

2018 Annual Conference Report

Annual Conference was held on May 31-June 2, 2018 at the Hershey Lodge in Hershey PA. The theme of this year's conference was Better Together - One with Christ.

Thursday, May 31, 2018:

The opening session was broken into two groups: clergy and laity. Kay Kotan, Director of Equipping Vital Congregations, was the speaker for the laity members. In her message, Kay used the example of Nehemiah, a person who possessed many qualities but had no training as a leader. His example shows us that whatever our place is, God can use us. We were also reminded that John Wesley felt that laity was crucial to the mission of spreading the word. Kay outlined several areas where laity can make an impact. Quoting Kay Kotan... "We are not *just* lay people, and we are called for impact". She encouraged us to take advantage of Equipping Vital Congregations educational opportunities to learn areas where we, the laity, can make an impact in our churches and communities.

Bishop Jeremiah Park's opening remarks to the conference celebrated the committed, dedicated, mission-minded, and generous people of the Susquehanna conference. He encouraged the conference to remember three words about the mission of the annual conference: Grow, Equip and Connect. He also spoke about the challenge of our current denominational situation regarding the question of homosexuality, acknowledging the uncertainty of what the next steps will be for for the United Methodist Church. Bishop Park reminded us that we need to be one with Christ. He gave an example of a tuning fork, noting that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to one another. They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. If we seek first to be one with Christ, Park said, then unity will follow.

Friday, June 1, 2018:

The opening session involved voting on the following recommendations:

1. Advance Specials (Connectional Ministries)
2. Board of Pensions
3. Commission on Equitable Compensation
4. Council on Finance and Administration

Kay Kotan and several colleagues presented the keynote address. The presentation focused a tinderbox, which included all the tools needed to get a fire started in our churches. Kindle, spark and ignite are the steps for equipping our congregations. To fuel your leadership, blaze the trail to revitalization, or spark a fire for a new ministry, visit EquippingVitalCongregations.com or visit this site on facebook.

The Friday morning session continued with a history lesson. In 1946, the Evangelical and United Brethren churches joined to form the Evangelical United Brethren church. Moving

forward... in 1968 the Methodist church merged with the Evangelical United Brethern church, forming the United Methodist Church. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Methodist denomination, everyone was reminded of our Evangelical, United Brethern, and Methodist beliefs and practices. Learning more about our roots and this merger explained why we see United Methodist churches in close proximity to one another.

The afternoon session included prayerful conferencing that featured celebrations of connectional ministries. It also included a breakout session to allow clergy and laity to discuss the One Church plan, which proposes allowing each congregation to decide their church's policy on human sexuality, will be recommended by the Council of Bishops at the Special Session of the General Council scheduled for Feb. 2019. The One Church plan attempts to provide unity as well as providing space in the United Methodist Church for differing understanding of human sexuality.

The afternoon session included voting on the following resolutions:

1. Mental Wellness
2. Form a Susquehanna Conference Creation Care Ministry Team
3. Automated Equipment and Artificial Intelligence within the Workplace
4. Setting Policy and Procedure for the Election of Delegates to the 2020 and Subsequent General and Jurisdictional Conferences.

Saturday, June 2, 2018:

The final session opened on Saturday morning. The session opened with prayer, followed by a balloted re-vote on a proposed amendment to the constitution of the United Methodist Church. Background on this amendment: Our constitution contains a paragraph on racial justice but not one on gender justice. The language of this petition is parallel to the language on racial justice already in our constitution. It is an affirmation that, as part of our core foundational beliefs, this church will forever stand against any actions, organizations or individuals that discriminate or dehumanize women and girls anywhere on this planet.

Bishop Sandra L. Steiner Ball (Leader of the West Virginia Area) delivered our bible centered message, which focused on Romans 12: 1-8. Key takeaways from her message:

- Do not be conformed, be transformed! So many times we are pressured to conform to the world's standards; instead we should be transformed by renewing our mind to what is good and pleasing to God's perfect will.
- Behavior follows belief! What we believe will ultimately determine how we behave.

If you wish to watch the recorded presentations, please visit:

<http://www.susumc.org/index.php/component/content/article/74-about-us/conference-center/annual-conference/2447-sus-ac-2018-lsa>

Here are personal responses to a few questions about Annual Conference:

Most important action(s) taken at plenary session?

I felt the most important action was voting on the constitutional amendment on gender justice. I feel it is important for the United Methodist church to stand up and support gender justice. (Kathy Highbaugh)

Most important worship service?

The message given by Bishop Sandra L. Steiner Ball. I loved how she delved deep into the meaning of Romans 12: 1-8. She inspired me with the following verse.
Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Kathy Highbaugh)

Why I recommend others to have the annual conference and Lay Member to Annual Conference experience?

This is a great opportunity to interact with fellow United Methodists. You can learn about new ways to engage and make a difference in our churches and communities and hear what is happening in other churches in our district. The worship sessions motivate you to want to go into the world and make disciples for Christ for the transformation of the world. The food is good too!

(Kathy Highbaugh)

Thank you for allowing us to represent The Penns Valley United Methodist Charge!

Kathy Highbaugh (St. James UMC)

Tami Spotts (Sprucetown UMC)