

# 2023 WNCC Conference Report by Dave McCoy

In June, the Western NC Conference held its Annual Conference at Lake Junaluska. As the only delegate from Wesley Memorial, I want to share with you information about the Conference as I observed it.

Prior to the Conference, Bishop Carter called for a Webinar meeting to bring the request of 192 churches to disaffiliate from the United Methodist Church before conference delegates. The number requesting disaffiliation was so large that the special session would save time at the conference. Removing those delegates may have, possibly, had an impact on voting for or against several contentious petitions that came before the delegates.

There were five resolutions on closing five churches because of declining membership and financial resources. All five passed.

Eight other petitions were brought before the Conference delegates. All passed.

- **Local Church Creation Care Teams**

Every local church is urged to form a Creation Care Team for action in five areas each year—Worship, Discipleship, Stewardship, Mission, and Evangelism – providing children, youth & adults of all ages with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring, creation & justice. The conference will assist churches with resources and mentors as needed.

- **Add Fossil Fuels to United Methodist Investment Screens**

The WNC Conference will forward a resolution as a petition calling the 2024 General Conference to include “fossil fuels” in the list of investment screens.

- **Parental Leave**

The WNC Conference will:

1. Expand the clergy parental leave policy to allow compensation maintained for the full one-quarter of year leave.
2. Establish a fund that provides at least \$1,000 for each clergy member granted parental leave to assist with the arrangement of pastoral responsibilities.

3. The Conference Council on Finance & Administration will determine the most appropriate source of funding.
4. Encourage churches to offer a corresponding parental leave policy for their lay employees.

- **Encouraging Leadership with Integrity**

As we continue this period of transition the WNC Annual Conference calls upon every United Methodist, as a disciple of Jesus Christ, to move forward in fairness and with integrity.

The Conference asks all lay and clergy members who intend to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church to recuse themselves from leadership roles in all areas of the church, including the local church, district, conference, jurisdictional and general church level committees, boards, agencies, delegations, and episcopal leaders. The Annual Conference encourages the WNC Board of Trustees to develop codes of conduct to manage conflicts of interest that may arise around discussions of disaffiliation agreements.

- **Voting at Church Conference**

The Conference sent an amendment to the General Conference stating that the vote of the Church Conference shall be extended to any & every member who has shown evidence of faithfulness to the membership vows: presence, gifts, and service. Each Administrative Council (or equivalent governing group) shall determine the baseline standards for the three quantifiable categories of membership vows and name a group of no fewer than 3 people to develop a list of eligible voters for the Church Conference. The minimum standards for voting shall be approved by the church's governing body and well publicized ahead of the church conference. Any member(s), upon request, shall have access to the list to clarify their eligibility and have a chance to appeal to the church-appointed eligibility committee. The list of eligible members to vote at a Church Conference shall be finalized at least one week prior. Financial giving to a church shall continue to be kept strictly confidential.

This provision does not change the membership status of any member. It only changes the eligibility of members to vote at a Church Conference to those who have some measurable signs of faithfulness to their membership vows.

- **Creating a U.S. Regional Conference**

The WNC Conference supports the creation of Regional Conferences in Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the U.S. respectively and urges the Council of Bishops to expedite the process of voting on the constitutional amendments necessary to enact the regional conferences legislation, calling special session of annual conferences to make this happen.

The Conference requests the Council of Bishops to immediately appoint a 20–25-member interim Committee to develop & propose to the General Conference the structure & organization of a US Regional Conference comprising the five jurisdictions of the United States. Committee membership should have a minimum of 3 members of each US jurisdiction.

- **Removal of Discriminatory Language**

Our Annual Conference supports the removal of all discriminatory policies and harmful language related to sexual orientation and urges delegates to adopt the following petitions already submitted and that will be before the voting body of the next General Conference.

1. Remove the statement that affirms marriage as only between “one man and one woman.”  
Remove the statement that only affirms “heterosexual” marriage. Removes, “The UMC does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”
2. Remove the statement, “self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.”  
Removes the footnote stating that “self-avowed practicing homosexual is understood to mean that a person openly acknowledges to a bishop, district superintendent, district committee of ordained ministry, Board of Ordained Ministry, clergy session that the person is a practicing homosexual; or is living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership or civil union, or is a person who publicly states she or he is a practicing homosexual.”
3. Remove the statement “ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers.”

- **Justice & Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People**

The Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church:

1. Supports and amplifies the queer delegates' call to justice and empowerment for the LGBTQIA+ community throughout the Conference, within and beyond our local churches, districts, departments, centers, and committees.
2. Until changes can be made in *The Book of Discipline*, implores our Conference to resolve any complaints against clergy regarding their sexual orientation or the officiating of weddings of LGBTQIA+ persons;
3. Aspires to become a United Methodist Church in which LGBTQIA+ people will be protected, affirmed, and empowered throughout our life, mission, and ministry together.