

The Arkansas United Methodist

ANNUAL CONFERENCE RECAP

May 29 - June 1, 2019



In his 2019 Episcopal Address, Bishop Gary Mueller encouraged members of the Arkansas Annual Conference to commit to “double down” on all of our great mission work throughout the state of Arkansas. || *Photo by Stephen Gideon*

‘It’s Time to Double Down Boldly on Our Mission’

Bishop Mueller encourages Arkansas Methodists to continue mission work in state

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

In his 2019 Episcopal Address to the Arkansas Annual Conference, Bishop Gary Mueller addressed the deep divides in the United Methodist Church and the hurt caused by the 2019 General Conference but reiterated the importance of “doubling down” on the crucial mission work being done by churches and ministries across the Conference.

Throughout his address, Bishop Mueller noted that this is the hardest Episcopal Address he has ever had to prepare.

“It is the hardest because our beloved church is as polarized as our nation ... LGBTQIA+ persons and allies are hurting because you believe the church has pushed you out. Supporters of the church’s disciplinary stance concerning human sexuality are hurting because you feel you have been labeled bigots,” Mueller said.

“It’s the hardest because I have to stand up here in front of those of you whom I deeply love and confess I can’t take away your pain, change how people treat each other or fix The United Methodist Church - as hard as I have tried.”

In February, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church gathered in St. Louis to discuss matters related

to human sexuality.

By a vote 438 to 384, the delegates voted to pass The Traditional Plan, which maintains the Book of Discipline's current language regarding human sexuality, preventing the ordination of "self-avowed practicing homosexuals" as clergy and the performance of same-sex marriages by UMC clergy in United Methodist Church buildings.

Despite the difficulty of this year's address, Mueller contrasted his initial thoughts by saying it is also the easiest address he's given.

Mueller stated that he has personally experienced the truth of this year's theme, "The Best of All, God is with Us."

"It's not just a catchy slogan, but a transforming reality more powerful than all the things that threaten to tear us apart."

It is also the easiest address because of a shift in focus from the problems and uncertainty in Arkansas, to a renewed focus - "doubling down" - on mission work, according to Mueller.

Mueller gave three examples of how Arkansas United Methodists can double down on mission work: Double Down on Faith, Double Down on Being Fruitful and Double Down on Compassion.

In each example of doubling down, Bishop Mueller cited a different parable from Matthew 25, some of Jesus's final teachings before the crucifixion.

Matthew 25:7-13 is the parable of the bridesmaids and their lamps.

"Jesus's message to us through these words is clear. We're not just disciples when it's convenient. We're disciples all the time," Mueller said. "Arkansas, it's time to double down on getting serious about our relationship with Jesus as Savior and Lord, double down on responding to his call to get involved in his ministry and double down about the importance of what's at stake for Jesus, for others and for us."

The worship band leads the Conference in a hymn during

the opening worship service.

For an example of doubling down on being fruitful, Mueller cited the parable of the talents, in which a master gives three servants different amounts of gold. Two of the servants took what they were given and multiplied their earnings, but one servant chose instead to bury his gold.

The servants who invested their money were rewarded, but the one who hid away his money was rebuked.

"Jesus is telling us we are to use the gifts, resources and people we have been given to get results that actually bring about God's transformation of lives, communities and the world," Mueller said.

A few of the examples of Arkansans doubling down in the past and the future include creating places like Methodist-LeBonheur Hospital, Camp Aldersgate and Philander Smith College, as well as current ministries supported by United Methodist Churches, including Lucie's Place, Breaking Bonds Ministries, and ECHO Village.

Bishop Mueller also brought up the current struggle many Arkansans are facing due to the Arkansas River flooding in cities along the river, such as Fort Smith, Dardanelle, Little Rock and Pine Bluff.

"This is something that we can all come together and help with right now. Many families are hurting right now, and they need your help."

To donate, visit <http://bit.ly/2EDBzn1> and select the Arkansas Disaster Relief Fund.

When mentioning his final point on doubling down, Bishop Mueller used the parable of the sheep and the goats. In this parable, Jesus casts away those who did not protect the least of these by feeding, clothing, and taking care of the sick and needy.

