

Day 2: 2021 Susquehanna Annual Conference Session

On June 19, 2021, the 2nd day of the 12th Session of the Susquehanna Annual Conference was called back to order by Bishop Jeremiah Park. The day began with a Juneteenth worship service. Rev. Kris Sledge started the service with a brief history of Juneteenth and the importance of the holiday. Rev. Sledge was followed by members of the connection singing "Oh Freedom". The poem Juneteenth by Noah Griffin was then recited. Bishop Park then introduced Bishop Jane Middleton, formerly of the Susquehanna Conference. He noted her many accolades and great history of ministry. Bishop Middleton, then took time to offer her appreciation for the conference and the honor of speaking on this day. Rev. Mindi Gochneur, then read 1 John 4:11-16, 19-21 and Luke 10:25-37.

Bishop Middleton, began her message with words of love for all, no matter your difference, no matter how hard it is. "The kind of love Jesus is calling for is a profound love in which the Christ in me sees the Christ in the other, every other. The power of love Christ requires of us is its all-inclusiveness. The most impossible reality of that love is its all-inclusiveness. How can we love knowing our own frailties? We cannot love in this radically inclusive way through our own power. Only by surrendering our will, our idiosyncrasies, our disfunction, our prejudices to God can we even begin to love with radical inclusiveness. Perhaps even most important, if we can accept with every part of our being that we ourselves are unconditionally loved by God, perhaps then we can truly love," she said.

Bishop Middleton, went on to talk about the Tulsa Oklahoma Massacre in 1921, and the effect it had on generations. She closed with thoughts on 1 John "The words of first John remind us that the source of this love is God in Christ Jesus. We can't do this by our own power but by God's gift. It's a wondrous circle of love. 'If we love each other, God remains perfect in us.' Only by God's grace can we even hope to live a life of love. The proof of our capacity to love is in our relationships with the near one and the far one, with those closest to us as well as those who are unlike us, our opposites. 'If anyone says I love God and hates their brother or sister he or she is a liar.' We must love with every fiber of our being. We must love because God first loved us. How can we do this? By allowing the Christ in me, to recognize the Christ in you," Bishop Middleton said.

Following Bishop Middleton's message, Rev. Catherine Boileau, spoke about the Cup of Water Fund. Next came the song "We Shall Overcome". Rev. Kris Sledge closed the service.

The Trustees report was the first business of the day. Rev. Mark Shover, President of the Board of Trustees presented the report. The Trustees motions and actions are as follows:

- 1) Convene corporate session. *The motion was approved.*
- 2) Approval of the minutes from the October 2020 meeting. *The motion was approved.*
- 3) The adoption of the reports of the Board of Trustees and the Property & Casualty Committee. *Rev. Shover had 3 corrections to the Trustees' report. Rev. Barry Robison, confirmed and affirmed those corrections. The motion was approved.*
- 4) Disaffiliation of Bethel-Marysville church. *Motion to call for the question was approved. The motion was approved.*
- 5) Confirmation of the new trustees just elected in ecclesiastical session. *The motion was approved.*
- 6) Adoption of the full report of the trustees. *The motion was approved.*
- 7) A resolution to approve all acts of the board of trustees from October 3, 2020, to and including June 19, 2021. *The motion was approved.*
- 8) Adjourn corporate session. *The motion was approved.*
- 9) Motion that in ecclesiastical session, the conference approve the actions taken at the 2021 meeting. *The motion was approved.*

Next was Rev. John Overman, Chair of the Commission on Equitable Compensation, who delivered the Commission's report. Motion to amend line 23: 2022 minimum salary increase from 2% to 3% was not approved. The report was approved.

Following that was the 2nd part of the Leadership Report. The ministries featured today exemplified the conference's mission of growing transformational leaders, equipping vital congregations, and connecting with each other and the world. Rev. Kevin Witt and Kim Shockley, spoke about the Grow Curriculum. Then the conference got a look inside how one church used the curriculum and how impacted the congregation. The Camp and Retreat Ministry followed. They talked about coming back to camp after the pandemic and how it was made possible through donor support. Next, was some insight into Fresh Expressions through the experience of First UMC in Williamsport and Camp Hill UMC. Then the conference learned more about multi-site churches with Linglestown Life/ Rockville UMC and Spry/Pine Grove UMC. Following that, Disaster Response Coordinator, Doug Hoy. He talked about what

Disaster Response does and how churches can get involved. Michelle Schwartzman, Volunteers in Missions Coordinator, then spoke about the different things that missions do and how it impacts people.

Next, there was a motion to return to Resolution #5 from day 1 of session. The motion was approved. The resolution was as follows: **Unity in Mission:** It calls for four actions. The first, asks the conference to resolve to desire to be an Annual Conference that lives out unity in diversity for the sake of our mission and as an answer to Jesus' prayer that we may be one. The second, asks the conference to resolve to desire to stay in relationship with The United Methodist Church and in mission together. The third, asks the conference to resolve that, if the United Methodist General Conference amends The Book of Discipline, we aspire to become an Annual Conference that protects diversity of conviction and practice among our local churches and our clergy, including that we would hope to become an Annual Conference which permits, but does not require, performing of same-sex marriages. The fourth, requests that the leadership and local churches of the Susquehanna Annual Conference work towards practical frameworks for living together in connection as The United Methodist Church continues to discern its future path. The resolution was approved.

