“Offering Christ: One Neighborhood at a Time” was the theme of the 2016 Memphis Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church that took place June 19-22 in Jackson, Tennessee, with Bishop William T. (Bill) McAlilly presiding. McAlilly is the resident bishop for the Nashville Episcopal Area of The United Methodist Church that includes the Memphis (West Tennessee and Western Kentucky) and Tennessee (Middle Tennessee) Conferences.

New Location
For the first time ever, Northside United Methodist Church hosted the conference. Delegates, along with family, friends and special guests, gathered to worship, learn, conduct business and celebrate accomplishments.

State-of-the-Church Address
“Change is here, friends,” said Bishop McAlilly during his Monday state-of-the-church address.

He used the acronym VUCA to describe a world that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous and is greatly affecting the global United Methodist Church.

McAlilly stated he is looking for “people who will see what is possible, not impossible,” and added, “In the next four years, we are going to build on the work God is doing.”

His message included several examples of churches doing work that speak of a “thriving church” not the “dying church” that receives so much attention.

McAlilly reminded delegates, “Your church is a mission station. You need to take the emphasis off mission projects.” To engage the mission field, he said, “Turn missional gestures into missional encounters.”

“We’ve never done it that way” is a phrase churches must eliminate to be agile and creative for the future, he said.

“How am I going to give love away in my neighborhood?” was a question McAlilly asked all Memphis Conference clergy and laity to contemplate.

Worship Services
Memphis Conference clergy and clergy spouses who died in the previous year – 19 in all – were memorialized in a Sunday afternoon Service of Remembering.

Retiring pastor Rev. Emily S. Matheny, associate pastor and executive director of congregational care at Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, delivered the sermon, “Common Bonds of Remembering.”

Matheny reminded attendees that annual conference is about building and sustaining relationships. “By recalling the lives of colleagues and friends, we honor their faithful work. …We keep our conferencing in holy perspective,” she said.

Of the 19 who were remembered, she said, “Each caught a glimpse of God’s world made real here on earth.”


A group of 17 college-age young adults serving as summer interns with Project Transformation Memphis were commissioned during the Opening Worship on Sunday evening.

In response to one of its four areas of focus to “invest in young people,” the Memphis Conference is partnering for the first time this summer with Project Transformation. By living in intentional community and building relationships with children and youth from low-income communities, the interns are exploring a call to ministry and service.

“One Neighborhood at a Time” was the title of Bishop McAlilly’s sermon that un-packed the questions: “Who are my neighbors?” and “Do I know them?” and “Who should I love?”

“You cannot say what God is up to if you stay inside the walls of your church,” said McAlilly.

Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, resident bishop of the Louisiana Conference of The United Methodist Church, was the preacher for Monday evening’s Service of Commissioning and Ordination of Deacons and Elders, with Licensing of Local Pastors.

“Know Who You Are” was the title of Harvey’s sermon that she began by saying to the group being ordained, commissioned and licensed, “You are at an incredible threshold… It’s not an easy path, but it is a privileged path. You will never be the same.”

Continued on page 6
Amanda Crice is new Memphis Conference coordinator of youth ministries

Amanda Crice assumed the duties of Memphis Conference coordinator of youth ministries, effective July 1.

The announcement came from Dr. Joe Geary, director of Memphis Conference Connectional Ministries.

Crice, a 2016 graduate of the Candler School of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, is taking her first appointment with the Wesley Foundation (campus ministry) at the University of Tennessee at Martin, Tennessee, that also began July 1, according to appointments announced by Bishop Bill McAlilly.

In addition to her work with the Wesley Foundation in Martin, Crice will give extra hours of leadership and focus to Memphis Conference youth ministries as an adjunct member of the Connectional Ministries team, said Geary.


The youth ministries position, explained Geary, is another way the Memphis Conference is living into its mission with a focus (one of four) of “investing in young people.”

Born and raised in McLeansboro, Illinois, Crice graduated from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky, in 2006 with a degree in middle school education. There she served in ministry leadership roles with the Wesley Foundation.

“It was the Wesley Foundation that brought me to the United Methodist Church,” said Crice, “and first opened my ears to hear the call to ministry that God had placed on my life.”

Over the next ten years Crice had employment that gave her “opportunities to work with people of all ages and in all stages of their faith development.”

After three years of teaching seventh grade and four years of full-time youth ministry, she said she knew her next step was to go to seminary and begin the ordination process.

“God had made it clear to me that I have a call on my life to minister with those who feel excluded or disenfranchised by the church,” said Crice.

Seminary helped Crice learn she is “particularly passionate about empowering youth and young adults to claim the gifts God has given them for their ministry in the world and creating space in the church to foster those gifts.”

Crice and husband Justin have relocated to Martin.

‘Peace with Justice – Memphis Conference’ is new Facebook page with resources and event info

"Peace with Justice - Memphis Conference" is the name of a new Facebook page launched this summer by Rev. Larry Chitwood, the Memphis Conference’s new Peace with Justice advocate.

Chitwood serves Bolton and Macedonia United Methodist Churches in Arlington, Tennessee, in the Metro District.

Find the Facebook page and “like” it at www.facebook.com/PeaceWithJusticeMemphisConference.

The purpose of the page, according to Chitwood, is to provide churches access to resources and event information on Peace with Justice initiatives in the Memphis Conference and The United Methodist Church.

For more information, contact Chitwood at LMCHITWOOD@gmail.com OR 901-240-5682.
‘Stitch of Love’ group crochets to help others

By Kristi Henson Owens, Executive Director, Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund

For a group of 11 senior crocheters living at Wesley Graceland Gardens, receiving a bag of donated yarn feels like children receiving their favorite toys on Christmas morning.