Mueller reminded those at Ozark Bank Arena that one of the major missions of the Arkansas Annual Conference is 200,000 Reasons, a ministry seeking to end childhood hunger in Arkansas. Since starting this ministry almost five years ago, that number has gone down from 200,000 hungry children to about 165,000 children.

"We can get it to 150,000 and then 100,000 and eventually zero. And we will. This is a way we can join together - regardless of whether we are liberal, conservative, in-between or confused - to double down on our acts of compassion," Mueller said.

Bishop Mueller reminded the gathered crowd that he is aware there are still divisions within our Methodist congregations but also gave a hopeful reminder that there is still much work to be done within and outside of the Arkansas Conference.

"You are a member of The United Methodist Church painfully divided by matters of human sexuality that are beyond your ability to settle, regardless of your stance. But you also are a member of a local congregation that is still called to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who make disciples equipped and sent to transform lives, communities and the world.

"So let's get started right now. Let's choose to start by joining hands with Christ, who joins our hands with each other. Let's choose to start by doubling down boldly on our mission. Let us start, my sisters and brothers."

Caleb Hennington, Digital Content Editor

Amy Ezell, Director of The Center for Communication

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STORY IDEA?



Arkansas elects 20 delegates to General, South Central Jurisdictional Conferences

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

The Arkansas Annual Conference elected 20 total delegates this year, eight to General Conference 2020, eight to South Central Jurisdictional Conference 2020, and two alternates.

These delegates will travel to General Conference, May 5 - 15, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota and South Central Jurisdictional Conference, July 15 - 18, 2020 in The Woodlands, Texas.

The Arkansas Annual Conference delegates are:

General Conference 2020

Clergy: Mark Norman, Michael Roberts, Lynn Kilbourne, Jessica Teegarden. Laity: Karon Mann, Todd Burris, Miller Wilbourn, Elizabeth Fink.

South Central Jurisdictional Conference 2020

Clergy: Natasha Murray, Rebekah Miles, Hammett Evans, Katie Pearce. Laity: Regina Norwood, Sarah Argue, Brandon Bates, Brian Swain.

Alternates

Clergy: Pam Estes, Lauren DeLano Laity: Amy Forbus, Asa Whitaker

Jessica (Jessie) Waddell Teegarden, who is the first ordained deacon that the Arkansas Annual Conference has ever elected to send to General Conference, is delighted at the opportunity to serve the Arkansas Conference.

"I am overwhelmed with emotion with the opportunity to represent Arkansas at GC 2020 and grateful for the support of my colleagues in ministry. It is especially meaningful to represent young clergy women and the order of deacons," Teegarden said.

"I am grateful for those who have paved the way and supported the need for deacons' voices to be present at the table, especially Rev. Laverne Keahey and Rev. Lu Harding who have served on jurisdictional delegation and as alternates in the past. I pray that we will continue to 'make history' and continue to elect new, young, and diverse voices to the delegation."

Karon Mann, who was elected as a delegate to the 2016 and 2019 General Conferences, was also grateful for the opportunity to serve once again.

"It is an honor to be elected as a delegate to General Conference 2020 and to serve as the head of the delegation. I thank you for your confidence in me and promise to work diligently for the future of our United Methodist Church," Mann said. "Arkansas delegations have a long history of camaraderie and Christian conferencing and this delegation will be no different. I thank the laity of the Arkansas Conference for this privilege!"

Elected Delegates



GC2020

Clergy:

- * 305 - Mark Norman - SE
- * 346 - Michael Roberts - C
- * 227 - Lynn Kilbourne - C
- * 397 - Jessica Teegarden - C

Laity:

- * 18 - Karon Mann - C
- * 7 - Todd Burris - C
- * 37 - Miller Wilbourn - C
- * 11 - Elizabeth Fink - SE

SCJ Conference 2020

Clergy:

- * 293 - Natasha Murray - SE
- * 275 - Rebekah Miles - C
- * 140 - Hammett Evans - SE
- * 317 - Katie Pearce - C

Laity:

- * 38 - Regina Norwood - C
- * 1 - Sarah Argue - C
- * 2 - Brandon Bates - C
- * 30 - Brian Swain - NW

SCJ Alternates

Clergy:

- * 138 - Pam Estes - SW
- * 107 - Lauren DeLano - C

Laity:

- * 12 - Amy Forbus - C
- * 35 - Asa Whitaker - NE

The Best of All
GOD
is with us



Greg Jones brings everything back into focus during keynote

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

The keynote speaker for Annual Conference this year is the Rev. Dr. Greg L. Jones, Dean of the Duke Divinity School at Duke University.

