

Notes from a first-time attendee of the UMC Annual Conference: “A Time of Unity & Inclusion” June 15-18, 2022

A few weeks ago I had the opportunity to attend the Virginia United Methodist Annual Conference in Hampton, VA. As a first time attendee I was excited to learn more about my Methodist faith.

Upon first arriving there was an unmistakable feeling of anticipation and homecoming. The reunion of colleagues and friends after 2 years of physical separation was heartwarming to witness.

The weekend was a perfect mix of passion, worship, and procedure (better know your Robert's Rules!)



Bishop Sharma D. Lewis opened with a powerful sermon that introduced the conference theme: United as One in Worship. She reminded us that unity does not mean conformity, and, despite our differences, we need each other.



The theme of unity was ultimately demonstrated when the conference body voted to accept the district initiative. And with a majority 'yay' we combined with Charlottesville to become the Three Notch'd District!

While this year's conference theme was evident, an unspoken theme of inclusion could not be ignored.

My first evidence of inclusion was witnessing the cultural diversity represented across the District Superintendents.

But I was probably most inspired by the representation of youth. They were not just present, but active and vocal. They spoke to the Bishop and conference body without fear, hesitation or guile- they are here and want to be included - they want to be not just in the room, but at the table. We were reminded that our youth aren't just our future, they are our NOW.



There was also an impassioned demonstration by clergy and laity regarding a longstanding LGBTQ+ related ruling. While the specific details were not openly available to the conference body at large, the emotion and commitment of those involved was moving. Ultimately, Bishop Lewis agreed to send the matter on to the judiciary counsel for consideration.

There was also intentional use of inclusive language. Little things such as the use of the Common English Bible (CEB), He—>God, Father —> Maker, and Mankind —> humanity/humankind could be heard in songs and seen during liturgical readings. Later there was an explicit call for all churches to do the same.



Another highlight was seeing Woodlake's own Rev. 'RJ' Jun up on stage. What a thrill it was hearing Woodlake's roof digging story highlighted during his dynamic presentation!

Overall, I was enlightened and encouraged. We have our issues. Every denomination does. But I think we'll be alright if we can remember that "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." -1Corinthians 12:12.

-Nikki R. Karnes