Wesley Graceland Gardens is a Wesley Living community in Memphis, Tennessee.

The group of ladies, called “Stitch of Love” crochet group, meets every Thursday in the community room to work on handmade items using yarn donated to Golden Cross Senior Residents Fund.

Belle Artis, one of the instructors, began teaching mentally challenged students how to crochet back in Chicago. When she moved to Wesley Graceland Gardens, she wanted to continue teaching others how to crochet.

Artis loves to make clothing for stuffed animals and dolls.

Every year, this group creates beautifully-designed items such as baby blankets and hats, booties, scarves and wraps for others in need.

Alta Henry enjoys making scarves and hats, while Georgia Clark likes to make clothes, including suits and dresses.

Not one strand of yarn is left unused; the creative bunch uses all of the yarn, no matter how small to make sure each item is finished with love.

One year the group was able to make and donate nearly 1,000 items to a nursing home and another year 80 baby blankets were made and donated to a hospital maternity ward.

Arnthi Brown and Geraldine Williams enjoy crocheting scarves, hats and blankets, while Deliah Griffin likes to crochet baby blankets and hats.

One year the group donated handmade hats to a man’s homeless shelter. Later, some of the ladies saw a man wearing one of their hats and said their hearts were full knowing they were doing something for others.

Jessie Thomas likes to crochet blankets and scarves, while Patricia Brodnax likes to make blankets.

This year, the “Stitch of Love” group crocheted and donated baby and other items to a women’s homeless shelter.

Other members of the group include Daise Williams, LaPaula Turner and Nancy Taylor.

It doesn’t take a lot of talent to crochet, the ladies say, just a lot of faith and love, as well as faith in your ability to do for others and love in the gratification of knowing you are helping.

While taking lap blankets to a nursing home, the “Stitch of Love” group was talking with a 99-year-old woman who mentioned that her favorite color was lime green. One of the crocheters had one lap blanket left to donate and it was lime green. Later, upon returning to the nursing home to donate more handmade items, one of the doctors told the “Stitch of Love” group that the 99-year-old woman had taken her lime green lap blanket with her everywhere.

Every item the “Stitch of Love” group crochets has love sewn in one stitch at a time.

Donations of yarn are greatly appreciated and may be sent or delivered to: Golden Cross, 1615 Appling Road, Cordova, TN 38016.

For additional information, call 901-213-1930 or visit www.goldencrossfund.org.”

Jackson First United Methodist Church reached out to its city on April 9 with ‘Great Day of Service’

By Bobbie Mays, Communications Director, Jackson First United Methodist Church

More than 150 men, women, youth and children from Jackson First United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, went out into their city in teams on Saturday, April 9, for a “Great Day of Service.”

The church’s missions team, under the leadership of Heather Taylor, coordinator, organized 14 service projects around the city.

After a light breakfast, prayer and brief commissioning service with everyone singing “We Are the Church,” the teams headed out into the city.

Projects included:
• doing art projects with shut-ins, hospital patients, and military personnel
• assembling care packages for homeless and others who come to the church in need
• painting, landscaping and repair projects at numerous locations around city, including social service agencies and two schools
• singing at nursing and assisted living homes
• knitting and crocheting preemie caps for local hospital

This memorable day was filled with so many blessings of the church working together, caring for others, helping our neighbors and sharing Christ’s love!
Memphis Conference delegates returned from the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church with an array of thoughts and impressions.

Meeting May 10-20 in Portland, Oregon, General Conference is the top legislative body of the United Methodist Church. It meets once every four years to work through legislation submitted by individual members, groups and organizations to revise portions of The Book of Discipline and The Book of Resolutions.

General Conference is the only entity that speaks for The United Methodist Church.

For full coverage of the 2016 General Conference, visit www.umc.org/who-we-are/gc-2016-news-archives.

The Memphis Conference delegation consisted of 864 delegates from around the world. They debated and processed legislation, worshipped together and learned about the work of The United Methodist Church throughout the world.

Memorial in The United Methodist Church worldwide grew to more than 12.3 million in 2014, due predominantly to increases in Africa, Europe and Asia where membership rose from nearly 4.4 million in 2009 to 5.1 million in 2014. U.S. membership declined in the same period, from nearly 7.7 million to slightly more than 7.2 million.

The Memphis Conference delegation, elected at the 2015 Memphis Annual Conference, included clergy and lay members, each one assigned to a legislative committee for the first week of General Conference.

Here are the members of the Memphis Conference delegation to 2016 General Conference:

**Lay Delegates**
- **David R. Reed**, Martin First UMC, Martin, TN – first lay delegate and head of delegation
- **Elyse Bell**, Paris First UMC, Paris, TN - second lay delegate
- **Sandra Burnett**, Lone Oak UMC, Paducah, KY - first lay alternate delegate

**Clergy Delegates**
- **Isabelle Dillard**, St. John’s UMC, Memphis, TN - second lay alternate delegate
- **Sky McCracken**, first clergy delegate, Purchase District superintendent, dean of the Memphis Conference cabinet, 2016 episcopal candidate
- **Eddie Bromley**, Milan First UMC, Milan, TN – second clergy alternate delegate
- **Autura Eason-Williams**, Capeville UMC, Memphis, TN - first clergy alternate delegate
- **Jonathan L. Jeffords**, St. John’s UMC, Memphis TN – second clergy alternate delegate

Below are the delegates’ answers to four questions about the 2016 General Conference. Any missing answers were not provided.

**Q. What was your most meaningful experience at 2016 General Conference?**

**Reed:** I have a new appreciation for the tremendous spiritual energy and stabilizing impact on the “global United Methodist Church” (that is) coming from the church’s explosive growth outside the United States.