Jones focused his speech on reminding the United Methodists in the room about the rich tradition of mission work — reaching every person for Jesus — in our denomination, despite all of the many problems the United Methodist Church is currently facing after the 2019 special session of General Conference.

Jones used Numbers to illustrate how many of the Israelites were content to continue wandering in the wilderness or return to Egypt — to slavery and oppression — rather than face their fears and enter God’s promised land.

“Every one of us has a ‘Back to Egypt’ plan. We see what scares us; we want what’s familiar instead,” Jones said. “Part of the problem we have these days is that in the midst of our bewilderment, in the midst of change, in the midst of division, in the midst of the complaining and whining, in the midst of our complaining about leadership, we’ve lost our sense of mission and our sense of confidence in who God is and what God is doing in the world by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Jones brought the mission of United Methodists back into



The Rev. Dr. Greg Jones gives the keynote address at the 2019 Arkansas Annual Conference. || Photo by Stephen Gideon

full focus during the remainder of his sermon, reminding those in attendance why we believe what we believe as Christians, and the power to in all of us to do good work through that belief.

Disaster Response asks for aid in Arkansas flood relief

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

Byron Mann, gave the VIM and Disaster Response report today, giving the assembled body an update on the flooding situation along the Arkansas River. Mann gave an update on what kinds of donations are needed from people and encouraged

everyone to donate money and not flood buckets or health kits.

“The reason we aren’t asking for buckets and health kits right now is because we just received a delivery of 38 pallets of buckets. What we really need right now is churches to volunteer to help out their local community and to donate money, preferably cash, to the Arkansas Disaster Relief fund.”

To donate, visit <http://bit.ly/2wvUnjG> and select Arkansas Disaster Relief.



Reports from across the Conference

By Caleb Hennington
Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

On Thursday, May 30, various ministries, from committees to collegiate entities, presented their reports at the business session.

While some, such as the Arkansas Conference Center for Vitality, used their time to highlight new programs, learning tools and their wonderful staff, others, like the newly formed Native American Committee, used their time to focus on the issues that still need to be addressed.

The Native American Committee, which formed at the 2018 Annual Conference and is lead by Angie Gage, highlighted that indigenous people are found in almost every county in Arkansas.

Gage also stressed the need for more churches to get involved with the Native American Committee at their own congregation and the reasons why it's important to pay attention to the struggles of Native people.

"More than 6,500 indigenous women and children in the U.S. go missing or are murdered every year. We are working to raise awareness on this issue but we need your help," Gage said.

Another new committee that was just formed before the start of Annual Conference is the Disabilities Committee. Mark Lasater is the head of this newly formed committee and said they are hoping to raise more awareness for those with disabilities in the Arkansas Annual Conference, and to make churches and services more accessible for those with disabilities.

Later, Annie Meek came to a microphone to bring awareness to the body that those with invisible disabilities should also be recognized by the Committee and more awareness should be brought to the struggles of them as well.

On Friday, May 31, Mary Lewis Dassinger, Project Coordinator of 200,000 Reasons to End Childhood Hunger, encouraged everyone at Annual Conference to involve their churches in the good work of 200,000 Reasons.

"Since starting the project five years ago, more than 500 churches in Arkansas have started a 200,000 Reasons mission at their church," Dassinger said.

Bishop Mueller added that although that number is amazing progress from where they started, more can still be done.

"100% of churches, regardless of size, can get involved in this

work," Mueller said.

For more information on 200,000 Reasons, contact Mary Lewis Dassinger at mdassinger@arumc.org. You can also check out the 200,000 Reasons class on CouRSe, the Conference's new online learning management system. Enroll in CouRSe by visiting arumc.myabsorb.com.



