

50th West Ohio Annual Conference Report

Hope was in the air as the 50th session of The West Ohio Conference gathered on the shores of Lake Erie at Lakeside Chautauqua. Bishop Gregory V. Palmer presided over the conference, which was held June 2-6. The conference theme of “Be Not Afraid – HOPE,” was based on Romans 15:13, “May the hope of God fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Palmer addressed the conference, speaking into the unrest in the denomination regarding human sexuality.

“If there was a memo that came from Holy Ghost headquarters that said ‘all of you United Methodists are free to suspend your attention to the primary mission of disciple-making and world transformation until you resolve the challenge of human sexuality,’ signed God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I just need you to know I missed the parchment and I didn’t get a digital version,” Palmer said.

“I am not going to be defined by a single conversation and a single story. And you ought not to be as well,” he said.

Five people shared their personal testimonies with the conference. From twins with Cystic Fibrosis to returning citizens and recovering addicts, each expressed their gratitude for the faith and hope they found in God through The United Methodist Church.

One week before the session met, 18 tornadoes devastated parts of the conference. A special offering of more than \$10,000 was received with numerous online contributions yet to be counted. Earlier in the year, Bishop Palmer challenged conference members to bring contributions for Light the Way, a focused plan to develop new faith communities and increase the number of highly vital existing congregations. An offering of more than \$100,000 was collected, bringing the total of gifts and pledges to \$2.6 million.

During the session’s times of holy conferencing, members:

ELECTED, in one day, the 14 General Conference, 14 Jurisdictional Conference, and 8

Alternate delegates to represent The West Ohio Conference in 2020.

- PASSED Recommendation #1 – the 2020 Budget of \$19,572,211, a reduction of \$500,000 (2.5%) from 2019. These reductions are possible in part because of Conference staff sharing and attrition, no 2020 raises for extended cabinet members, and the benefits of owning the Conference center.
- PASSED Recommendation #2 – Board of Pension & Health Benefits, which keeps healthcare coverage the same for active and retired clergy. The Conference has added an Employee Assistance Program for additional mental health support, and all eligible clergy will see an auto-escalation in their pension contribution rate of 1% per year, until a maximum of 10% is reached (unless clergy opt-out).
- PASSED Recommendation #3 – Commission on Equitable Compensation, in which the recommended minimum salary for clergy is 2% higher than last year. Key Conference staff and Cabinet took no increase in salary for 2020.
- PASSED as amended Recommendation #4 – Petition to the 2020 General Conference to Amend Paragraph 316.1: Clarification of Context of Ministry Regarding Licensed Clergy. The amended text provides that a charge for licensed local pastors is defined as “the people within or related to the community in which it is located.”
- PASSED Recommendation #5 – Petition to the 2020 General Conference to Amend Paragraph 319.2: Annual Licensing for Local Pastors. The recommendation allows for district committees on ordained ministry to choose to continue the licensing for a local pastor each year without meeting with the person, unless requested.

Membership stands at 148,153. Worship attendance was 88,978, and church school attendance stands at 28,745. Professions or reaffirmations of faith: 2,856. Adults and young adults in small groups: 96,152. Worshippers engaged in mission in 2018: 49,847. WOC

50th West Ohio Annual Conference Report

churches served 2,403,556 people with ministries of outreach, justice, and mercy.

During the Corporate Session of the West Ohio Annual Conference, Ann Baird, chair of the West Ohio Board of Trustees, reported the following:

- The renovation of the West Ohio Conference center is now complete, including increased meeting space and offices for the Capitol Area districts, which will save over \$600,000 over a 10-year span. The project is fully paid for and there is no debt on it. Feel free to stop by for a visit!
- Routine and preventive maintenance continues at the three West Ohio camps, but no major building projects have arisen over the past year.
- Seven churches have closed in the past year: Pickerington Trinity (CAS), Fairfield Beach (CAS), New Zion Hocking (FTH), Turning Point (MWS), Water's Edge (ORV), Victory Chapel (SHV), and Bethel in Lawrence County.
- Working with Extended Cabinet, the Board of Trustees agreed to a new process for allocating closed church proceeds in a more strategic way so these resources become an investment in future ministries.
- Performance for Conference investments of more than \$82 million was down at the end of 2018, but in the first quarter of 2019 was back to market highs.
- The Board of Trustees continues to work with all of West Ohio's affiliated organizations, including senior living facilities, UMCH Family Services, the Charitable Pharmacy of Central Ohio, OhioHealth, the United Methodist Financial Credit Union, and the Preacher's Relief Society.

Also during the Corporate Session, Conference Chancellor Chris Hogan reported on changes following the 2019 Special General Conference. Highlights of the newly passed disaffiliation process include...

- Disaffiliation can only be for disagreement with the Book of Discipline on the issue of homosexuality.

- Begins with a church conference called by the District Superintendent.
- Sets minimum costs to be covered by disaffiliating churches, including two years' apportionments and the church's share of the Conference's unfunded pension liability.
- Provides for annual conferences to establish additional costs of disaffiliation.
- Each disaffiliation agreement must be adopted/approved by a majority vote of the Annual Conference.

During the Celebration of Ministry Service Bishop Palmer brought a greeting to the congregation followed by calling all present to remember our common ministry and to reaffirm our Baptismal vows. Chair of the WOC Board of Ordained Ministry, Rev. Dr. Brian Law, continued the service as the 2019 retirement class of 43 ministers were honored for 1,223 years of cumulative ministry. Bishop and Mrs. Cynthia Palmer individually greeted the retirees and their spouses. The celebration of their service was followed by the singing of the doxology.

Following his sermon, candidates for ministry answered the General Examination followed by the commissioning of ten provisional Elders and two provisional Deacons. Twenty-one Elders and Deacons were ordained into full membership by Bishop Palmer.

Our own pastor Maggie Sykes was ordained an Elder in Full membership during this service.