Within what I would call the “inherited United Methodist Church” in North America, entire regions are experiencing a precipitous loss of membership – even a loss of belief in the Triune God. In these regions of rapidly-dwindling membership, there seems to be an epidemic of selective rejection of United Methodist theology and new interpretations of the Holy Scriptures.

To put the lasting effects of such cultural and theological diversity into perspective, the North Georgia Conference lay leader offered me a stunning statistic: He said there are now more members of The United Methodist Church in one district in the North Georgia Conference than in the entire state of California. That is hardly comprehensible. If not factually accurate, it is representative of the problem.

Spiritual energy and new disciples come from the birth of new faith communities. Unlike most of the mainline protestant denominations that are struggling within the United States, The United Methodist Church is rapidly becoming a truly global church which will continue to thrive if we but honor and support that which God is blessing, wherever in the world that such exciting growth is taking place.

**Bell:** As a person of faith called by God to be in mission and ministry with my community, region, nation and world, it was through General Conference I experienced the beauty of moving from a United Methodist Church of the United States with global outreach to a truly global United Methodist Church.

I was privileged to serve on the Global Ministries Legislative Committee during the first week, processing petitions and resolutions received from members around the world. It gives new meaning today as I read The Book of Discipline and The Book of Resolutions to know each word was prayed over and analyzed to express the exact content, seeking to understand intended and unintended consequences.

As I sat around the table with our discussion group, I couldn’t help but feel the spirit on the day of Pentecost. One member spoke English, one French, one Portuguese and two Kiswahili. All spoke of love for God and their neighbors.

**Burnett:** The 2016 General Conference had some very inspirational and challenging worship services. They were the most meaningful times for me. Another meaningful experience was seeing and greeting friends from around the world, some of whom I had not seen for four years.

**McCracken:** The worship was incredible. Meeting people from all over the world reminded me that the Church goes far beyond my own experience and context.

**Bromley:** General Conference was one of the most spiritual experiences of my entire life. The whole thing is bathed in prayer. Worship, prayer and devotion are the order of the day. The three are the structure in which the church’s business is done.

Those who have not experienced General Conference would probably have a hard time understanding just how Christ-centered the whole thing is. Media posts tend to highlight only what is “wrong” with General Conference. The experience of being there is almost the complete opposite of what many of these kinds of posts portray.

**Eason-Williams:** My most meaningful experience was the time spent listening and telling stories about the issue of homosexuality. There were six people in my group.
Everyone spoke at their level of comfort and the stories ranged from no personal experience with the issue to one who has come out as one of the 111.

**Jeffords:**
The most meaningful experiences overall were the worship services. Each brought something that praised God while offering a word we needed to hear. I was also reminded of what can do through The United Methodist Church when watching the Imagine No Malaria report.

**Q. What was your most surprising and/or challenging experience at 2016 General Conference – and why?**

**Reed:**
One of my disappointments was budget-related. There are sound economic models of The United Methodist Church in North America which show that we have less than 20 years to turn around our decline in membership to prevent a financial collapse of the general church.

Bold legislation was submitted and passed in the Finance Legislative Committee by a vote of 44 to 8 to reduce the budgets of the General Commissions and General Agencies by 5% (from a $600 million budget over the next 4 years) with those funds going back to local churches to be used to implement proven methods of church growth for increasing church vitality and for new church starts.

The leaders of a few of these bureaucracies blocked this initiative without acknowledging the fact that they have spent hundreds of millions of apportionment dollars from local churches without changing the trajectory of The United Methodist Church.

It should be noted that it had been proposed by the author of this legislation to exclude United Methodist Men from these cuts because that agency raises most of its own funds and only gets a tiny percentage of World Service Funds compared to all other General Commissions and Agencies.

**Bell:**
I was truly blessed to be a part of the discernment process in concert with other United Methodists as plans were made for the next quadrennium. There were occasions when being fully engaged could be a challenge and even exhausting at times on many levels: mentally, physically, emotionally and even spiritually.

The days were long, the discussions often intense; and emotions ran high. Wading through all the levels of parliamentary procedure while debating Roberts Rules of Order became wearesome at times. But through it all, God’s spirit prevailed.

I was grateful to my African friends who began singing for the presence of the Holy Spirit to come into the convention center in Portland, Oregon, to bring unity to a group of people called United Methodists. We have much to learn from our African friends. It was truly amazing to see the sudden change in tone and mood throughout the convention center.

**Burnett:**
The most surprising experience was when the delegates requested that the Council of Bishops show leadership and help guide the denomination in a time of turmoil and crisis. This was such a surprise to me because I do not know of a previous General Conference where such a request was made of our bishops.

**McCracken:**
(The most surprising and/challenging experience was) seeing the increased venom and tactics of the extremes and special interest groups in our denomination.

**Bromley:**
For me the most challenging experience was when our bishop (Bill McAlilly) was accused of trying to sway votes. Emotions were running high that day, and we were not at our best as a group of Christians. Many conflicts threaten the health of The United Methodist Church and I was reminded of just how much work we have to do to work through our differences.

**Eason-Williams:**
My most challenging experience was watching my bishop be disrespected from the floor of General Conference basically because he is from Mississippi and talking with some people during the recess who felt like the disrespect was justified. I am very proud of the way Bishop (Bill) McAlilly handled the situation.

**Jeffords:**
There is great tension in The United Methodist Church about how to be “of one heart,” even if we are not “of one mind.” Watching that on display as constituencies and caucuses maneuvered on the floor was difficult/painful. My sense is that some are content to worship the Gospel of Roberts Rules of Order than be open to what the Spirit is saying to us now about who we shall be and how we shall be a witness to a broken world.

