

Annual Conference Summary and Report
Submitted by Rev. Amanda McMurtrey
June 7, 2023

Hello beloved,

As many of you know I spent much of last week and the Baltimore Washington Conference's (BWC) annual conference. If you aren't familiar the annual conference is a gathering of all clergy and lay delegates from each congregation in the BWC that happens each year. Our own lay leader had hip replacement surgery just a few weeks before the conference and so wasn't able to attend. Below I have done my best to include some summaries and resources for any of you who would like to better understand the work of the annual conference. If you have any questions or want to know more please don't hesitate to contact me and we will find a time for conversation.

Peace and blessings,
Pastor Amanda

Celebrations:

- Every annual conference gathering includes some celebrations that are truly holy. These include evangelism and service awards, honoring retirees, commissioning and ordination of clergy, honoring the work of many ministries of the conference and more.
- This year we honored 31 retirees who combined for more than 800 years of service. We commissioned 2 Deacons and 6 Elders and ordained 7 Elders. We also confirmed 9 youth and baptized 3 children as part of annual conference this year.
- We also received discipleship ministry reports about more than 20 ministry groups that are active in our annual conference. Here is a link so you can read all the reports if you wish: <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/2023-annual-conference/2023-discipleship-ministry-reports/>
- One of my favorite experiences this year was our participation in the Circles of Love and the Love in Action Mission project. Circles of Love was a three hour session on Thurs. morning where we were randomly assigned to tables for deeper conversation about our faith and how we understood love. On Friday morning all 1200 persons in attendance joined together for a mission project. Some stayed at the hotel preparing bags of supplies and books for 8 Baltimore schools. The rest, myself included, traveled to one of 6 work sites to complete beautification and improvement projects to the grounds and facilities. I had a joyous time working in a school library at Harlem Park

Elementary/Middle School and was able to truly witness how many hands can come together to serve the kingdom of God.

Conference Business:

- By Book of Discipline there is work that needs to be done at each annual conference to ensure the proper running of the administration and finances of the annual conference. This work was spread throughout Thursday and Friday. Below is a link to reports given around the budget and stewardship, equitable compensation, and health and pension benefits for our clergy.
- Reports - <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/stewardship-budget-2023/>
- In general, the conference is fairly stable financially and our finance board does an amazing job of caring for and overseeing the financial resources of the over \$18 million dollar budget for the BWC.
- As one might imagine there were slight increases approved for the clergy compensation minimum salary and there are anticipated increases in health care plans. Throughout the country annual conferences are experience a 6-18% increase in the cost of their healthcare plans. I was wonderfully grateful that our team has done such good work that we will experience just over a 6% increase. There will also be a change in clergy health care coverage in Jan 2024 to Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

Church Closures and Disaffiliation:

- There were four churches that decided they should close this year and we voted to support their decision. The churches were Marley UMC in Glen Burnie, Hyattstown UMC in Hyattstown, Friendship UMC in Martinsburg, and Carlos UMC in Eckhart Mines.
- There were also 23 churches who had completed the required discernment process, achieved a 2/3 or better majority vote within their congregation, and have accepted the financial payout required to disaffiliate. The annual conference voted to approve their disaffiliation. The disaffiliation process will be completed after the full financial payouts have been made by either July 31, Sept 1 or Oct 15, 2023.
- Here is the full list of churches: <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/2023-annual-conference/2023-proposed-church-disaffiliations/>

Resolutions:

- The body of the annual conference also considered, amended, debated, and voted on 10 resolutions. I have done my best to give the title, a brief summary, and the action taken on each resolution below in the order we discussed and voted on them at annual conference. There were two types of resolutions presented this year. Some are to make changes to the policies and procedures of the BWC. I have labeled them as procedural resolutions.

