

2023 North Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church

June 1, 2 and 3, 2023

Report by Dennis Wells – Lay Delegate

Thank you for allowing me to attend and represent Rockmart First United Methodist Church at the 157th North Georgia Conference.

At the beginning of the conference there was a remembrance of 46 beloved North Georgia Conference clergy, clergy spouses and laity in our annual Service of Remembrance.

Dr. Rev. Terry Walton preached a moving sermon recognizing each person. You can go to The North Georgia Conference website to view the video of the Service of Remembrance.

In a deeply meaningful moment, the Annual Conference recognized the posthumous ordination of Rev. Marita Harrell. Marita's life was tragically taken from us in May 2022 by one whom she sought to share the saving love of God in Christ Jesus. What you may not know is that at the time she was preparing for ordination and full connection in The United Methodist Church.

The 157th session of the North Georgia Conference was called to order on June 1, 2023, at 3:30 pm at The Classic Center in Athens, Georgia by Bishop Robin Dease presiding. Her first as our new bishop.

The theme was "I Will Pour Out My Spirit on All"

The annual Conference Special Offering for UMCOR and our North Georgia Conference disaster response efforts was received at the service. That offering totaled \$34, 000 + and funds continue to come in. Contributions can be made at www.ngumc.org/give.

Ernest Perry, North Georgia Conference president of UMM, celebrated the 159 active charters of the United Methodist Men in North Georgia. This number is an increase from the previous year.

The scouting ministry is an important ministry of our conference and our denomination. Bishop Dease provided the keynote address to the national scouting gathering in Atlanta earlier this week, representing not only the North Georgia Conference but The North Methodist Church.

United Methodist Women have now changed their name to United Women in Faith. Stephanie Dressler, North Georgia Conference president of United Women in Faith, celebrated this essential ministry and how the name change will better reflect how women answer our calling as United Methodist.

There was an update to the 5 Areas of Focus that were introduced at last year's conference. Those 5 Areas of Focus are

Scriptural Literacy and Imagination
Community Engagement
New Faith Opportunities and Communities
Racial Justice and Healing
Health and Wellbeing

There are videos with more information to view on the website.

The North Georgia Annual Conference licensed 15 new local pastors, 6 provisional elders, 6 full connection elders.

Under Disaffiliations – The Conference Board of Trustees in alignment with an order from the Superior Court of Columbia County, brought for word tow churches that requested disaffiliation from the United Methodist Church per Book of Discipline paragraph 2553. Trinity on the Hill United Methodist Church Augusta and Mann-Mize United Methodist Church Augusta. The disaffiliations were ratified by the annual conference.

Trustees' business

Red Oak UMC Griffin, a historical Black church, was one of seven churches that closed in 2022. A motion was proposed and passed encouraging the Conference Trustees to consider a way to honor this church. Working with the Task Force the trustees proposed to designate funds from the sale of the church property, approximately \$79,000, for Black Church Development to determine its use in consultation with the South West District Superintendent. The recommendation was approved.

In 2022, the Trustees settled the litigation with Mt. Bethel United Methodist Church and received \$13.1 million in settlement funds.

In consultation with the Episcopacy Committee, the Trustees sold the episcopal residence and are providing Bishop Dease with a housing allowance for the time being.

The Trustees continue to oversee the Park Eye Fund. In 2019, the Conference began a relationship with the Emory Eye Center which does cutting edge procedures and treatments for eye-related medical issues. Every month, 25 to 30 older adults receive medicine for glaucoma and as of March, 63 children and young adults have received amazing treatments allowing them to keep the gift of sight thanks to our donations.

Following the conclusion of the litigation in Columbia and Cobb Counties, the board of Trustees has voted to lift "the pause" on disaffiliation allowing the 2553 process to resume. Details on the process and information will be posted on the Conference website late next week and as it's available.

Bishop Dease has announced we will have a special session November 18, 2023.

Conference Finance & Administration proposed Annual Conference budget is the lowest budget in 22 years. - \$14,936 million – a reduction of 1.7 million compared to 2023. The budget and CFA recommendations were approved by the Annual Conference.

Board of Ordained Ministry and Center for Clergy Excellence recognized and celebrated 33 retirees: 21 elders, 11 local pastors, and 1 deacon.

In 2022, The Barnes Elevation and Administrative Team awarded \$1,388,622 in 23 grants to local churches, districts and approved Conference Boards and Agencies. In 2023 the Barnes Fund will invest \$1,272,370 in mission and ministry across our Annual Conference,

The Annual Conference approved the closure of four churches:

Freeman Memorial UMC – Newnan, Georgia

Hollonville UMC – Williamson, Georgia

Roopville UMC – Carroll Count, Georgia

Mt Bethel UMC – Marietta, Georgia

Future dates set at the Classic Center are 2024: June 13-15 (Thursday -Saturday)

2024: June 12-14, 2025 (Thursday - Saturday)

Service of Word and Table & Fixing of Appointments of Saturday morning and the preaching of Bishop Dease was something to behold. Go to the website and watch this video.

Rev. Murry and Congregation, this is the end of my report.

Thank you,

Dennis Wells

Lay Delegate