**Q. What are your observations as a first-time delegate (impressions) or returning delegate (comparisons to past)?**

See more photos of Memphis Conference delegates and others at 2016 General Conference on the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org

Continued on page 10
Talking about the “ever-changing world” and “ever-changing church,” she said more than once that today’s church is not the church of previous generations.

During the “wilderness times” of every life, she reminded, “God is a god of the future who brings hope out of desperation and makes a way when there is no way.”

Noting that “tomorrow, today will be yesterday,” she stressed, “God is doing a new thing today.”

Addressing laity in attendance, Harvey said, “I remind the rest of you that clergy are not the only ones with credentials. “You, too, by your baptism,” are called of God.

“Our life’s work,” Harvey preached, “is to share the love of God. … God does not call us once and for all. God calls us again and again again.”

• Ordained as elder was Jeffrey Martin Rudy
• Ordained as deacons were Camille Wagamman Bradley and Jonathan Chambers Lewis
• Commissioned as elders were Amanda Leigh Crice and Amanda Hartmann Westmoreland
• Commissioned as deacons were Eric Joseph Soard and Janean Lee Tinsley
• Licensed as local pastors were Kyle Bomar, Matthew Emsion, Robert Field, Lisa Harper, Dallas Pfeiffer, William F. Simms and Roger South

The Service of Sending Forth and Setting of Appointments on Wednesday afternoon included a message from Bishop McAlilly, meditations on different ways churches are offering Christ in their neighborhoods and the setting of 2016 clergy appointments.

Looking to the future, McAlilly asked, “What’s going to become of the church if we don’t move in a different way?”

He emphasized that “any good idea for the body of Christ can come from anywhere.”

Among other parting words, McAlilly told clergy and laity, “I believe The United Methodist Church is one of the best-kept secrets in the world.”

Teaching Sessions

“Traditioned Innovation” was the theme of three teaching sessions on Tuesday by Dr. L. Gregory Jones, author of a book on the same subject released in May 2016 by Abingdon Press.

Church Social Innovation - Renewing Wesleyan Witness

Jones is executive vice president and provost at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Previously he was at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, where he was most recently vice president and vice provost for global strategy and programs, and before that dean of Duke’s Divinity School.

Jones believes churches today must take innovative approaches through social entrepreneurship to provide renewal, re-establish trust and cultivate sustainability. He stressed that a faith-based organization must avoid becoming “just another social service agency” and “must not let the past get in its eyes.”

“Isn’t that what we’re really after?” he asked — referring to the past.

“If we don’t know why we are doing something, we should stop,” he stated candidly.

Rather than being part of the “broken institutional landscape,” Jones advocates for churches and Christians to embrace “social innovation” and “social entrepreneurship.”

Too many Christian churches, he said, are guilty of an inward focus, a “failure of imagination,” “mediocrity that parades as faithfulness” and a mindset rooted in scarcity, rather than God’s abundance.

Jones pointed to what he termed “Biblical illiteracy” in some churches. Many fights over “authority of scripture,” he lamented, are “amidst ignorance of scripture.”

“You can’t teach someone to be a Christian in one hour per week,” he said, to draw attention to learning priorities that, for instance, emphasize spending more time per week playing a sport than grappling with the challenges of being a Christian.

Church-led social innovation is possible, Jones said, when churches “rise out of (their) pettiness and infighting” and become inventors “in a way that bears witness to the love of God.”

Citing Ephesians 3:20-21 (RSV: Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.), Jones called for churches to:

• Adopt a mission that has great value
• Align everything in service to that mission
• Adapt, innovate, renovate and discard
• Act boldly using resources at hand

Account for outcomes and lessons learned Bishop McAlilly said Jones’ message “has stirred us up in all we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

Offerings for ‘Churches Reaching Neighbors’ and ‘The Jerusalem Fund’

Offerings during annual conference benefitted two initiatives:

• The Jerusalem Fund is a confidential ministry that provides assistance to Memphis Conference clergy facing short-term financial hardships.

Special collections also were received for Project Transformation and the Rust College A’Cappella Choir.

As of July 1, the Memphis Conference Treasurer’s Office reported monies received as follows:

• Churches Reaching Neighbors $18,232.52
• The Jerusalem Fund $4,966.14
• Project Transformation $600.00
• Rust College A’Cappella Choir $2,983.00

A’Cappella Choir Concert

At the conclusion of the last teaching session on Tuesday afternoon, delegates and guests experienced a sacred concert by the A’Cappella Choir of Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi, a United Methodist educational institution.

The group of 22 vocalists (a portion of the full choir), mesmerized concertgoers with a repertoire that included hymns, spirituals and gospel music. Vernon L. Jones directed the choir.

“How is this not a glorious day!” Bishop McAlilly exclaimed, referring to Tuesday’s teaching sessions and the concert.

A’Cappella Choir, directed by Vernon L. Jones, center, performed a sacred concert. (Photo by Lane Gardner Camp)
Assorted photos from 2016 Memphis Annual Conference. Find more photos in the “Photo Albums” section of the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org. Photos by Lane Gardner Camp.
Episcopal Candidate: Rev. Sky McCracken

Memphis Conference delegates unanimously nominated Rev. Sky McCracken for the office of bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church. Last year delegates endorsed his candidacy, along with delegates of the Tennessee Conference.

McCracken currently serves as dean of the Memphis Conference cabinet and superintendent of the Purchase District in Western Kentucky.

For election results, see jurisdictional conference story on page 15.

Youth Participation

In addition to young people who led prayers during business and teaching sessions and participated in worship as musicians, vocalists and dancers, speakers included:

• Hope Cody from Bolivar First United Methodist Church in Bolivar, Tennessee, who delivered the “Young People’s Address,” sponsored by the Memphis Conference Board of Laity. She answered the question, “How is God calling you to offer Christ to those in your neighborhood?”

