. He encouraged the church to engage the world in a similar manner.

Director of Connectional Ministries Rev. Dr. Adlene Kufarimai presented the Conference nominations report, which was approved by voice vote.

The Conference then considered its first resolution. Bishop Wallace-Padgett explained that this year the four resolutions under consideration would be addressed throughout Annual Conference instead of in one block of time. She also explained that Conference members would be invited to surround each resolution with intentional prayer and silence to bring their best selves to the table and hear God’s voice in the process. She then led the Conference in a prayer liturgy as they considered a Resolution on Climate Change. After a time of discussion. The resolution was adopted with a standing vote of 416 for and 194 against.

The President of Birmingham-Southern College Daniel Coleman presented a brief update on the college and then offered a blessing as Conference members and guests broke for lunch.

As the afternoon plenary session began, the Conference paused for a prayer about gun violence led by Bishop David Graves. Conference members then adopted the Consent Agenda, which Conference Secretary Rev. Dr. Dedric Cowser presented during the morning session.

Stephanie Sparks presented the Adult Discipleship Team report highlighting tools and opportunities the team provides for individual and group discipleship. These include three podcasts (Read Together, Pray Together and soon-to-launch Study Together), an online Weekly Examen, a Prayer Labyrinth available to loan to local

churches for free and more. During the report she led the Conference in a time of concert prayer and a prayer using a finger labyrinth.

Rev. Adam Burns presented the report from the Ministry with the Poor Team. The report included [a memorable video](#) that humorously demonstrated how sometimes churches' attempts to help people in their communities miss opportunities to build relationships and truly address the issues and situations people face. He noted that the Ministry with the Poor Team provides resources and training opportunities to help congregations in their ministries. He encouraged everyone to mark their calendar for a training event on Sept. 17, 2022.

The Conference then considered its second resolution Supporting, Recognizing, and Honoring the Services of Law Enforcement Officers. After prayerful consideration and no discussion, the resolution was adopted by voice vote.

Cabinet Secretary Rev. Sherri Reynolds presented the churches which are closing under the *Book of Discipline* paragraph 2549:

- Center - Mountain Lakes District
- Central Heights - Northwest District
- Clare Purcell - Cheaha District
- Daniel's Chapel - Mountain Lakes District
- Gibb's Chapel - Mountain Lakes District
- Hargrove Memorial - Southwest District
- Muscadine - Cheaha District
- Oak Level - Cheaha District
- Pleasant Grove - Cheaha District
- Southside (Tuscaloosa) - Southwest District

The Conference approved the church closings with a voice vote and a time of prayer and remembrance of their ministries.

Rebecca Morris presented the report of Embrace Alabama's Kids. She gave updates on its various ministries and shared how the Embrace Alabama's Kids staff works extremely hard to be the hands and feet of Christ to the vulnerable children and families in all its ministries. The report included a [video message from](#)

[President Blake Horne](#) and [a video](#) and live presentation by Felicia Williams, one of the first graduates of the Higher Education Program.

Rev. Zac Langer, chair of our Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry, presented the report of that committee. He noted, "The college years are such an important part of a person's life, when students are truly deciding what kinds of people they're going to be; we, as the Church, have a responsibility to be active in their lives during that process so that they can decide what role faith will play in their futures." He noted that the Board is focusing on how it can better partner with local churches. He encouraged churches to support their local campus ministry by sharing a story of how a local church member's dedication to campus ministry can make a difference in students' lives.

Rev. Dr. Bill Brunson, one of the co-chairs, and member Ambria Lankford presented an update from the NAC3 team. Bishop Wallace-Padgett created this team of diverse clergy and laity from across North Alabama to help envision who we will be as a North Alabama Conference moving forward. The three Cs of the Team Name describe commitment to Christ, Community and Clarity. After sharing [a video message](#) from the entire team, Dr. Brunson and Ms. Lankford explained the team's purpose is finding a way for our diverse population to navigate this season together (to have space for grace-filled ministry to happen without compromising values) and become generative in the work of making disciples. They also acknowledged how people of differing theological leanings and ideas of the church's future are feeling the same emotions of sadness, grief and uncertainty during this season in The United Methodist Church.

Conference Chancellor Lynn Hare presented a brief update on the pending settlement of Boy Scouts of America regarding its bankruptcy and the numerous claims of abuse by former Scouts. She explained that while this final settlement must still be approved by the courts, under the terms of the settlement, The United Methodist Church would contribute \$30 million to compensate survivors and release local churches from all abuse claims involving Scouting activities. (North Alabama's portion of this contribution is \$448, 216.) She explained that the settlement is more than financial. Additionally, the settlement addresses safe sanctuary and youth protection policies and asks the church to give opportunities for as many victims as possible to share their stories and insights to help protect

future youth. The church is encouraged to sincerely listen and learn. Additionally, new Affiliation Agreements will be required to help redefine congregations' relationships with Scouting and provide appropriate legal separation.

