



2018 Susquehanna Annual Conference Report

Bishop Jeremiah J. Park presided over the 9th session of the Susquehanna Annual Conference held at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center in Hershey, PA from May 31st to June 2nd. This year's theme: "Better Together: One with Christ" takes the words of our Communion liturgy and uses them to speak to and encourage the clergy and laity of the Susquehanna Conference to work together to find common ground and to work toward the goal of unity as the Conference moves forward.

In his sermon during the Opening Celebration, Bishop Park said: *"Unity is a biblical mandate for the Body of Christ. However, we realize that unity is a challenging agenda for the church. The fact of the matter is that unity doesn't have a chance until we acknowledge that "our way or the highway" is not a way at all, and that breakthroughs can only be made when we are willing and ready to create room for others. It means a change of heart on our part."*

The Cabinet of the Susquehanna Conference presented the Leadership Report under the theme: "Better Together: In Tune with Christ". Using the tuning fork as a metaphor, the Cabinet put forward the new mission and vision for the Susquehanna Conference:

- Grow spiritual and transformational leaders.
- Equip congregations for vitality and create new places for new people.
- Connect with each other and the world.

Continuing the theme, Richard Betlyon, a local piano tuner featured in a video said, *"While the frequencies are always the same, every piano – like every person – is different. As different as each piano may be, when you tune them all to the same pitch, they are all in tune with one another."*

Thursday evening's Celebration of Life and Resurrection honored the lives and ministries of 48 clergy and 46 laity who joined the church triumphant since Annual Conference 2017. Rev. Marian Hartman, Scranton/Wilkes-Barre District Superintendent shared the message saying, in part, *"We're saints. Oh, I don't have a capital "S" saint by my name, believe me. But those who are part of Christ are saints. And your loved ones are saints that helped shape our lives."*

Kay Kotan, Director of the Office of Equipping Vital Congregations gave the Keynote address that centered on kindling, sparking and igniting the fires of local congregations around the Susquehanna Conference. Unveiling a 'Tinderbox' of five tools: Consultation, Coaching, Small Group Resources, Workshops and New Places for New People. The Office of Equipping Vital Congregations is ready to help the churches of the Susquehanna Conference fulfill the new mission and vision!

Friday evening's Celebration of Ministry Service honored 36 clergy who served faithfully for a combined 1,043 years as elders, deacons, associate members and licensed local pastors. Rev. Janet Durrwachter served as the link between each portion of the service, reminding us: *"The Bible teaches us that God calls different people in different ways. Today, we look to Moses as an example of holiness, but remember that when God called Moses to lead God's people out of slavery and into freedom, he was a runaway with a rap sheet- tending a flock of sheep in the wilderness. Don't think that your mistakes in the past disqualify you from being used by God."*

Rev. Tom Willard, who retired from Camp Hill UMC passed the mantle to Pastor David Keyworth, pastor of Tyrone Wesley UMC during the Celebration of Ministry. Rev Willard reflected on his calling,

"When we were eighteen months old, I had a raging fever, and in those days, you didn't rush to the hospital, you rushed to your doctor. And our doctor notified my mother and dad that it was unlikely that I would survive the night. And if they were people of prayer, he encouraged them to take me home and pray over me. So, my mom and dad took me home and knelt beside their bed and they prayed. And their prayer was simple: In return for his good health, O Lord, we surrender him to your service. Thankfully, my parents chose not to share that story with me until I was eighteen years old and had already been called by Christ into ministry."

Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball, who serves the West Virginia Episcopal Area, led our Saturday morning Bible study and gave the sermon during the Ordination service. Her words on original blessing rang out: *"Blessing can live alongside suffering and trouble. In fact, blessing can bring us out of suffering and trouble. What hope this can give to a hurting world. Blessing does not mean that nothing bad happens. Blessing means that the presence and goodness of God will be with you when you need it most."*

The Susquehanna Conference's Young People's Ministry Council brought perspective to Saturday's proceedings when they said: *"Youth leadership brings a necessary perspective, is hope for future leadership, and is a way to bring young people to Christ. We are leaders in the church now, as middle and high schoolers, because we know that one day we will be in your position helping our children become church leaders."* These words were from YPMC members Hannah, Lydia, Julia and Jacob.

Main actions enacted by the Conference:

The report from the Susquehanna Conference Council on Finance and Administration shared that 100% of our apportionments were paid to the general church for the 2017 year.

The Black College Fund was represented by, James Cogman, a Certified Lay Servant and a candidate for Ordination in the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference. He encouraged the Susquehanna Conference that *"despite what we may look like, what we may sound like or what we may believe, we are all still called as long as we have breath in our bodies to let our light shine."*

A significant portion of Friday was spent in small group discussions regarding the Commission on a Way Forward recommendations. All attendees to Annual Conference were separated into

randomly-drawn small groups for an hour and 15 minutes of discussion. Thoughts and prayers were also collected for the delegates to the 2019 Special Session of General Conference.

As 2018 is the 50th anniversary of the formation of the United Methodist Church, three celebratory presentations were made to honor our connection throughout the Conference. Conference Archivist Milton Loyer gave an inspiring dramatic presentation of Bishop Hermann W. Kaebnick's address to the delegates to the 1968 Uniting Conference. Dr. Brand Eaton, President of the Conference Historical Society highlighted a history of the churches that are throughout our Conference and conducted a panel discussion on the future of the United Methodist Church.

Rev. Russell Pierce presented the Top Ten In Mission Together Award to the Susquehanna Conference on behalf of the General Board of Global Ministries. Recognizing all the work that the congregations of the Susquehanna Annual Conference did on behalf of Global Ministries.

Resolutions adopted by the conference:

RES-1 Mental Wellness

Submitted by Mission and Outreach Team, Susquehanna Conference Mental Health Task Force, Rev. Evelyn Madison, Chair Judy Rosser, Blair County Single County Authority on Drug and Alcohol Services, Executive Director of Blair Drug and Alcohol Partnerships and a member of First UMC Hollidaysburg PA.

The motion was approved.

RES-2 Form a Susquehanna Conference Creation Care Ministry Team

The motion was approved.

RES-3 Automated Equipment and Artificial Intelligence within the Workplace

Submitted by Rodney Truscott Lay Member to the Susquehanna Conference of the U.M. Church

The motion was approved.

RES-4 Setting Policy and Procedure for the Election of Delegates to the 2020 and Subsequent General and Jurisdictional Conferences

Submitted by Rev. Larry L. Leland, Jr

The motion was approved.

Number of people ordained, commissioned or received into associate membership, and average age:

12 people. Average age: 39 years old

Did your clergy session approve any openly gay candidates for ministry? If so, how many?:

No.

Did your conference elect new delegates for the special 2019 General Conference? If so, how many? What are their names?

No.

Number of people retired:

36

Susquehanna Conference Statistics:

Membership stands at: *141,606*, down *1,891* from 2016.

Worship attendance stands at: *53,511*, down *2,002* from 2016.

Church school attendance stands at: *47,817* down *3,186* from 2016.

Professions or reaffirmations of faith for 2017: *1,943*, down *162* from 2016.

Adults and young adults in small groups for 2017: *27,849*, down *2,180* from 2016.

Worshippers engaged in mission for 2017: *28,014*, up *2,092* from 2016.

The 10th session of the Susquehanna Annual Conference will be held at the Hershey Lodge and Convention Center, May 30th to June 1st, 2019.