• Black College Fund Ambassador Jacob Cogman, a 2016 graduate of United Methodist-affiliated Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, who thanked the Memphis Conference for its support of the Black College Fund of the United Methodist Church in Paducah, Kentucky.

2017 Budget

The annual conference approved a budget of $8,134,256 for mission and ministry in 2017. This is a $521,136 (six percent) decrease from 2016.

Bethany K. Huffman, president of the Memphis Conference Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) stressed the group’s ongoing work to align the conference’s budgets and resources.

Conference Health Insurance

Delegates affirmed the recommendation of the Clergy Wellness Commission to move from its longtime, self-funded plan to plans offered by Wespah Benefits (formerly known as the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits). Speaking after annual conference, Larry Davis, Memphis Conference treasurer, said, “This change affects all of our retirees, full-time clergy and conference lay employees.” Davis provided these summary points of the changes:

• The Board of Pensions and Clergy Wellness Commission are now combined to form the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits.
• Retirees will access their Medicare supplemental coverage through the One Exchange program.
• Retirees and their spouses will each receive $250 per month in a Health Reimbursement Account (HRA) to fund their coverage premiums. Future retirees will have to have served 20 years to qualify for this subsidy.
• Clergy under the age of 60 on July 1, 2016, will no longer receive a medical subsidy upon retirement.
• Full-time active clergy and conference lay employees will be enrolled in the Health Flex insurance program offered by Wespah.

Davis said workshops will soon be announced to assist retirees and active clergy in transitioning to the new program.

Resolution Vote

By a significant margin, delegates did not pass the one resolution that was submitted by William (Will) R. Clark, a member of Lambeth Memorial United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee; a member of the Duke Divinity School (Durham, North Carolina) class of 2017; and a certified candidate for ministry in the Memphis Conference.

The resolution proposed an addition to the conference’s standing rules: “guaranteed voice, but not vote” on the floor of annual conference for “current enrolled seminarians and candidates for ministry.” Visit Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org for full text of submitted resolution.

Memphis Conference Lay Leader David R. Reed, chair of the resolutions committee, said the committee supported the “spirit” of the resolution, but committee members said they could not remember a time when anyone who wanted a voice at annual conference did not receive voice. The committee recommended non-concurrence of the resolution.

Language Translation

For the second year, language translation interpretation services were provided to Spanish-speaking delegates and guests from four Hispanic congregations. This was accomplished with equipment from the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries and volunteer interpreters.

Awards

Three individuals were named recipients of the 2016 Memphis Conference Harry Denman Evangelism Award:

• Clergy: Rev. Mark Carrigan, Huntington First United Methodist Church, Huntington, Tennessee

• Laity: Jim Hathcock, Bartlett United Methodist Church, Bartlett, Tennessee

• Youth: David Gerle, Trinity United Methodist Church, Paducah, Kentucky

Sponsored by the Foundation for Evangelism, the Denman Award honors persons who have made outstanding efforts in Wesleyan evangelism by helping to bring others into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Four churches, one from each district, were presented the One Matters Discipleship Award:

• Bemis United Methodist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, in the Tennessee River District

• Edith United Methodist Church in Ripley, Tennessee, in the Mississippi River District

• El Redentor United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, in the Metro District

• Trinity United Methodist Church in Paducah, Kentucky, in the Purchase District

Sponsored by Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, the One Matters award recognizes churches that have moved away from zero professions of faith and baptism to positive numbers. Each award included a $1,000 gift.

The Bishop’s Award of Excellence in Scouting from the General Commission on United Methodist Men was presented to Arlington United Methodist Church in Arlington, Tennessee.

Rev. Larry Woodruff received two plaques (one each) on behalf of Cub Scout Pack 452 and Boy Scout Troop 452, both chartered by the church.

Prayer

The chapel at Northside United Methodist Church was transformed into a “prayer room” – a
place for delegates and visitors to go who needed a quiet place for prayer. Morning prayer services with communion took place in the prayer room on three mornings.

**Clergy Retirements**


“For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven,” said Bishop McAlilly. “So, too, there is a time for movement, new adventure, fields of service not yet touched. With love, we send you forth in the spirit of John Wesley: May the world be your parish.”

**Exhibits and Displays**

More than 40 organizations with ties to the Memphis Conference and The United Methodist Church had displays and exhibits in the gym at Northside United Methodist Church.

**Streaming, Social Media and Mobile App**

2016 marked the fourth time the Memphis Annual Conference was streamed, allowing non-attendees to watch live from their homes, churches and offices.

Using hashtag #2016mac, social media provided a way for conference attendees to participate in online discussion before, during and after the event. A new mobile app allowed delegates and others access to annual conference information and materials in electronic and digital formats.

**2017 Memphis Annual Conference**

Delegates voted to meet June 4-6, 2017, at Collierville United Methodist Church in Collierville, Tennessee, for the 2017 Memphis Annual Conference.