Rev. Monica Harbarger, Executive Director of United Counseling, presented a report of this ministry. Using the story of *The Velveteen Rabbit*, she explained that United Counseling has the role of being present and being a safe place for individuals, families and congregations to “become.” She noted many resources and opportunities United Counseling offers. She also provided ways individuals and congregations can support this ministry that has been a part of the North Alabama Conference for more than 50 years.

Rev. Dr. Tiwirai Kufarimai, chair of the Evangelism Team, presented the team's report. After giving an overview of evangelism, he presented a highlight of Annual Conference every year – the Harry Denman Evangelism Awards. During the report, he presented the recipients of both the 2020 awards and the 2022 awards:

2020 Denman Award Recipients

- Clergy: [Rev. John Hill](#)
- Laity: [Billy Coleman](#)

2022 Denman Award Recipients

- Clergy: [Rev. Ian Conerly](#)
- Laity: [Kim Woodin](#)

The Conference concluded its Thursday business with the consideration of its third resolution Strengthening the Representation of Young People. After a lengthy discussion, including a motion to postpone the resolution indefinitely, which was defeated, the Conference adopted the resolution by voice vote.

Friday

Friday morning began with worship and sermon by guest preacher Bishop David Graves. He focused on the stories in John 1 of Jesus calling his first disciples. He

shared stories of his ministry of individuals bringing others to church and to know Jesus.

Conference Secretary Rev. Dr. Dedric Cowser presented the proposed Revision to the Standing Rules. He explained a Standing Rules Working Group was established in the Fall of 2019. The revisions being presented to the Conference seek to align the Standing Rules with existing structures and procedures, create flexibility to better adapt to a changing context in the future, create greater clarity in the event of future disruptions to our usual ways of doing business and to “fill in the gaps” and address issues that either were not anticipated in the current Standing Rules, or that have arisen since their adoption. The Conference adopted the revised Standing Rules by voice vote.

Conference Lay Leader Dr. Lisa Keys-Mathews presented the laity address. During the address she introduced herself and named 50 facts about herself. She asked those gathered to make a tally of any statement that also applied to them. As she asked everyone to add up their tallies, she noted, “We are more alike than we are different in the ways that count to God.” She encouraged all those in South Hall to look into each other's eyes and remember, “You have never looked into the eyes of anyone whom God doesn't love.” She concluded the address by encouraging the Conference to honor, respect, love, and support those who discern they will leave The United Methodist Church and those who discern to stay a part of the denomination. She added, “We can continue to serve God, worship God, and expand the Kingdom of God together, being ourselves, living our theology, focusing on our numerous, important similarities; as children of God in the United Methodist Church.”

Executive Director Rev. Tony Jones gave the Sumatanga Report. He shared an energetic report about the work of the Sumatanga Action Team and how God has been blessing the camp over the last two years. Rev. Jones noted that while Sumatanga is not fully where it needs to be, much progress has been made.

Rev. Dr. Adlene Kufarimai and the Conference Missions Team presented an update on Missions. Declaring that we are still in mission, Dr. Kufarimai noted that in 2021 North Alabama Conference individuals, churches and organizations gave a total of \$438,637.74 to missions of The United Methodist Church through The

Advance. The Conference has also contributed \$24,902 to support missionaries around the world. The presentation included video messages from the [General Secretary of the General Board of Global Ministries Roland Fernandes](#) and [North Alabama's coordinator of Volunteers in Mission Rev. Todd Owen](#). The report concluded with Bishop Wallace-Padgett and the Conference pausing for a time of prayer for North Alabama's newest missionaries. Rev. Joe Riddle, his wife Ashley and family will be serving with the Congo/Zambia Episcopal Area beginning in July 2022.

The North Alabama Methodist Foundation report was presented by Board President Betty Zoller and Executive Director Mike O'Kelley. They shared how since 1984, the Foundation has worked with local churches to provide resources to help them grow and expand vital ministries for their communities. The presentation included [a video of testimonies](#) from North Alabama Conference churches.

