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# Daily Digest – June 3, 2021

## *Annual Conference 2021*

Jun 3, 2021 | Headlines



Morning worship, lead by, left to right, Dave Williams, Paul Lazenby, Brooke Hobbs, and TJ Williams.

By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor



The second day of the 2021 Arkansas Annual Conference began where any good day should start, in communal worship of our Savior and Creator. The morning worship was led by Brooke Hobbs, Dave Williams, TJ Williams, and Paul Lazenby. After leading us through a few songs this morning, the Rev. Bryan Diffie presented a short scripture reading and message that spoke of the brightness of God's light that shines through Israel and God's chosen people, and how we as Christians and United Methodists must be the light in our current world, reflecting God's glory to all.

### **Episcopal Address**

Bishop Mueller's 2021 Episcopal Address was titled "The Gift of an Unexpected Pause," and presented a reflection of the tough year that 2020 brought us, with a global pandemic, political polarization, the sin of racism, and other trials and tribulations, but also three important ventures that churches should seek to achieve in the days, months, and years ahead.

Much like the Israelites who wandered the desert for 40 years seeking the Promised Land, the United Methodist Church finds itself wandering in the desert as well, trying to resolve a long-debated issue over human sexuality in the United Methodist Church.

"I understand why so many of you have reached the point you have – just ready for something to happen so it is all over," Bishop Mueller said. "But I wonder if our impatience, anger and desire to settle things as quickly as possible are signs that we do not trust God – so God is keeping us wandering until we are formed into a more faithful people. Just like God kept the people of Israel wandering until they were formed into a more faithful people."

Bishop Mueller went on to say that he believes God is testing the United Methodist Church at this moment with an "unexpected pause," just as he did in Exodus with the people of Israel and that we should be focusing on three important ventures while we wait for General Conference 2022. Those ventures are to strengthen your congregation, double down on the mission, and put Jesus at the heart of everything.

"My brothers and sisters of the Arkansas Annual Conference – let us use this unexpected pause to fall in head-over-heels, passionate and crazy love with Jesus regardless of whether we are traditionalists, moderates, centrists, or progressives. If we do, we will discover we no longer are wandering in the wilderness – instead we are on our way to the promised land God has set before us," Bishop Mueller concluded.

### **Morning Business Session**

The morning business session began with a Committee on Episcopacy report, presented by Karon Mann and the Rev. Mark Norman. Mann and Norman thanked Bishop Mueller for his faithful guidance, words of encouragement, and wise counsel during last year's global pandemic. Bishop Mueller and his wife, Karen Mueller, were presented with a gift by

the Committee on Episcopacy to show their appreciation for all that they do for the Arkansas Conference.

Mary Lewis Dassinger and the Rev. Samantha Meadors presented the 200,000 More Reasons report. 200,000 More Reasons is the new name for 200,000 Reasons, which was approved by vote at last year's Annual Conference meeting. 200,000 More Reasons is committed to not only end childhood hunger in Arkansas but to improve family stability and childhood literacy as well. You can view a video below of a few people from around the Conference who have committed to improving the lives of families and children in Arkansas.

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The Rev. Rashim Merriwether, Special Assistant to the Bishop for Ethnic Concerns and Initiatives, presented a report on the Dismantling Racism Initiative. Merriwether's position was created in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd, a Black man who was killed by a Minneapolis police officer, and the months of protests calling for reform, racial reconciliation, and dismantling the sin of racism within our church and the world. Merriwether presented the work that has been done in the last year, and spoke of the hard work that still needs to be done in order to make a more just and equitable church for all. You can read more about our Dismantling Racism Initiative on the Conference website.

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A report from the Arkansas delegation to General Conference was presented by Karon Mann and the Rev. Mark Norman. They ask for continued prayers until General Conference takes place in fall of 2022. Please reach out to them with prayers, concerns, or questions.

### **Retirement Service**

Fifteen clergy members were honored for their years of faithful service at the 2021 Retirement Service. The names of all retirees, as well as their years of service, can be found below.

Everett H. Blakely – 7 years  
William Buchanan – 29 years  
Stephen Coburn – 37.5 years  
William D. “Luke” Conway – 32 years  
Danny Dunlap – 12 years  
Leonard Higgins – 40 years  
Gerald Holloway – 14 years  
Teresa Holt – 22 years  
John Humphries – 18.75 years  
John Mark McDonald – 30 years  
Treva Mills – 17 years  
Paul Seay – 20 years  
James Phillip “Phil” Smith – 11 years  
Mark Waynick – 24 years  
Brenda Wideman – 6 years

### **Petitions and Resolutions**

Two resolutions and one petition to General Conference were voted on today. The resolutions were Project Transformation Arkansas Relationship to Arkansas Annual Conference, which passed by a vote of 446-67 after a substitute resolution was passed to take the place of the original resolution printed on page 62 of the Pre-Conference Journal. The resolution will formally recognize Project Transformation as a ministry partner with the Arkansas Annual Conference.

