

North Georgia Annual Conference

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(Len worked intently at Annual Conference)

This year's North Georgia UMC annual conference was held Tuesday- Friday in Athens, GA. With the theme "One With Each Other." There were approximately 3,000 laity and clergy across the North Georgia districts in attendance.



Several key business votes taken:

- A minimum salary was set for part time local pastors.
- A referendum was passed to provide training for clergy and staff to deal with suicide risks
- The clergy move date was changed to the last week in June with a moving pastor's first week, starting next year, to be the first Sunday after July 4th.
- Sadly, 15 churches in the North Georgian Conference were closed.

There was worship. An opening worship on Tuesday morning led by Bishop Sue Halpert, a remembrance service on Wednesday led by retiring District Superintendent David Naglee, a Thursday night ordination service and a closing worship service on Friday, led by Rev. Dr. Michael McQueen.

There was music, lots of music. I'm thinking about implementing regular Music Breaks into my workplace.

This year was also a year for electing both clergy and laity delegates to The UMC General Conference being held in Minneapolis in 2020.

Because it was an election year, there was voting, lots of voting. 8 Clergy Ballots and 17 Lay Ballots over the course of 4 days.

The politics of the church, much like the politics of our nation, can be very disheartening. One would hope and pray that God's people are above the politics of agendas, pre-defined voting slates to drive those agendas, jockeying for position, lunchtime and hallway whispers and conversations centered around pressing people to vote a certain way. Groans and grumblings when certain candidates lost. Cheers and celebrating when certain candidates won.

Because of all the 'quiet time' required during the voting sessions, I took the opportunity to read scripture and meditate, listening for God's still small voice during the conference.

What I discovered: this was in fact holy conferencing and the Holy Spirit was definitely moving in the Classic Center this week. Whether it was a progressive or a traditionalist or centrist speaking, there was a lot of wisdom being imparted from the Holy Spirit.

I like to take a moment to share some of what I heard.

- We need to find ways to get people into the presence of God.
- We are given a great treasure in this life that is stored in earthen vessels. However, the treasure is not put in the jar to make the jar more important or valuable. The treasure is meant to be poured out and shared with others.
- We are too comfortable. We have taken residence up on the roof - above the dirt and noise and chaos of this world, protected and isolated waiting for Jesus to fly by in his holy helicopter and pick us up.
- Everyone thinks Jesus is just like them. We are trying to make Jesus just like us but we are made in God's image, not the other way around.
- People say they are trying to find themselves, but Jesus preaches that it is ourselves that we must lose.
- We are not in ministry to win a popularity contest. We are called to share the radical message of Jesus.
- We are in the middle of the greatest reformation of the church in our times.
- We need to expand our witness to the society we find ourselves in to transform the world.
- We are keepers of the flame.
- We need to keep the main thing the main thing, and the main thing is Jesus Christ.

Allyson said something to me before conference that stuck with me. She said this is going to be a rough conference and she hoped it didn't shake my faith. I had told her that wouldn't happen.

But you know what, the conference did shake my faith. It shook me from my slumber. An awakening of what I, as a Christian, am called to do. A conviction of what I need to do more of.

The need for people to know the redemptive power of Jesus Christ to transform their lives is great. As Christians, we are called, not just the clergy, but all of us, to go and make disciples for Jesus.

So this morning, I challenge you to find a way to share Jesus.

- Make a sandwich or bring cookies for the summer lunch program
- Bring a jar of peanut butter for the Samaritans food pantry
- Volunteer to help at VBS
- Take a non-Christian friend to lunch
- Greet a stranger with a kind word
- Send a card
- Pick up the phone and call a shut in
- volunteer at a homeless shelter
- visit the sick
- visit those in prison
- Invite someone to church
- Find someone who looks different from you, thinks differently from you and share Jesus with them.
- Love and pray for those people who get on your last nerve.
- Be a friend to the friendless
- Attend a bible study to learn more about Jesus or better yet, volunteer to start a bible study to reach a new group of people.
- Senior adults, mentor a young person.
- Young adults, share your dreams and struggles with a senior.
- Judge less, Love more. Repent. Forgive.

So enough from me. For any other info, a full summary of the week of activities, as well as a full list of the clergy and lay delegates for our 2020 General Conference, can be found at NGUMC.org.

Or feel free to talk with one of the delegates who attended with me.