Conference Statistician Johnny Frazier presented the annual Statistical Report. He shared the story the reported 2021 data tells about the North Alabama Conference saying, "We are 638 active churches ranging in membership from 4,372 to 2 and these beautiful voices for Jesus Christ average having in attendance from 2,073 to 3 every Sunday. We are six purely missional churches attending to the least, the last and the lost. We are 17 new churches; we are four satellite churches being planted by existing ministries, and we are 60 active Celebrate Recovery ministries." He added, "In 2021, 373 new persons called out in the Name above all Names, declaring through their profession of Christian faith the belief in the one King, Jesus Christ. Throughout our Conference 813 new Christians traveled through the waters of baptism."

Regional Director Elizabeth Wix gave an update from the Conference Advance Special Society of St. Andrew. She explained that the ministry's mission is "to bring people together to harvest and share healthy food, reduce food waste, and build caring communities by offering nourishment to hungry neighbors." She shared about the organization's work and offered ways – such as gleaning and crop drops – individuals and congregations could partner with them to help hungry people in their community.

Christopher Tomlin, President and CEO of the Methodist Homes of Alabama and Northwest Florida, presented a report from this ministry that cares for God's older children. He shared [a video highlighting their work](#). He also noted two distinctive features of Methodist Homes. 1.) It was the first organization in Alabama to implement the revolutionary household model of resident care for assisted living and nursing services. 2.) Thanks to its Fountain of Love Fund, since Methodist Homes began, no resident of a Methodist Home has ever been asked to leave due to their inability to pay.

During the Archives and History Report, the Conference received a special visit from Bishop Francis Asbury (a.k.a. Rev. George Cobb). He enthusiastically celebrated that in 2020 the North Alabama Conference marked its 150th year of spreading the gospel message. He presented a copy of the book *For Jerusalem's Sake*, which features stories and reflections of those 150 years, to Bishop Wallace-Padgett and invited Conference members to pick up their complimentary copies.

The Conference considered its fourth and final resolution Support of the Protocol of Reconciliation and Grace through Separation. After much discussion, the resolution was adopted by a standing vote of 337 in favor to 258 against.

As morning business closed, Conference CFO, Treasurer and Director of Administrative Services and Benefits Officer Scott Selman offered an update that the Board of Pension had updated the Conference's unfunded pension liability formula for churches seeking to disaffiliate. This recalculation allows the use of 25% percent of reserves. He then offered a blessing as members and visitors broke for lunch.

After lunch, the Conference gathered for its closing worship and Celebration of Life Service. Retiring District Superintendents Rev. Terry Bentley and Rev. Kelly Clem preached a joint sermon based on Hebrew 11 and 12. Bishop Wallace-Padgett read the names of the clergy and clergy spouses who have died in the last year. As she read each name a bell was rung in their honor and family members and others touched by their ministries were invited to stand. Those remembered included the following persons:

- Mr. John (Bruce) Aaron
- Rev Jimmy Carl Ball

- Rev. James Graham Berry
- Mrs. Joyce Marie Bishop
- Rev. Alvin N. Burbank
- Rev. John Clinton Busler
- Mrs. Martha J. Butler
- Rev. Jesse Lee Bynum
- Mrs. Susie Carson
- Mrs. Brenda H. Cash
- Mrs. Jeana Myers Cassis
- Rev. Rich Cassis
- Rev. Robert (Sonny) Champion
- Mrs. Glenda Driver Croft
- Mrs. Inez Forbes
- Rev. Henry E. Ford
- Mrs. Catherine Freeman
- Mrs. Sheryl Ann Gates
- Rev. Henry J. Golson
- Rev. Dr. Kenneth Paul Graham
- Rev. Thomas Lee Hammons Jr.
- Rev. Joseph Samuel Harris Sr.
- Rev. William Thomas (Tom) Holt
- Rev. Ira Dillard Laney
- Emily Gibbs Lewis
- Rev. Hoyt L. Logan
- Mrs. Ernestine Maples
- Mrs. Frances Jane Shoemaker Martin
- Mrs. Ellis Jean Mays
- Rev. Larry V. Millard
- Mrs. Pat Millard
- Rev. James Milton Newton
- Rev. William Albert Parker III
- Mrs. Carolyn Young Parkin
- Rev. William Alton Parris
- Mrs. Patricia Sims
- Rev. Dr. A. Mac Stinson Jr.
- Rev. Randall A. VanLandingham

- Rev. Julius Wayne (Vic) Vickers Sr.
- Mrs. Peggy Ann Edwards Vickers
- Mr. Charles Anthony (Andy) Wilson
- Rev. John A. Wilson

As worship continued District Superintendents read appointment changes and all clergy appointments scrolled across the screen. District Lay leaders offered a prayer for the ministry of clergy and congregations over the next year.

Following worship, the Conference was dismissed. The 2023 Annual Conference will again meet in Huntsville on June 21-24.