**Other Business**

- Participated in a Sunday afternoon Open House at the nearby office of the Memphis Conference that included tours and refreshments
- Were welcomed to the city of Jackson on Monday morning by its mayor, Jerry Gist
- Recognized the 60th and 20th anniversaries of the ordination of women and deacons, respectively, in The United Methodist Church
- Recognized the Memphis Conference’s newest Wesley Foundation at Bethel University in McKenzie, Tennessee. Previously, it was a Wesley Fellowship, but was granted official recognition by Bethel University in January, paving the way for “Foundation” status with the Memphis Conference
- Learned about a July 2017 mission trip opportunity to travel to East Congo with Bishop McAlilly to, among other things, build a center for women victimized by ongoing wars and conflicts
- Heard a report and watched a video about the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church that took place in May 2016 in Portland, Oregon
- Approved charge line changes and church discontinuances
- Learned about changes in the Nashville Episcopal Area office staff in Nashville, Tennessee, that took effect July 1
- Received reports from many different committees, boards, agencies and affiliated organizations of the Memphis Conference

**More Information**

More information – including video, photos, a list of 2016 clergy appointments and more – about the 2016 Memphis Annual Conference is available on the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.net/2016AC or by emailing communications@memphis-umc.org.
General Conference

serve in 16 lands. I was proud to have been a part of raising funds for the Imagine No Malaria initiative. I was proud to see mission and ministry being shared from Angola to Zimbabwe, American Indians to Pacific Islanders, and Koreans to Hispanics.

Each conference was given a Korean “peace cross” as a reminder of the peace and reconciliation needed on the Korean peninsula.

Burnett:
The adjustment of the schedule from previous conferences meant that delegates were not worshiping or meeting in the evenings. This made the event a much less tiring conference, but also meant some petitions were not considered by some legislative committees and other petitions were never presented to the conference.

McCracken:
As opposed to past General Conferences, some of our best leadership was conspicuously absent. What I suspect is that fewer United Methodists see General Conference as a relevant part of the work of the Church.

Eason-Williams:
I have been to General Conference several times as an observer, but this was the first time as part of the delegation. I was a reserve (delegate) and grateful that the delegates let me have experience on the floor all day Monday. The work of being a delegate is stressful, but even in the midst of voting on legislation there is God who brings all of us to the table with language barriers, cultural differences, different theological perspectives, and speeches for and against... God graciously holds us together in worship and ultimately as the body of Christ. Thanks be to God!

Jeffords:
I became aware very quickly that while the General Conference speaks for the Church, the way it behaves toward one another is not indicative of any church I’ve served. The disconnect between the General Church issues and what we deal with on the local level is significant.

Q. Is there anything you would like members of the Memphis Conference to know about General Conference not covered by the other questions?

Reed:
I arrived home physically and emotionally spent, but carrying with me a renewed spirit and a fresh awareness of the love, power and presence of the Holy Spirit in my life and in our shared lives together as the family of God.

In the midst of the intense struggles and passions about the future of this part of God’s church, God’s presence was on full display in small and extravagant ways.

While our tribe known as United Methodist did not discover a way to agree on a very important matter that divides us, we did discover Christ was with us at the center of our discussions and is still the One who unites us in the family of God.

I left General Conference with the belief that change will come, but with a thankful heart that we have graced each other with the time and space and the spiritual leadership to facilitate such change. We do not have to agree with each other, but we have to love each other.

I know that God will shepherd our efforts moving forward if we will but invite Him to the table. And we must after all; it is His Table.

Bell:
As I prepared for General Conference, it was my constant and abiding prayer that God would bring clarity to the difficult questions we face as a denomination regarding human sexuality. I have remained hopeful throughout the process that we might find common ground.

At General Conference, we asked our bishops to give leadership. Late afternoon on May 18 delegates voted to accept the recommendation of the Council of Bishops to delay a debate on homosexuality and let a proposed commission study church regulations. Delegates on both sides had mixed emotions to the decision to refer. The bishops suggested they might call a special General Conference in 2018 or 2019 to deal with such proposals.

I continue to be in prayer as we love one another and find our way forward while maintaining the unity of the body of Christ. I am privileged to be part of the connection called United Methodists and to serve the Memphis Conference as a lay delegate to General Conference. I thank you for your prayers as we move forward through this process. God is not finished with the people called United Methodists!

Burnett:
Bishop (Bill) McAlilly presided effectively during a stressful session. He handled his duties with dignity and grace, even amid false accusations.

McCracken:
There are some awesome people in our denomination who dearly love Jesus Christ and the Church. Their witness gives me hope and confidence that The United Methodist Church is going to regain its method and passion to make disciples. We are more than the issues that gain the most press, but aren’t the most pressing.

Eason-Williams:
I am in awe of the many layers of participation in the process of General Conference (before, during and after) and the many people who care deeply about the future of the church. I am grateful to the many, many volunteers who give of time and resources to serve this process as greeters, marshals and pages. One volunteer from Ohio met me and others at the airport and not only told us how to ride the train, but carried bags and escorted us to our hotels.

Jeffords:
I was honored to go and participate in the varied ways I could as a reserve delegate. I was especially thankful for a chance to work with Sky (McCracken) and help prepare him for his introduction to the Southeast Jurisdiction delegates. We were/are so proud of how he did, and even more so for who he is. 😊

Rev. David Atkinson of Collierville United Methodist Church served on the Marshal and Page Coordination Team at General Conference.
Two ‘young clergy elders’ reflect on time spent at recent leadership forum in Washington, D.C.

[First published on website 5/1/2016]

Two young clergy elders represented the Memphis Conference at the 2016 Young Clergy Leadership Forum, that took place Jan. 25-27 and was sponsored by the General Board of Church and Society (GBCS) of The United Methodist Church.

Rev. Dr. Angela Harris of Bolivar First UMC in Bolivar, Tennessee, and Rev. Jason W. Jones of Lone Oak UMC in Paducah, Kentucky, joined young clergy elders from around the world on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. for the event. Jones served McKenzie First UMC in McKenzie, Tennessee, at the time he attended the forum.

GBCS invited each annual conference to send two young clergy elders currently serving full time to learn about GBCS, share ministry knowledge and experience, create foundations for future collaboration and build relationships with one another.

