

## **Adventures of a FFUMC Lay Delegate at the North Georgia Annual Conference**

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*(Sharing the story of the Good Samaritan at Sunshine VBS)*

How do I tell you about 4 days in two minutes or less?

Well, I can say, "I've been church-ed" - four days of church – Praise the Lord

The biggest responsibility of the Lay Delegation was voting for lay delegates to the General and Jurisdictional conferences. It took us 17 elections to choose 11 lay delegates to General Conference, 11 delegates to Jurisdictional Conference, and 5 alternates. The clergy voted on the same number of delegates much quicker than we did!



### **So this is how it generally went for seven of the eight sessions over four days:**

- We were welcomed.
- We got to meet the Lay candidates. Each one could present themselves in 60 seconds – thank goodness we had a one-page info sheet on each candidate in our handbook.
- We participated in an Opening Service with communion.
- We prayed.
- We learned how to vote.
- We prayed.
- We voted.
- We ate lunch.
- We sang with the praise leader, Gerald Lee Hicks, and his singers and House Band. It was wonderful and moving music, and we sang, clapped, and swayed with the best of them.
- We watched as election results were posted.
- We prayed.
- We voted again.
- We praised, clapped, sang, and swayed.
- We listened to committee reports and approved them.
- We adjourned.
- Then we started over again the next day – and the next and the next!
- We had the call to order and a prayer.
- We listened to Committee reports.
- We got results of elections.

- We prayed.
- We voted again.
- In between activities each day, we watched videos of each district related to the Fixing of Appointments and messages from the retirees. Then we prayed over each district.
- We had speakers on various topics.
- We met those who would be ordained, licensed, and commissioned on Thursday night.
- We had a Retirement Recognition Service.
- We had a Service of Remembrance for those who went on to glory this year.
- The musicians led us in praise with singing, clapping, and swaying.
- We received the latest election results.
- We prayed and voted again.
- Sometimes we prayed, voted, got results, prayed and voted again – all in one sitting.
- We learned about programs, activities, and initiatives going on in the conference district such as
  - Trustee's work
  - Fresh Expressions
  - Churches of Excellence
  - North Ga Camp Retreat Ministries

We went on like this each day – with emphasis on praying, voting for delegates, listening, and approving reports, resolutions, and changes to rules. Then we clapped, sang, praised, and swayed to the music and singing of the wonderful House Band and singers.

**We listened to some lengthy discussions about a few things.**

- Equitable Compensation for Part-time Local Pastors for serving very small churches when the church cannot pay the minimum rate for their ministers. Bishop Sue said the conference would help any church, however small, IF they were vibrant, out in the community, doing missions, invited people in, and trying to grow.
- What happens when churches close and are sold? Where does the money go? You might have to ask one of the other delegates or ministers about this one. As Bishop Sue said one time in the conference – “*Oops, my brain went to the beach*” during that discussion.
- The most controversial discussion came with a resolution brought forward by the Council on Youth Ministries – *Helping to End Suicides in the Church Among At Risk Individuals*. The resolution supported the development of guidance for Ministers and Youth Leaders to recognize and understand signs of depression and suicidal thoughts of at-risk individual especially related to the LGBTQ youths who are 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than straight youth. This brought lots of discussion, and one amendment was brought forward to change to wording to anyone at risk such as the elderly and veterans. The amendment failed, and the resolution passed.

**Overall, there is bad news and good news:**

- Bad news: There is still lots of conflict over the vote in February related to full inclusion of LGBTQ individuals including participation in the clergy and being married in the Methodist Church, which didn't at all surprise me. I know there would have been conflict had the vote gone another way.
- Good news: God loves us all and will be with us as we work this out. God knows we are struggling, and God will love us as we grapple

Now my favorite parts of the conference:

- The large group of youth who participated during all four days
- Praise, worship, and wonderful music
- Meeting new sisters and brothers in Christ
- Seeing Mark Westmorland, David Campbell, Carolyn Clifton, and Kristen Heiden, whom I haven't seen in a while
- Watching Rev. John Barnes present his thoughts on retirement in words and song on video and be recognized in person at the Retirement Ceremony
- Spending time with Thomas Martin, our new minister
- And of course, spending time with and getting to know my fellow representatives – Allyson, Carson, Len Blalock, Cindy Hall, Nancy Ricciardi, and Carl Martin. They are now my ***Cohorts in Christ***.

**My most favorite thing** was purely selfish and worldly. On sunny day at lunch time, I walked around the UGA Campus reminiscing about where I spent five wonderful years a long, long time ago. Once a DAWG, always a DAWG.

I am so glad I had this experience, tedious as it was at times, and I am grateful to God and this church that I was selected to attend.

As my Aunt Sara used to say, "Blessings on YOU!"