

2019 Special Session of the General Conference opens with a Day of Prayer

The day begins with a sense of humility. The room filled with prayerful thoughts, thanksgiving, and unity, even with the knowledge that what lies ahead will be difficult and will test the spirit of everyone in the room and beyond. From the US, to Europe, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Philippines the prayers remained a consistent surrender to God's will, an embrace of the Lord's everlasting love and grace, and thankfulness for one another.

"Today has been an amazing day where we have gathered with delegates and bishops from around the world, to be in prayer thanking God for the many ways that God continues to use the United Methodist Church here in the United States, and globally as well. We've also spent time lifting up missional needs in varieties of areas around the globe. From Indonesia and the Philippines; to Europe and Eurasia, to the continent of Africa and here in the United States. It has been a powerful time when we have connected with God and with each other," said Rev. Larry Leland, Clergy Delegate, Lewisburg District Superintendent.

We were welcomed by Bishops Al Gwinn, Robert T. Hoshibata, and Debra Wallace-Padgett with opening remarks and prayers of humility, unity, and surrender to God's Sovereignty they set the tone for the Day of Prayer.

Bishops Eduard Khegay and Harald Ruckert led the delegations through prayerful worship with and for Europe and Eurasia. Giving insight into the complexities of UMC congregations throughout Europe and Eurasia - worshipping in 16 countries, 20 languages, and 310 local churches - serving tens of thousands of people. While being grateful for the diverse family of God, and the richness of mission work and cultures, and for unity in Christ Jesus. Praying for struggling economies, political differences, displaced people, and restrictions on religious freedom. They ended with a time of experiential prayer at different stations throughout the main concourse and the main bar of the General Conference.

Our praying continued with Bishops Mande Muyombo and John Yambasu leading prayers with and for Africa. They began with giving thanks to God for spirituality, diversity, church vitality, and mission. Then transitioning to prayer for the many missional challenges the continent faces: health, education, leadership development, women's empowerment, and agriculture. Ending with an offering of prayer for the 2019 General Conference and the important work it has to do, followed by group prayer between delegates and their neighboring tables.

Layne Miller, one of our lay delegates said, "There were so many great elements, praying silently and individually, praying with the people from our delegation, around the table, and praying with strangers that we don't know. There was the communion elements, an element of asking for forgiveness, that was very meaningful to me. Especially as we face tomorrow, we don't know what is to come, but this day set a great tone for everything that's going to be coming."

Bishops Minerva Carcano and Leonard Fairley led prayer with and for the USA. Offering thanksgiving prayers for New Church Development, UMCOR Mission Teams, and Ministries with Young People. Then asking heartfelt prayers for those living in poverty, those living as migrants, those affected by gun violence, and those living in modern-day slavery. Ending their time with a blessing for the Prayer Room and Prayer Volunteers by Bishops Bob Farr and Frank Beard. The delegates were then dismissed for self-guided prayer followed by a time a fasting or lunch.

The afternoon began with a time of prayer with and for the Philippines and Southeast Asia led by Bishops Ciriaco Francisco, Rudy Juan, and Pedro Torio. They started in song celebrating God's thriving work and joyfully thanking God for many blessings. Asking prayer for the many struggles they face including: increasing poverty, climate change, human rights violations, violence against women, children, and indigenous people, displacement and migration, extra-judicial killings, and overseas Filipino workers. Their time ended with all the Bishops joining hands on stage in a powerful moment of prayer in their native languages in unison aloud.

Bishop Gary Mueller offered some closing remarks of courage, "When it comes to difficult times, when comes to deep pain, when it comes to challenges, it takes every ounce of courage you have to overcome it."

The day closed with Communion served by all the Bishops to the delegations on the floor, and to visitors throughout the concourses of the building.