Harris and Jones offered the following reflections on their 2016 Young Clergy Leadership Forum experience:

Harris

I was honored to represent the Memphis Conference in tandem with Rev. Jason W. Jones. A record-making blizzard blanketed the city in the days before the Forum began, closing airports and making travel to the city, and around it, challenging. Three flights were cancelled before I was able to make it into the city a day late. More than a third of the speakers and participants never made it in due to weather-related travel cancellations.

Once I was able to join the group, it was a wonderful opportunity of holy conferencing with young clergy from around the U.S. and the globe. Conversations were shared about calling, our own context for ministry, and our hopes and dreams for our own local churches, as well as The United Methodist Church as a whole.

There were engaging and informative speakers and break-out sessions for small group discussion where we learned more about GBCS, what they do, and how they would like to network with rising leaders around the connection.

Growing up in Tennessee and Mississippi, and completing my seminary education in Washington, D.C., gave me the unique experience of seeing familiar faces at the Forum and around the city. One of the presenters, Giovanni Arroyo, is a former seminary colleague of mine, and now works at the United Methodist General Commission on Religion and Race. We reunited and joyfully reflected on a mission trip we had been on together eleven years prior where we were learning from and living with homeless individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Bermuda.

Another familiar face was recent Wesley Theological Seminary graduate Laura Kiywaba—a young woman I had mentored through the initial steps of the clergy process, and who is now serving a church in the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The Forum also allowed time to get to know fellow Memphis Conference clergy Jason W. Jones and other clergy from across the globe.

All in all, I am thankful to have had the experience to engage in holy conferencing with new and old colleagues and friends, and to hear about some of the engaging ways the Holy Spirit is moving in and through The United Methodist Church.

Jones

The three-day event featured presentations and conversations that attended people deeper about how we can be engaged in transformative mission and help to turn our ministry contexts—which for most of us are congregations—toward a more deliberately-outward focus.

We heard from a number of speakers, including Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe who reminded us that “all ministry is standing in the tension [that’s] never over.” Shane Claiborne brought the challenging word that movement “out of fear” leads to our “mak[ing] decisions and act[ing] devoid of love.” And Dr. Sayyid Syeed of the Islamic Society of North America helped us to understand that while “faith is sometimes misused,” for too long “we’ve built not bridges but mountains”—formed by ignorance, prejudice and hate.

Still, for me, the most meaningful and thought-provoking message came from Dr. Kirk VanGilder of Gallaudet University, one of only two non-hearing, Ph.D. professors of religion in the world. He shared that, from a very young age, it was evident that he had problems hearing. And one of his earliest memories is of sitting in a doctor’s office with physicians and his parents discussing whether he could be “fixed.” He said the experience was formative for his identity as his reality was always framed as losing his hearing; no one ever spoke of his gaining his deafness.

In other words, he said, he grew up believing he was incomplete or less-than; it’s been his faith that’s helped him to comprehend the difference between cure and healing, and what it means to be a whole person. Moreover, he helped us to ask questions about how well we create truly hospitable atmospheres in our churches and ministries: those wherein all persons are genuinely included.

It was also wonderful to meet, converse with and form connections among other United Methodist clergy from around the globe. From Florida to the Philippines, Alabama to Africa, there was a beautifully-diverse group gathered. And the opportunity to find similarity in our contexts, experiences, and beliefs—as well as to sit with and literally embrace one another amid our sometimes-significant differences—was for me nourishing in ways I don’t often encounter.
Faith UMC in Oakland joins with two churches of other denominations to offer community VBS

By Amanda Wiley, Faith UMC, Oakland, TN [First published on website 7/20/2016]

Faith United Methodist Church (UMC) in Oakland, Tennessee, was bursting at the seams with Vacation Bible School (VBS) activity, June 27-30.

Outside on the lawn, two volunteers from Faith UMC, along with two volunteers from Cleaves Memorial Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church, in also in Oakland, led a mix of first and second graders in games.

In the Bible room, Faith UMC’s pastor, Rev. Don Park, assisted Jakayla McCray of Cleaves Memorial CME in experiencing “walking on water.”

Meanwhile, a host of volunteers from Faith and Cleaves and Oakland Presbyterian Church were abuzz in the production of snacks for the VBS participants and light meals for the volunteers.

The snacks were carried outside to a group of preschoolers who ate while learning about hunger and food pantries from Lynn Palmer of Oakland Presbyterian and Colleen Pulliam of Faith UMC.

This multi-denominational collaborative VBS has just finished its third year at Faith UMC by providing summer fun and learning to the children of all three churches, as well as children from the community.

All three small churches benefit from combining resources, staff and children to produce a greater program than any church might create by itself.

This summer’s VBS, built upon the deepening relationship between the churches, proved to be the best attended and highest spirited week the churches have ever experienced.

Faith UMC and Cleaves Memorial CME have existed less than a mile from one another for years with little interaction. However, in the past several years, a relationship has begun to build between these two congregations that supersedes differences in styles of worship.

The partnership began with community-wide Thanksgiving services to benefit local schools. It then became more personalized as the churches joined to share special worship times, such as an Ash Wednesday service and a Tuesday night Lenten series that is a tradition at Cleaves.

In this past year, Cleaves Memorial CME and Faith UMC have begun a tradition of “pulpit swapping” – a Sunday morning worship where each pastor preaches at the other’s church.

Perhaps the biggest cooperative effort is the joint VBS that the churches collaborate on each year. It began as an attempt to build bridges between two churches and has expanded to serve the entire community. Members of Cleaves and Faith no longer look upon each other as casual acquaintances, but as extensions of one church family.

