

LAY LEADER REPORT ON ANNUAL CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 3, 2020

As with so many events in the year 2020 the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference looked very different this year. The three day conference scheduled for June in Grove City was at first rescheduled to a one day event in Erie, at the Bayfront Convention Center in October but ultimately became a ZOOM conference held on October 3, 2020. The comment was made, "We've never done it this way before!" That is so true, the COVID-19 Virus pandemic has forced us to do many things in ways we have never done before, and yet the work of the Western Pennsylvania United Methodist Conference is being done in ways we never imagined. Praise God. As your lay representative to annual conference I am happy to report that the Western Pennsylvania Conference is alive and well and has continued to serve our Lord Jesus Christ all around the world.

This year's conference theme was WPA Chic, "Clothed in Trust". Our Bishop Cynthia Moore-KoiKoi opened the conference with prayer then proceeded into the "State of the Church Address" . The scripture reading, following the theme of the conference, was from Jeremiah 17: 7 & 8 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; it's leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit." Bishop Moore-KoiKoi then went on telling of the many ways the churches of our conference have continued to do the Lord's work in spite of and in many cases because of the pandemic. She told us that we have been planted by the water and we have green leaves and we are bearing fruit. She told us of some church camps that were able to hold camp, though modified, this summer and Wesley Woods was one of those. One church in our conference opened up for children to do school work and provided child care for working parents. Many ministries like Ramp of Hope which many in our own church have been active in have continued to work through the pandemic. Many churches, like Summit, have worshiped on-line and in parking lots. In our conference there were 1,180 baptisms, 21,684 people were involved in mission work and eight million dollars went to missions through our apportionments. As I listened to the Bishop speak I was amazed at all the work being done through our connectional church, and we are a part of this work through the money we contribute to apportionments. Apportionments used to be called Mission Share, and I think that more accurately expresses what apportionments really are. That is how we take part in missions too big for any local church on its own. That is how we are providing disaster relief to victims of fire and floods. That is how we feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. I encourage you to go to www.wpaumc.org and see all of the work that is happening through our apportionments and dedicated fellow United Methodists. You may also find out about missions that you might like to become personally involved in. You may view the "State of the Church Address" as well.

Of course the conference was not all inspiration and beautiful music though there was that even on ZOOM. There was also the administrative reports and budget concerns. Many local churches, Summit being one of them have not been able to pay one hundred percent of their apportionments so it was reported that adjustments are made as the money comes in to supply ministries. The conference is looking hard at how to curtail spending and budget for the future. We were also informed that the cost

of moving pastors has been moved from the local church to the district due to smaller churches not being able to bear the cost.

Another big change in this year's conference was that there was no voting due to the conference by-laws that state all votes must be taken in person. Voting by virtual means would require a change in the by-laws and that is under consideration.

The Bishop also informed the conference that our future annual conferences will be held at Erie's Bayfront Convention Center and explained why this venue change from Grove City will be a great cost-saving measure.

The Bishop addressed the rumor of a schism or separation, she reminded the conference that won't happen unless the General Conference votes for it.

During the closing worship service ordination, commissioning, retirements and memorial remembrances were acknowledged. Bishop Moore-KoiKoi also acknowledged the difficulty being experienced by pastors who are saying good-bye and getting to know a new church during this pandemic with so many restrictions but affirmed God's grace is sufficient for these difficult times.

I thank you for allowing me to represent you at this year's annual conference. What I will remember most about this very different Annual Conference is that God has planted us at Summit U.M.C. in the Western Pennsylvania Conference by the water and we do have green leaves and we are bearing fruit even in these difficult times.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynda Lagan

Lay Leader - Summit United Methodist Church