The others are called aspirational resolutions. These are expressions of opinions by the body in preparation for anticipated legislation that will be dealt with at General Conference (the world wide gathering) in April 2024 or a missional/theological idea that someone desires to see have more attention within the BWC. In some ways each annual conference resembles a caucus like in our federal and state government. Aspirational resolutions are put forth either to drive the missional priorities of the annual conference or to generate conference support for General Conference legislation. If you would like to read the full resolution they can be found here: <https://www.bwcumc.org/events/2023-annual-conference/2023-resolutions/>

- “Establishment of a BWC Clergy Bereavement Protocol and Policy” (procedural resolution)
 - Summary: This resolution seeks to create a protocol and policy for the BWC when a clergy member experiences the death of a spouse, child, or parent. It includes 6-8 weeks of paid bereavement leave and support for the local church through the district superintendent.
 - Action: Passed
- “Building Missions and Stewardship of UMC Property” (aspirational resolution for missions of the BWC)
 - Summary: This resolution calls for ministries, committees, and agencies of the BWC to take steps that ensure the exploration of creative uses for church properties. For example, some of our churches are using their land to build affordable housing or community centers. It is a way of assessing and utilizing our conference’s property in the best way to grow the kingdom of God.
 - Action: Passed (Action taken will be up to conference staff and leadership)
- “Identifying and Opposing Apartheid in the Holy Land” (aspirational resolution for the missions of the BWC)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes increased focus and missional and legislative action to address the treatment of Palestinians in Israel.
 - Action: Passed (Action taken will be up to conference staff and leadership)
- “Maternity and Paternity Leave for Foster/Resource Parents” (procedural resolution)
 - Summary: This resolution proposed two weeks of paid maternity/paternity leave be give to pastors who serve as foster/resource parents when they receive placement of a new child or children. The leave is limited to twice per year.
 - Action: Passed

- “Affirmation of the Queer Delegates’ Call to Center Justice and Empowerment for LGBTQIA+ People in the UMC” (aspirational resolution for the missions of the BWC)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes the BWC supports the empowerment of the LGBTQIA+ community in their call to justice; implores the BWC to either not pursue or resolve in a timely fashion with non-punitive resolutions to any complaints against clergy regarding their sexual orientation or the officiating of weddings of LGBTQIA+ persons; and to aspire to become a UMC in which LGBTQIA+ people will be protected, affirmed, and empowered throughout our life, mission, and ministry together.
 - Action: Passed (As an aspirational resolution the passing does not indicate that we will actually follow any of these aspirations, but does express that a majority of the BWC favors such action. Action taken will be up to the conference staff and leadership)
- “Vital Connection Within Our Annual Conference” (aspirational resolution for the procedures of the BWC)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes that district superintendents would aspire to preside over all local church conferences in the district to help deal with issues of misinformation and confusion.
 - Action: Not Passed (The body expressed that district superintendents should certainly work to clarify any misinformation or confusion, but acknowledged that presiding over all church conferences was not necessarily the best way to achieve this goal.)
- “Integrity in Conference, District, and Local Church Leadership” (aspirational resolution for the procedures of the BWC)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes to encourage the Bishop and Cabinet to make inquiry of all persons on conference committees, boards, and agencies as to their intention to remain in the UMC and if they express an interest in leaving the UMC they would be asked to resign from their leadership role on that conference committee, board or agency.
 - Action: Postponed indefinitely (This action indicates an issue in which the body does not want to debate or vote. The resolution cannot be brought forth at a future annual conference unless significantly changed.)
- “In Support of Creating a US Regional Conference” (aspirational resolution in preparation for action at General Conference)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes that the BWC would support legislation/action at the General Conference to change the structure of our Global church so that the US would become a regional conference. (This is a change to church polity of the UMC and if you

are interested will probably require further conversation with me so I can explain the impact that change could have on the UMC in the US.)

- Action: Passed
- “Supporting Removal of Discriminatory Policies” (aspirational resolution in preparation for action at General Conference)
 - Summary: This resolution proposes changes to the Book of Discipline to remove discriminatory policies and harmful language related to sexual orientation. (Only the General Conference can make changes to the Book of Discipline, so a resolution like this serves as a type of opinion poll.)
 - Action: Passed
- “Clarity When Churches Disaffiliate from the UMC within the BWC and at some Future Point Want to Return to the BWC” (procedural resolution)
 - Summary: This resolution seeks to address procedural needs for any disaffiliating churches who chose to return to the UMC at a future time.
 - Action: Referred to the Trustees Committee (this resolution will be studied by the conference trustees committee and they will decide if they want to make a recommendation, or not, at the next annual conference.)