

Florida Annual Conference 2018
“Remembering Who We Are” - Question 1 (Transcription)

Bishop Carter: We are going to move now to the next item in our agenda which is a way of remembering who we are. And this will be a few minutes in which we are asking you to bear witness in the same way these brothers have born witness through song to who God is in their lives and the focus question is *What should we teach?* When the early Methodists met for their first conferences they focused on three questions, *What to teach? How to teach?* and *What to do?* So this evening we are not so focused on *what to do* or *how to teach* but *what is it that we teach.* One of the early Methodist conferences Mr. Wesley was presiding over the gathering and they were focusing on what to teach and how to teach and someone began to talk about “Didn’t we used to preach much more about hellfire and damnation?” And someone stood up and said “Yes, in fact, that is true. We did used to preach more about that, but we found that it discouraged our own people and alienated people outside of us.” So very early on they were struggling with “What is the gospel that we teach?” We think this is really foundational to Christian conversation and so we ask you to speak from your heart and your mind. It is wonderful if you want to quote Scripture; that’s a really good thing in terms of what we should teach.

We have a few minutes and we want to allot each person a couple of minutes and you can say a lot in a couple of minutes just so we can hear some different voices.

So we invite anyone to come forward. What is said here is not a trivial thing. This will be recorded in the minutes of this 50th Anniversary Annual Conference just as the early minutes of the Methodists were and hopefully it will become a teaching document so future generations will know how we were answering this question. So the floor is open- if you would say your name and the church you are from.

Mason Dorsey (Everglades Community—Pembroke Pines, SE): Hey y’all. Came across this a couple of months ago, Romans 2:4 *Or do you think lightly of the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance.* And so what I am hoping what we can teach is that repentance is not this (which I am very good at doing) shaking my finger at somebody but this, the arms of a hen spread wide to gather her chicks underneath her. And this is the love of God that leads to repentance. And let me add another thing on there. If I could go to Romans 3 now, verses 22 & 23 *Even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe for there is no distinction for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.* Often when I have heard *for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* it’s usually a “you better get to the cross now and confess your sins.” But lately a couple of months ago reading through this, it’s a reminder of a promise, it’s a reminder of assurance that the righteousness of God is given to us through faith in Jesus Christ for everyone who sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And so if we are just willing to let Jesus be our righteousness, the promise is guaranteed because we have sinned, Jesus’ righteousness is for us. And so that repentance leads us to righteousness because we have sinned and now we have repented. I hope we can teach that.

Michele Ginther from Faith UMC in Hudson (NC), lay delegate: I am. I love the John Wesley quote, *Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can.* And then there is the Edward Everett Hale quote, *I am only one, but I am someone. I cannot do everything, but I can do something and because I cannot do everything, I will do the something that I can do.*

Maria (last name inaudible), Jacksonville: I will be sweet and short. God is love and we are supposed to love. If we have the time and we hug, then we don’t have to do anything else. That’s enough teaching.

Nanci Branson, Atlantic Central, lay delegate: My scripture has helped me a lot during times of fear, fear of the unknown. Which is really a good thing for us to hear right now. It is Joshua 1:9 *Have I not commanded you, be strong and courageous, do not be afraid, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.* And as my husband likes to say, “Preach the gospel wherever you go and when necessary use words.” Thank you.

I am a member of Memorial United Methodist Church in Fernandina Beach , FL (No name given): My scripture is Colossians 3:28-29 *In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in common relationship with Jesus Christ. Also since you are Christ's family then you are Abraham's famous descendants, heirs according to the covenant promise.* I just think that is really good to remember that we are all the same in Christ.

Evet Simons from Port St. Lucie Florida: I don't usually come up here but I just thought about it. When I was in college I sent out cards. *That you are is God's gift to you. What you make of yourself is your gift to God.* And we need to spend our lives making our lives the gift that God gave us. And it's not all perfect, it's not all good, it's not all fluff. It's, it's real and it's real with love because love is the gift that God gave us and he wants us to be a conduit of that gift to others.

David Mullins, clergy, SW district: Amos 8:11 talks about a day in which there would be a famine, not of food and water, but of hearing the word of the Lord. And while it's certainly talking about a little bit different circumstances in that day in a specific context, we live in a day like that today. Our culture does not know the true story of the gospel anymore. And in many of our churches we have people that we assume know the stories and we will say in our sermons, "well, you have all heard the story of this and that," but I can't tell you the number of times that I've discovered somebody that didn't know the stories of our faith. I preached on the dry bones in Ezekiel one time and I had a longtime member of the church come to me and say, "That's great pastor, I had never heard that story before." And that is a key passage for so many. So what do we teach? We need to teach our people to know the word of God. Thank you.

Bishop: Okay, David, stay at the mic for a minute. I want to ask you a question. Just in a couple of sentences, "What is most essential that we teach in this time of famine?"

David Mullins: Honestly, I think we need to give people the skills to study the Word for themselves, not to just take our word for it as pastors, but to be reading it themselves, to know it themselves, to know the core of the cross and the empty grave and to be able to go from there and delve into the Word themselves. I think we need to equip our laity to be able to study this book. And Wesley called this the book of God, it has the words of salvation. They need to know it for themselves.

