

Lay Member Summary



Revive Us Again was the theme of the 2017 Florida Annual Conference, and around 1700 Florida United Methodists gathered at the Buena Vista Palace Hotel in Orlando June 8-10 to learn and share about changing the world through a request and petition to “Revive Us Again” found in Psalm 85.

Celebrations, Revival, Remembrance

The Annual Conference gathering began with the celebration of Holy Communion, with Bishop Ken Carter serving as preacher and celebrant. We celebrated the twentieth anniversary of our covenant relationship with the Methodist Church of Cuba, and Cuba Methodist Church Bishop Ricardo Pereira preached a “revival” message Friday evening, followed by an altar call. Many members participated in a blood drive adjacent to the hotel to remember the 49 victims of the June 12 mass shooting at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando and to support the community. Inspirational, celebratory music was led by Robert McMichael and Jarvis Wilson of Atlanta, Georgia.

Revive Us Again Theme

Annual Conference speakers included Rev. Dr. Elaine Heath, Dean of the Duke University Divinity School, whose presentation underscored the revival theme. She said the church must be incarnational, embracing “the new kind of thing God is doing...acting “like Jesus without permission” in our time. She believes we are living through “a full blown systems change for the church,” which normally results in confusion and chaos. Rev. Dr. Kevin M. Watson, Assistant Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, echoed the theme of revival, calling for a return to and reclamation of Christian conferencing. “The (Wesleyan) class meeting was at the epicenter of the explosive growth of American Methodism.” For revival, “we need to move from information-driven small groups to transformation-driven small groups.” Rev. Dr. Walter Monroe, South Central District Superintendent, preached at the service of remembrance, and Bishop Carter delivered the sermon for Saturday’s ordination service.

Pre-Conference Workshops

Pre-conference workshops launched the Revive Us Again theme, and all sessions were held on Wednesday, June 7, at St. Luke’s UMC in Orlando. They included presentations on Board of Ordained Ministry preparation, cultivating generous givers to transform ministry, how to help churches reach the next generation, how to help churches get connected to Cuba, lay servants/certified lay minister training, Commission on a Way Forward update and discussion, connecting your congregation and your annual conference, Fresh Expressions, church-school partnerships and a special conversation with Florida Conference authors. That evening Dr. Tammy Pawloski, director of the Center of Excellence to Prepare Teachers of Children of Poverty at Francis Marion University, gave a special presentation: “Children at Risk: A Mission of Bridge Building.” She discussed why poverty matters and why schools matter more. There are currently 43-million children in the U.S. living in poverty. Addressing the need for church-school connections, Pawloski called human capital a vital element that can “change the trajectory of these children.”

Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits

The conference implemented the health care supplement (i.e., The Freedom to Choose plan) on 1/1/17 as recommended by the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits and adopted by annual conference. The details of the Freedom to Choose plan are on the website at www.flumc.org/freedomtochoose. The Board

of Pension continues to evaluate the marketplaces and the impact this has had on clergy. The board meets in August to set the stipend levels in 2018 or to respond to any major legislative changes.

Strategic Leadership Team Report and District Reduction

The three key initiatives of the Strategic Leadership Team continue to be Fresh Expressions, the Nehemiah/Legacy Project and the School-Church Partnerships. The future vision for the Annual Conference includes the realization of 500 Fresh Expressions and 500 local churches, while doubling the number of vital congregations. With over 75 Fresh Expressions in process through the state, we are reaching new people, in new places, in new ways. The Nehemiah Project has created a unified process for walking with churches toward closure and regeneration, and the Strategic Leadership Team and Cabinet recommended to the Annual Conference the reduction from nine to eight Districts. Conference members approved the reduction. Future work includes finalizing a Conference Strategic Plan, partnering with the Committee on Finance and Administration to look at the future sustainability of the Annual Conference, realizing a vision for reaching the next generations, and utilizing data visualization tools to help create outcome-based measurements.

Bishop's Offering

Conference churches gave over \$67,422 toward the Bishop's offering Thursday evening. The offerings celebrate our partnerships with our neighbors in Cuba and Haiti. One-half of the offering will be directed to each initiative.

Cuban Pastor Pension Initiative — In collaboration with the leadership of the Methodist Church of Cuba, we will develop a pension fund for Cuban pastors based on their years of service there and related to their economic scale. The UMC's General Board of Pension and Health Benefits will help us design and administer the plan. A matching gift of \$50,000 is already in place!

Abundant Health for Haiti — One of four areas of focus for The UMC in 2016-2020 is the development of Abundant Health Initiatives across our planet. Meds and Food for Kids (mfkhaiti.org) fights malnutrition in Haiti, treating children with life-saving medika mamba (medical peanut butter). A gift to mfkhaiti.org feeds desperately hungry children. This will be developed through our Haiti Partnership.

Treasurer's Report

- The conference treasurer reported that local church membership was 239,000 in 2016, down 7,000 or 2.8% from 2015. Average weekly worship attendance was down 5,000 or 3.8% at 125,000.
- CF&A reported the number of churches paying apportionments at 100 percent went from 418 in 2015 to 417 in 2016; the percentage paid was approximately 87% in both 2015 and 2016.
- CF&A's 2018 budget request is 2.19% less than 2017.

Ordination

Ordination, licensing and commissioning of 51 individuals. Ordained: twelve as elders, one as deacon. Commissioned: fourteen as provisional elders, two as provisional deacons. Licensed as local pastors: 22.

Local Churches

Seventeen churches are celebrating milestone anniversaries: Four marked 150 years, seven have reached 125 years and one other has reached 100. Four are celebrating 50 years and one is celebrating 25 years. Conference members approved discontinuation of 16 churches.

Complete coverage of this year's annual conference event is available at www.flumc.org and www.acflorida.org. Full ministry reports are included in the 2017 Annual Conference Workbook at www.acflorida.org.