Richard Hearne brings a report to Annual Conference on the Lydia Patterson Institute on the U.S. - Mexico border. || Photo by Stephen Gideon

Richard Hearne of the Lydia Patterson Institute also gave a report on the school, which services junior high and high school students living on the U.S. – Mexico border.

"This year, 81 students graduated from the Lydia Patterson Institute, and 100% of those students are enrolled to go to college in the fall, many at United Methodist institutions," Hearne said.

He also praised the Arkansas Annual Conference for the ongoing campaign to raise money for the school's new chapel, which the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas has committed to matching every dollar donated up to \$250,000.

A few awards were also given today, including three Harry Denman Evangelism Awards. These awards went to the Rev. Casey Turner of First UMC Jonesboro, Zach Schrick, and Shannon Mecum.

According to The Foundation for Evangelism website, the award "honors United Methodists in each annual conference whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word (what), Sign (why), and Deed (how) – brings people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ."

Michael McSwain of the General Board of Discipleship also awarded the One Matters Discipleship Award to members of North Pulaski United Methodist Church.



Left to right: Mackey Yokem, David Moore and Natasha Murray wait to go up to the microphone at Annual Conference during Saturday's business session.

|| Photo by Stephen Gideon

One resolution passes, one fails at AC

By Caleb Hennington

Digital Content Editor, [@arumceditor](#)

On a day that's typically on the lighter side for business, the Arkansas Annual Conference had to modify the agenda at the last minute to fit a few necessary business items into the last day of Conference.

The first resolution of the day was presented by the Rev. Katie Pearce and proposed a raise in the amount of weeks that clergy are afforded for vacation time. Currently, most clergy are given two weeks of paid vacation for the first five years in the conference and four weeks after 10 years.

The Rev. Katie Pearce makes the case for a resolution that would increase clergy vacation time.

The resolution aimed to raise the vacation time to four weeks for all clergy, no matter the amount of years spent in the Conference.

The resolution was noted to be non-binding — meaning that if it passed, no church or SPRC would be required to implement the policy — but Pearce noted that it was more of a way to encourage the increase in vacation time, not mandate it.

The Rev. Chase Green, senior pastor of Primrose United Methodist Church, in a speech in favor of the resolution noted that while attending Wesley Theological Seminary, he learned that self-care and soul-care are essential for a healthy pastor and a healthy congregation.

A few others, speaking against the resolution, said that this kind of policy is already in place in many SPRC's, but laity

and clergy need to learn to work together to make sure it gets implemented.

After taking a vote on the resolution, the increase in paid vacation time for clergy was adopted.

The second resolution of the Conference was submitted by a group of Central District pastors and laity, and called for the immediate suspension of the United Methodist Church motto "Open Minds, Open Hearts, Open Doors," in light of the decision at General Conference 2019 to maintain the Book of Discipline's current stance on human sexuality.

Kyle Forehand of Pulaski Heights UMC noted that this resolution is not calling for the permanent suspension of the motto, but only a temporary one and could be reinstated if the denominations stance on human sexuality were to change.

Others, such as the Rev. Clayton Bulice of Hazel Edwards Memorial UMC, said that the adoption of this resolution is unnecessary since his church and many others in the Arkansas Conference still follow the idea behind "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors."

Still others shared personal stories of family members and friends who have felt hurt after the adoption of The Traditional Plan at General Conference.

The Rev. Angie Gage, senior pastor of Cherokee Village UMC, said she has a 25-year-old daughter who is a part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Her daughter has been to churches where she has been snubbed because of who she is, and therefore she supports suspending the motto.

After a vote, the resolution failed to pass, 201 (37.85%) in favor to 330 (62.15%) opposed.

Pics from Ordination



The 2019 ordination. From left to right: Katy Chambers, Andrew Kjolraug, Gary Maskell, Corey Tyson Read, Judy Rudd, Rashim Merriwether.
|| Photo by Stephen Gideon



The speaker for this year's Ordination Service was the Rev. Linda Harker, senior pastor of McFarlin Memorial United Methodist Church in Norman, OK. || Photo by Stephen Gideon



Katy Chambers is ordained as a deacon by Bishop Gary Mueller.
|| Photo by Stephen Gideon