A Resolution Regarding Decisions about Potential Separation, Departure, or Realignment as an Annual Conference was presented by the Rev. JJ Whitney and passed by a vote of 293-237 after a substitute resolution was presented to take the place of the resolution printed on page 65 of the Pre-Conference Journal. The resolution seeks to bring together diverse ideological groups within the Arkansas Conference, including the Wesleyan Covenant Association/Confessing Movement, UMCNext/Uniting Methodist, and the Black Methodist for Church Renewal, in a wide-ranging discourse concerning the potential vote of separation that could occur at General Conference 2022. Rev. Whitney said the goal was for people to come together in Christian conferencing to discuss their thoughts, feelings, anxieties, and more about the upcoming General Conference session.

A General Conference Petition to Clarify Deadlines in Paragraph 507 was presented by the Rev. Jim Polk. The purpose of the petition was to clarify the deadline for petitions to be sent to General Conference, considering the twice-delayed General Conference, which was set to occur in 2020, but has now been pushed back to 2022. That resolution passed by a vote of 465-46.

### **Celebration of Life Service**

The Rev. Edna Morgan preached the Celebration of Life Service, and honored the saints that we lost since the last Annual Conference with personal stories and “-isms” and phrases that she said we will all remember when we think of their names.

The lives lost this past year include the following.

Wayne A. Bell  
Donna Bennett  
Dorothy E. Bostow  
Rita Jo Callahan  
Lewis V. Chesser, Jr.  
Brenda Collier  
James E. Conn  
Cheryle Costner  
Joann Garner  
Gary L. Goldman  
Donna Goza  
James E. Harris

Don J. Hewett  
Syd Howe  
Mary Ellen Hughes  
Richard Hughes  
Linda Johnson  
Berah Willyne Thompson Jordan  
Emma Lee Kelton  
James H. "Jim" Lenderman  
Wayne Lindsey  
Annie Beatrice Martin  
Carol Ann Nolley  
Mary "Arlene" Pickett  
John Polk  
Mary Agnes Powell  
Gordon "Randall" Reddin  
Sammye "Royce" Savage  
G. Bonnie Shearer-Hughes  
Alma Smith  
Charlotte Staggs  
William J. "Bill" Thompson  
Guy M. Whitney, Jr.  
Kay Wiggins  
Donna B. Williams

### **Evening Business Session**

In the evening business session, the Rev. Angie Gage gave a presentation on Native American Ministries and the ongoing work that must continue in regards to giving Indigenous peoples recognition and a voice in our Conference. The Rev. George Odell presented the work of the Arkansas General Commission on Religion and Race, and Clay McCastlain presented for the United Methodist Men in Arkansas.

After presentations from these groups, Todd Burris, Conference Treasurer and Director of the Center for Administrative Services, and the Rev. Brittany Richardson-Watson, president of the Council on Finance and Administration, presented this year's Conference Spending Plan. After a short presentation on the tithe initiative, and the benefits that have come out of the Conference switching to a 10% tithe plan instead of an apportionment model, the Conference members voted on the Spending Plan. By a vote of 353-74, the 2021-2022 Spending Plan passed.

### **Barnabas Award**

The Rev. Maxine Allen received this year's Barnabas Award. The Barnabas Award is an annual award in honor of the late Rev. Jim Beal. It is given annually by the Board of

Ordained Ministry to a person, lay or clergy, who has a heart for pastors and mentoring others.

"I am deeply humbled to receive this award named in honor of the Apostle Barnabas which was instituted as a result of the legacy of Jim Beal, an Arkansas Churchman whose shadow all clergy stand in," Allen said. "Many thanks to those who nominated me and the committee that selected me.

"As a second career pastor, I was able to have wonderful mentors: Revs. William "Paw Paw" Robinson, Chester Jones, and Joyce Harris Scott. This woman and these men opened doors for me. I hope that I have held my foot in those doors long enough to have a 3rd generation walk through and sit at the tables of power across Methodism. To those who have allowed me to be their mentor, and especially to those I "fired" as mentees, I have learned so much from you! You make me want to continue teaching and learning for the next 50 years! To God be the glory!"



The Rev. Maxine Allen received the Barnabas Award at the 2021 Arkansas Annual Conference.

**Order of the Day: Rev. Dr. Michael Beck**

The Rev. Dr. Michael Beck of Fresh Expressions US gave our first Order of the Day for Annual Conference. Beck came to us virtually via Zoom, and spoke on the mission of Fresh Expressions, which is to go into places where we don't normally think church can happen, and form relationships and connections with people in new ways. Some of the places that Rev. Dr. Beck mentioned where Fresh Expressions have popped up include tattoo parlors, burrito restaurants, dog parks, and virtual spaces. You can learn more about Fresh Expressions US by visiting [freshexpressionsus.org](https://freshexpressionsus.org).



### Laity, Youth Addresses

Kathy Conley, Lay Leader for the Conference, presented the Laity Address at the morning business session. Conley emphasized the work of laity across the connection and presented a video showcasing the work and importance of laity in the Conference.

The youth address was presented via video by ACCYM President Phoebe Sanders, who spoke about the struggles that ACCYM has gone through in the past year, but the hope she feels about the future of the United Methodist Church as well as the welcome news of Project Transformation's partnership with the Arkansas Conference.

The final day of Annual Conference will commence at 8 a.m. on Friday, June 4. Tune in to our [YouTube channel](#) to watch the day's events online.

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