Carolyn Perry with the Shady Hills UMC, the NC district: It's important to know the Bible, but in the Bible in Deuteronomy starting in chapter 6, and I think starting in 2 or 3, it says Hear ye O Israel, and I say "Hear ye O world," love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength and teach this diligently to your children. And remember this as you walk by the wayside, as you sit down to eat, as you talk to your neighbors. Scripture is important and if everyone would learn to love the Lord first, then everything else falls into place. So you then go to John 3:16 which everybody knows and adding 17 onto that, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. And Jesus did not come into this world to destroy it, but through him the world might be saved.* I believe those Scripture verses should be our main topic of teaching when you are teaching all of the Bible. You need to let them know that God loves us, but that there is hell for those people who don't obey God's word.

Gene Maddox, SW district: One of the great doctrines that we have as Wesleyans is that Jesus Christ did not just die for some people but for everyone. There is no such thing as a person for whom Christ did not die and therefore there is no such thing as a person that God does not love. What we teach is that just as Christ died for every human being, making no distinctions or exceptions, that our love for all humans must be without exception or distinction, Therefore with the sacrificial Christ-like love we teach that we are to love all humans equally, whatever their nationality or skin color, whatever their level of intelligence, whatever their size, length, weight, vocation or environment, whatever their level of dependence upon another may be. We love regardless of their age or health, regardless of any and all circumstances, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or marital status, regardless of their citizenship or their language, regardless of their ability to contribute to the welfare of others. And so regardless of what it costs to love the other person, we teach the sacrificial cross bearing self-denying Calvary love of Jesus to everyone and so we teach that as imitators of Jesus Christ, we are called in hospitality to welcome the stranger. And as our own Bishop Carter has stated, and I hope that this might resonate with our hearts, a consistent ethic of hospitality would call us to also welcome the unborn as the stranger. Finally we teach as United

Methodists that we especially care for the least of these, especially those who have no vote, and yes, even no voice. May we without exception and with full consistency so teach and so live. Thank you.

Bishop: Thank you, thank you. We have a few more minutes. We are going to continue the conversation in the morning. So I want to hear, perhaps if you would go to a microphone sir, to 1. We will have one speech from 1, 2, 3 and 4 and then tomorrow morning we will continue. (Shout from the balcony for recognition) Balcony, ok, great... and uh 5 & 6. Sorry that's inappropriate for me to say that, it's partly the sight line. So we have six persons in the queue, one from each place. You each have about a minute and a half, if you would share "What should we teach?" and lets just start with 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Frank Reynolds, St. James UMC, St. Petersburg: I have just a couple of verses that I want to share from Luke chapter 5 verses 31 & 33... When Jesus early in his ministry was talking about or ministering to the least and lost, he was being criticized. *Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance".* We need to teach that, that there is another way that God has to offer. And then the other verse is at the end of his ministry or closer to the end of his ministry. Luke 24, verses 46, 47, 48. *He told them this is what is written. The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.* And so not only is forgiveness of sins available through repentance but he is also calling us to share the news and preach the same message that he did- the repentance for the forgiveness of sins preached to all nations.

Sara Baum, youth delegate from the NC district: "What to teach?" is a very important question but another very important question is "How do we live?" If we teach and we don't live by what we are teaching, then what is the point? If we teach self-control, if we teach kindness, if we teach humility and we don't live it, then really what is the point? So just live by what you are teaching, that is the most important thing.

Dottie Graves, FUMC, Melbourne: In John 15 Jesus is speaking to his disciples before he goes to the cross. And he says *If you keep my commands you will remain in my love just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I told you this so that my joy may be complete in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. If you're my friends, you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know what is his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends for everything that I learned from my Father, I have made know to you. You did not choose me but I chose you and appointed you, that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command, Love each other.* Jesus told us every single thing his Father told him and he calls us friend because we know the Master's business. If he has told us everything and he calls us friend, if we are his friend and we obey him, we go and tell the world the best news the world has ever heard.

Doug Walker, lay delegate, GC district: What I think we should teach is "How do we live as disciples of Christ in the Methodist context in the current complex and diverse world."

Sue Bickings, FUMC, Bunnell: Jesus said this when the Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and sinners. It's Matthew 9:13 *He said, "but go and learn what this means. I desire mercy and not sacrifice. For I did not come to call the righteous but sinners.* I think we should teach that.

Stanley Melek, clergy, SE district: When I think about what to teach, I think about the priorities of life. We should teach about priorities of life. The first and most important thing is faith. If we have faith and we know who we believe in, faith is important. And secondly, family. We are God's family and we are God's children. Thirdly, about finances, and then fourthly about friends. And fifth about fellowship. So if we have things in priority we will know how we will put things in order so we will put first things first, so we will not mix things up.

Bishop: We were getting a little bit into tomorrow's conversation about how we teach and what should we do based on what we teach and so thank you for helping this to get started.