REPORT ON THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH KENTUCKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE, JUNE 1-3, 2026, BY GRAEME DONOVAN, LAY DELEGATE

The Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church met June 1-3 in Louisville, at Christ Church UMC, organized by a team led by our own Pastor, Darren Brandon, who is the Secretary of the Annual Conference, and presided over by Bishop David Graves. Here are some highlights.

Racism. The evening before, in St. Paul's McAdams Hall, the Kentucky Commission on Religion and Race hosted a reception to welcome the General Secretary of the UM-wide Commission on Religion and Race, Rev. Dr. Giovanni Arroyo, who spoke eloquently at the reception, and at a Banquet on Monday evening, held at St. Matthews UMC, Louisville. Arroyo's presentations were, for me, the highlight of the Conference, alongside adoption by the Conference of a ***Resolution on Disrupting and Dismantling Racism and Discrimination***. This important Resolution had been in preparation for several months to address one of the five priorities of the Conference set in 2025. It took the form of a statement of repentance and resolve, which can be found here. Among other things, Arroyo emphasized that while our current culture has demonized diversity, our Creator loved diversity, as evidenced by declaring good the extraordinary diversity of creation described in the first chapter of Genesis. Arroyo's challenging questions were, "Do we have the spiritual capacity to live with God's diversity? Are we willing to be transformed by diversity, willing to go beyond ourselves? It requires love", he said. He also spoke of the difficulties of dismantling racism, urging us all to move from belief to established practice, with resolve, and if called for, with lamentation and repentance. It is mandatory for all clergy in the Conference to take anti-racism training aimed at developing intercultural competency, and it is also offered to laity who want to receive it. We'll look out for events and opportunities in the forthcoming year.

Women Clergy. In its opening plenary work session, the Conference celebrated the 70th anniversary of full participation of women in the ministry of the church, with a standing ovation for the almost 60 women clergy in various ministries lined up across the front of the meeting space. The assembly recognized Rev. Tina Patterson, who had served as Director, African American & Connectional Ministries, and Rev. Kim Pope-Seiberling, who had served as Director of New Church Development; both are now leaving to serve in other conferences. The Rev. George Strunk was recognized for his 50 years of service as a minister. Bishop Graves took the opportunity of celebrating Clara Ester, whose story was untold for 50 years, but while still a student, was among the first people to reach and try to help Dr. Martin Luther King, within minutes of his assassination in Memphis. She had a long career as a UMC Deaconess in Mobile, Alabama, where she has most recently served as the District Lay Leader.

Mountain Mission. Director Karen Bunn, with Communications Director Andy Mitchell, reported that the Mountain Mission, 83 years old, reaches 200,000 persons in need each year.

Children's Homes. Director Rev. Julie Hager-Love spoke of this vital work, a 155 year-long legacy, reaching almost 2,500 children, youth, and their families this year in Kentucky, which has, painfully, one of the highest rates of child abuse of any State in the nation.

Higher Education. The Conference ministry to higher education, carried out at three Methodist universities and by seven Wesley Foundations at other universities, has been implementing a new model of direct support by churches close to the universities, to which campus ministers are jointly assigned.

Camp Ministry. The Conference camping ministries were a focus of extra attention this year, partly as a result of the fire at the Aldersgate camp last Fall which destroyed the O.P. Smith Lodge. The Conference heard about the capital campaign already underway to replace it, and took up an offering that contributed more than $60,000; the UM Foundation added $25,000. Many speakers attested to the spiritual importance of Aldersgate and Loucon camps in their own lives and the lives of their families.

Ecumenism. Rev. Todd Smith (Somerset First UMC) and Rev. Jean Hawxhurst (Ecumenical Staff Officer for the Council of Bishops) described the importance of maintaining close connections with the Kentucky

Council of Churches, and with the ten Protestant denominations exploring uniting in Christ. They reminded the Conference that Jesus' last prayer with his disciples was a prayer for unity, and that one of John Wesley's most strongly held admonitions was that there is no individual salvation without social salvation. They spoke about working with other churches on peace and justice issues, as well as public policies to address social needs.

Good Samaritan Ministries. This program made grants totaling just over $1 million during the past year, and applications for next year's grants open September 1.

Migrants. Rev. John Gallaher (Embrace UMC, Lexington) and Mizari Suarez of Neighbors Immigration Clinic made powerful presentations about alarming increases in incarceration and deportation of immigrants in Kentucky. Since last year's Conference, the number of detention centers in the state has risen from two to eight, and the number of police forces cooperating with ICE has risen from 12 to 35. The Oldham County detention center has been visited by volunteers from the Crestwood UMC, but major questions remain about how to provide pastoral care in the detention centers. It was wrenching to hear of breakdowns in trust among neighbors as communities are torn apart.

Finance and Administration. The Council on Finance and Administration reported sale of the episcopal residence last Fall, and preparation for sale of the former conference center grounds and building in Crestwood, since Bishop Graves is now located in Nashville, TN. The Conference adopted a balanced budget for the forthcoming year of $4.43 million. The above connectional ministries, and others not highlighted here, are supported by the United Methodist Churches in Kentucky, all of whom aspire to contribute a tithe of ten percent of their budgets to these ministries.

District Superintendent. The Kentucky Annual Conference has been newly consolidated into four Districts – North, South, East, and West – and the new District Superintendent for our (North) District will be Rev. Ashley Tackett-Evans, formerly Senior Pastor at Scottsville First UMC.

Next year's Annual Conference will once again be held at Christ Church UMC in Louisville.

For further information about other activities of the Annual Conference not mentioned here, or to receive a copy of the **Dismantling Racism Resolution**, please EM donovangraeme@gmail.com .