

LEADING LIKE JESUS

Florida Annual Conference held June 16-18, 2016 at The Buena Vista Palace Hotel in Orlando was dynamic and fresh in that the local tragedy in Orlando became a main focus of the Bishop's initial sermon and was addressed by many of the speakers. Bishop Kenneth Carter was poignant and strong in his mandate for us as United Methodists to be inclusive and a place where all of God's children can feel welcome and safe. The Bishop and the Cabinet prepared a statement regarding the violence in Orlando and support for the LGBT community. This statement is available in full on the annual conference web site. A candlelight vigil was held on Thursday evening in memory of those who lost their lives and were injured.

In the opening worship service communion and anointing with oil were offered to every participant, setting the perfect atmosphere for the rest of the conference and the work needing to be done.

The Conference workbook was 185 pages including reports from every ministry and every aspect of the church operations. We are a part of a very amazing connectional church. The Imagine No Malaria campaign raised \$13M in one year and saved 130,000 lives. The UMC raised a total of \$72M so far and with the goal to save the lives of 1M children and mothers.

We were encouraged to support UM missionaries by joining a covenant relationship to support a missionary team. The cost is \$5 per member and for us that would be \$1,400. We also learned about a new program called the Young Adult Missional Movement where young adults 18-30 years old live together, participate in local mission projects and support each other in their spiritual growth. They are often housed in parsonages that are no longer being used by the local church.

We also received a report from the General Conference held in May in Portland where we had the most diverse delegation and also the youngest team lay leader at the conference. We learned that a new hymnal will be coming out and a special commission was set to study human sexuality with the possibility of a special general conference to address this difficult issue.

Bill Hybels, founder and senior pastor of the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, IL was a wonderful feature. This excellent session was an interview format with the interviewer being Pastor Jorge Acevedo from Grace UMC in Cape Coral. He shared his history and how he came to found this church. He also emphasized 3 staples of a vibrant church including evangelism, discipleship and compassionate justice.

On Thursday evening we broke into District meetings where we were one of several churches selected to give updates on how we have grown in the past 5 years and Cathy did a great job with her presentation. Unfortunately she was only given 2½ minutes so the power point was concise and fast moving.

Bishop Janice Riggle Huie spoke on Friday morning. She spoke of the VUCA World- a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. She said change is rapid, unpredictable, and linear. She identified 5 strengths in the midst of change- qualities for Methodism in the church and the community.

- Purpose
- Posable- integrate opposite opinions saying both/and not either/or
- Network- multiplier effect

- Innovation
- Ecosystem- resilience and capacity to be renewed

Friday afternoon was Jeff James, a VP at Disney who was one of the founders of the Disney Cruise Line. He said you must create a strong customer centered culture and focus on core business opportunities. Disney's rules for employees include safety first, courtesy, show and efficiency. Each employee knows the golden rule is to create happiness. When an entity genuinely cares for their employees their employees genuinely care for their customers and each other.

In business, we voted to change the health insurance program for our pastors. Cathy was the chair of this committee (pensions and benefits) and gave part of the report. Our health insurance has been self-funded by the conference. Claims have outweighed premiums for the past 3 years so the program is no longer sustainable. It was recommended and passed that the local church will now increase the pastor's salary to accommodate the cost of their insurance. The cost will be \$9,000 a year for a single pastor, \$12,000 for a couple and \$15,000 for a family. The down side is that the pastors will have to pay taxes on this extra income, but they can choose a health insurance program that meets their needs through private insurance, a spouse's policy or the market place. For many churches this will initially be less than we currently pay in premiums to the conference.

The Florida UMC Foundation celebrates 50 years this year. There was a memorial service for pastors and spouses who have passed in the past year as well as services of celebration for churches having significant anniversaries and a retirement service for those retiring this year. Five resolutions were presented on Saturday Morning:

1. Help end violence against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning Individuals. Passed
2. To support equality of love and value for born and unborn children.
3. Requesting the re-establishment of the Office of Director of Hispanic Ministries of the FL Conference. Financial impact: \$75,000.
4. For Drivers' Licenses for all FL drivers.
5. Reestablish the FL Conference Immigrant and Refugee Task Force

There was also a service on Saturday morning for the Licensing, Commissioning, and Ordination of pastors as well as the fixing of appointments.

As you know we paid our apportionments at 100% for the 1st time in 15 years, which places us with the majority of all churches in the FL Conference. Only a hand full of churches do not manage to do so. We need to be intentional in assuring we continue to support the connectional church and pay our fair share of the cost of the FL Conference, its business and ministries. If you would like to read part or all of the workbook it will be in the office with Phyllis. All in all, business was conducted and the conference was an inspiration to everyone who attended. Thank you for allowing me to be your lay delegate.

Mary Lou Coleman