Next, the Young People's Ministry Council presented their report. They talked about the program Lead Now, which is an internship program for senior high students that helps them develop their gifts and learn leadership skills that was piloted at Aldersgate UMC in Mechanicsburg. The students worked with Vacation Bible School, built websites, and video production for their churches. They are also mentored by church staff.

Bishop Park, then took time to recognize conference chancellor Ray Hamil, who will be retiring later this year. Bishop Park then recognized Bob Force who has been committed to the conference for 30 years in the finance ministry, he will be retiring this year but will still serve on the Seedling Financial Board. He then recognized Rev. Greg Myers, for his service on conference staff, cabinet, and Board of Ordained Ministry, he will be retiring this year. Bishop Park then recognized Christy Mackey, who served as the Executive Assistant to the Bishop for many years. Christy will be leaving in July.

After the lunch break, the conference heard from those who will be ordained as elders this year through Wesley's historic questions. Those examined were Rev. David Layser, Rev. Jason Schwartzman, Rev. Kristopher Sledge, and Rev. Daniel Wilt.

Following that we took time to honor those who will be retiring this year, by members of Cabinet reading the names. Followed by honoring those who have passed away since the last Annual

Conference, through members of Cabinet reading the names. Bishop Park then set the appointments for 2021.

Then came a time to honor Bishop Park, who will be retiring effective on August 31. Members of the Transition team Rev. Barry Robison and Lisa Bender spoke on the team's behalf. They thanked Bishop Park for his ministry. As well as shared that many people have donated the Beloved Community Fund on his behalf raising thousands of dollars. Then a video was played of many across the conference connection thanking Bishop Park.

Bishop Park then went on to thank members of the staff, the cabinet, clergy, and laity who worked to plan this year's conference session. He then made some important announcements: Conference session will come to order again on Oct. 5, 2021, for a special called session. The conference will be voting on the budget at that time. The next Annual Conference will take place in person on June 1-3, 2022, at the Hershey Lodge. We then entered a time of worship.

Closing worship was opened by Rev. Grey Myers. He thanked Bishop Park, talked about his ministry, and praised his steadfast service. Next was the song "How Great Thou Art". Bishop Park delivered the message for this service. He began by recounting being assigned to the Susquehanna Conference. He went on to thank the conference, "Please accept my 'Thank you! Thank you! And Thank you!' from the bottom of my heart for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. God's people of the Susquehanna Conference, clergy, and laity alike, your commitment to discipleship and stewardship, dedication to mission and outreach, and diligence in ministry and service are truly exemplary and exceptional; and you remain committed to all of these things even in the midst of an unprecedented season of multiple challenges. Your faithfulness is outstanding and exemplary. No wonder, I was told, that the Susquehanna Conference was number one among all annual conferences in the United States for 2019 shares of ministry collection. You honored the general church shares of ministry 100% even last year, the most financially challenging year! Mission Central, Seedling Ministry as a loan fund, and the Stewardship Foundation are all in a much stronger place ready to serve more people and congregations! Thanks, and praises be to God! No matter what, our people are determined to continue to touch and serve and transform lives with the love of God in the name of Jesus Christ. In the midst of the unprecedented challenges all around us, we see our pastors and congregations continue to offer new and creative ministries as they expand their presence and connection with the people in the community and beyond with determination, courage, and grace for the sake of the good news of God. Indeed, our

people remain steadfast and serve with their time, talents, and treasurers to represent the presence of healing and hope for such a time as this. Thanks be to God for you!”

Bishop Park then went to say goodbye, “So with confidence, I commit you to God and God’s grace for such a time as this. Indeed, the God who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus,” (Philippians 1:6). He continued to talk of his love for worship, “I have been most richly blessed to have traveled the hills and valleys, the farmland, and the rural areas, small towns, suburban, and the cities of the Susquehanna Conference to visit our churches and people. Lisa and I immensely enjoyed the times we had in worship and fellowship all over the place in our conference. Wherever I visited I shared with our people a message that we are a church alive in Christ together. We worship and serve the living God. As God’s people, there is no other way to be, but alive!”

He then went on to take a moment of personal privilege, expressing his love for his wife, “Lisa, you’re the best dance partner I can ask for. I am privileged to have the best wife and you are the best mom for Cathy and Matthew, and their spouses George and Joyce, and you are the best grandma Gemma, Penelope, Eugenie, and Eli can have, you are a blessing to all of us beyond description. Lisa, how can I thank my God enough for the joy I have because of you? With you, I know that the best days of our lives are yet to come and am looking forward to our common journey ahead in joy and peace with gratitude.” He closed his message by singing the song “For I Have Touched the Hem of His Garment”.

Bishop Park then spoke about the Mongolian Mission fund and some of the history of the mission. Next came the song “Great is Thy Faithfulness”. Rev. Matthew Lake then offered a prayer for our Bishops during the transition. The Chi Rho singers then led a time of worship. Rev. Mindi Gochnaur, offer the benediction to close the service.

Closing out the live portion of the session, Rev. Barry Robison, motioned to adjourn the conference session. The motion was approved.