

2019 Iowa Annual Conference Report

I. Introduction and Thank you

My name is Warren Western, and I want to thank you for the privilege to be your Lay Delegate to the Iowa Annual Conference. This is my first year as your delegate to the Iowa Annual Conference and I was curious as to what differences I would find compared to my 20 + years of being a local church lay delegate to the New York Annual conference.

II. Overview of Annual Conference

A. Schedule of Annual Conference

The conference started on Friday evening with the Laity and Clergy meeting separately and concurrently in different rooms at the Iowa Event Center. The Conference sessions continued on Saturday, Sunday and Monday from 8:30 AM until 8:30 PM with two hour breaks for Lunch and Dinner. The conference adjourned at noon on Tuesday four hours earlier than originally scheduled.

B. Annual Conference consists of

- An Episcopal address by the Bishop
- An address by the Conference Lay Leader
- Worship service for retiring pastors
- Worship service for Ordination of new pastors
- Worship service of remembrance for Clergy and Lay members who have died during the past year
- Several Offerings for mission causes
- Review of ministry programs of the conference
- Approving Resolutions for churches that closed during the past year.
- Celebration of ministries and mission displays
- Celebration of new congregations started

- Music and singing. The praise band was from the Salem UMC in Cedar Rapids
- Fellowship with other delegates from all over the district and state

C. Observations about Annual Conference

- Young delegates and children/babies
- Big hall needed to hold over 900 clergy and lay members of the Annual Conference
- I Loved the Diakonos program. 32 high school students, 4 from each district who facilitate the operation of the conference. They are the future of the church and over the 10 years of this program, some have been ordained as elders. They did a skit of exit interviews of conference delegates and of conference leaders that was very enjoyable. They were given an offering and donated some of this offering and their own giving toward the camping ministry.

III. Additional Tasks of this Annual Conference

A. Election of Delegates to 2020 General and Jurisdictional Conferences

Every 4 years the year before General Conference, each Annual Conference elects delegates to General Conference and to the Jurisdictional Conference later in the same year. The Iowa Annual Conference elects 6 Lay Delegates and 6 Clergy delegates to General Conference and 6 additional delegates each who serve as alternate delegates to General conference and as delegates to Jurisdictional conference. Each of these delegates must receive 50 % of the lay or clergy votes to be elected. Usually many votes are needed to elect all 12 delegates of laity and 12 delegates of clergy.

This year after the 2019 Special General Conference last February which narrowly adopted the Traditional plan regarding sexuality instead of the more flexible One Church plan, the people in the conference that favor inclusiveness got more organized than in the past. They interviewed all of the candidates for election to General and Jurisdictional Conference and produced a document of recommended candidates for election that was distributed to most of the delegates. As a result 11 of the 12 Lay delegates were elected on the first ballot and 9 of the 12 clergy delegates were elected on the first ballot. All of the delegates elected are on the recommended list of inclusive candidates.

B. Workshops

Eight workshops were presented Saturday afternoon at the 2019 Iowa Annual Conference Session. I attended the workshop titled “FREEING THE SPIRIT IN YOUR COMMUNITY” led by Rev. Clinton Twedt-Ball the head of the Mathew 25 ministry that grew out of a project started by St Paul UMC here in Cedar Rapids. I really enjoyed learning about the history of this program and their approach to doing ministry. This approach begins by focusing on the marginalized groups in the community, listening to the groups with a stake in the issue and letting them set the priorities and do some of the work while facilitating the process and work. Matthew 25 ministry has grown dramatically and led to the investment of \$10 million in the neighborhood.

IV. Camping Ministry and Sale of Picture Rocks Camp

The camping ministry in the conference has been struggling financially in recent years due to decreased funding from the Annual Conference and a decrease of use by youth and churches for retreats. The camping ministry board has initiated a program for soliciting ongoing donations from individuals and churches to support specific camps or camping ministry in general.

The Picture Rocks camp (which I have fond memories of attending for a couple of years) has been running a deficit and is the smallest camp. Camp Courageous next door has made an offer of \$1.5 million for Picture Rocks. The Annual conference voted to approve the sale of Picture Rocks. The sale will be executed in the fall of 2019.

V. Budget and Apportionments

The total figure for the projected 2020 Budget was \$13,127,917, down \$1,160,369 from \$14,288,286, for a reduction of 8.1%.

The projected 2020 budget for General Church Apportionments was \$2,792,753, down \$48,739 from \$2,841,492 in 2019, for a reduction of - 1.7%. General Church Apportionments represents 21.27% of the total 2020

The projected 2020 budget for Conference Missions was \$2,266,078, down \$684,020 from \$2,950,098 for a reduction of 23.2%. Conference Missions represents 17.26% of the total 2020 Budget.

The Conference is in the process of reducing the number of district offices. Eight districts and eight district superintendents will remain unchanged, but with two DS's partnering in one location, sharing one District Administrative Assistant (DAA), resources and equipment. This restructuring should result in a savings of approximately \$600,000 to \$700,000.

Each local church in the conference is apportioned an amount to support the common ministries of the Annual conference and the General conference. As your Lay Delegate to Annual Conference I commend and celebrate that this congregation supports this shared ministry and has been paying its apportionment in full for several years

The Budgeted total apportionments amount for the whole conference for 2020 is \$10,595,825 which is down by 9.2% from the 2019 apportionment value.

If you have questions about this budget information ask me about it.

VI. Reports and Resolutions

Most of the reports were approved with no or minor modifications. There were 10 Resolutions submitted. Two of them were not approved, (conference favoring the abolition of ICE and closing of the National Guard drone center near Des Moines) and one was tabled because it was replaced by a different resolution. The resolution that had the most discussion and amendments was one expressing disapproval of the Traditional Plan adopted by the 2019 Special General Conference and basically ruled constitutional by the April meeting of the Judicial Council (Supreme Court of United Methodist denomination). The Judicial Council ruling said that Annual Conferences could express aspiration for more inclusive policy. The writers of this resolution and the amendments adopted worked toward making the resolution less divisive and more aspirational. There has been a request for a ruling of Law on whether this resolution is legal as defined by the Judicial Council. Bishop Haller has said she will issue her ruling within 30 days. The United Methodist church is a very connectional church where the fastest growing congregations are in Africa and Asia and these regions tend to be more conservative. In contrast the congregations in the US and Western Europe tends to be more inclusive and progressive. It is my prayer that a way will be found for congregations to be more inclusive and maintain the unity of our United Methodist connection.

The wildly important goal of the Iowa Annual Conference is “All United Methodist Churches in Iowa will have a process of intentionally forming disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by the year 2020” Our leadership council has been discussing this and it needs to be one of our focal points this year.

The Conference Lay Leader Margret Borgen shared the following comments in her address to the Annual Conference.

“I would so like to think these familiar hymn words, They’ll Know We are Christian by Our Love, are a statement about how we live and work together, not just an aspiration,” she said. “I would like people to look at

our debate even on the most difficult of subjects and think, “These people care about each other.”

She also shared four words that are important and needed to take our conference and churches to a better place. They are Respect, Openness, Prayer and Honesty.

If you have any questions about the information in this report there are many links about the Annual conference on the Web including summaries, audio of the messages/sermons (there were several very good ones). The Annual Conference web site is <https://ac2019.iaumc.org/>. I will be happy to answer your questions.