United Methodist Women of Troy UMC sew and donate children’s clothes to Reelfoot Rural Ministries

[First published on website 6/6/2016]

The United Methodist Women (UMW) of Troy United Methodist Church in Troy, Tennessee, recently donated children’s clothes they made to the daycare center at Reelfoot Rural Ministries, an agency of the Memphis Conference of The United Methodist Church.

The garments included 12 pillow case dresses and 12 pairs of shorts.

With the help of their local Walmart, the UMW also donated 24 t-shirts to go with the outfits.

Follow Bishop McAlilly on his Blog:
www.bishopbillmcalilly.com
A smile in El Salvador: member of Concord UMC in Paducah offers Jesus, aid in Central America

By Casey Northcutt Watson [First published on website 7/18/2016]

The music pulses, blaring so loud Claire Douthitt has to scream for her dance partner to hear her over Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk.”

Her partner doesn’t listen. The sun is shining, the song is fast and loud and he’s in the throes of happiness. In his home, a facility for handicapped adults in San Salvador, El Salvador, dance parties are savored. This dancer is completely present in this moment—moving, dancing, grinning.

Douthitt laughs and keeps his left hand gripped in her right. She notes his exuberance. She’s seen it before during her previous trips to San Salvador. She’s met several locals through conversations about the Gospel.

“We see people who are crazy poor and are happier than people in the States who just have so much,” she says.

Douthitt, 22, is a member of Concord United Methodist Church in Paducah, Kentucky. She’s visiting El Salvador with Starfish Orphan Ministry, a Paducah-based nonprofit organization. The ministry strives to bring awareness to the plight of orphans and to adoption issues while also providing easy ways for people to serve others in need.

This is Douthitt’s sixth time visiting El Salvador. In the past, she has traveled there with her church and worked in conjunction with Starfish and a San Salvador-based nonprofit called Sus Hijos. She’s helped build houses and run special events for orphans and handicapped adults—people who don’t often get to enjoy special activities outside their rundown facilities.

This party is a treat for Douthitt’s dance partner.

As the young woman dances and visits with residents, Spanish rolls off her tongue. She laughs and jokes with the other facility residents around her. She says she has fallen in love with the people living in this small, Central American nation.

But, life in San Salvador isn’t all dance parties and happiness.

On trips with Starfish and Concord United Methodist Church, Douthitt sees crushing poverty and hears stories of gang violence. She hands bologna sandwiches and apples to children who huff glue to stave off hunger. But the Salvadorian smile—the one that fits across the faces of the hungry and the destitute—keeps her flying back. The resilience in these people attracts her.

Douthitt, and her teammates at Starfish, want to infuse that resilience with joy—the kind that comes from Christ. She believes if these people meet Jesus, He’ll help bear the hardships of living in a developing, gang-ridden nation. Salvadorians might be resilient, but they still need Christ.

“I’m not as concerned where they’re living as [whether] they know that Jesus loves them,” Douthitt says. “Do they know that he hasn’t forgotten about them?”

This desire to spread the Gospel has been growing in Douthitt for years, encouraged by her spiritual environment in Paducah. She says her small church of roughly 250 people, has helped foster her love for other people and her passion to tell them about Christ’s message.

“We [at Concord United Methodist Church] have always been very mission-minded, and I wouldn’t be in El Salvador without the United Methodist Church,” she says. Then, she adds, “They have just been more supportive than I could have ever imagined. They rallied around, not just the youth, but everyone who wanted to do outreach in missions. … I wouldn’t change my church family for the world.”

If God’s will follows Douthitt’s own desires, she’ll return periodically to El Salvador and eventually move somewhere overseas so she can tell even more people about their Creator.

That plan will have to wait, though. Douthitt, a recent University of Kentucky graduate, has just become a registered nurse and will soon begin work at the University of Kentucky’s Albert B. Chandler Hospital. She’ll work there for a while, and then ask God about her next steps. Those could include a missionary’s life in The United Methodist Church.

For now, all she can do is pray for this handicapped man in San Salvador—the one who can’t stop moving to “Uptown Funk.” She wants him to know whether he’s dancing to Bruno Mars or sharing a filthy bed with another resident, Jesus is standing by him. Douthitt wants him to feel enveloped, covered and swept up in Christ’s love. She wants that to be the source of his smile.

Claire Douthitt, right, dances with a handicapped adult in San Salvador, El Salvador. Douthitt, a member of Concord United Methodist Church in Paducah, Kentucky, has traveled to El Salvador six times, both with her church and with Starfish Orphan Ministry. She has grown to love the people there. (Photo by Casey Northcutt Watson)

United Methodist Women of St. Stephen UMC in Memphis host ‘Friendship Dinner’ on June 14

By Ruth Ann Ray, St. Stephen UMC [First published on website 7/18/2016]

A United Methodist Women Friendship Dinner was held at St. Stephen United Methodist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, on June 14.

Everything from the decorations to the food was patriotic-themed in celebration of Flag Day. The food was picnic fare and delicious down to the All-American Apple Pie!

The somber display of an empty table, representing the fallen soldier, brought a tear to many an eye and the number of people who stood when their service branch music was played was stunning! The walls displayed pictures and memorabilia shared by church members of those who served in the military or as first responders.

Pastor Deb Christiansen opened the dinner with prayer. UMW President Ruth Ann Ray and member Wendy Pannell paid special tribute to the military veterans and several Memphis Police officers who were in attendance.

St. Stephen’s most distinguished Army veteran, Eddie Spencer, was proudly dressed in his military uniform for the evening. Yes, he is still able to wear it at age 95!

The highlight of the night was the music presentation by guests, Alicia Butler and Lisa Machen. Hearts were warmed and faith in God and our country was renewed by this well- planned event.
Civil Rights activist James Meredith visited Centenary UMC in Memphis in June for event to mark 50th anniversary of his 1966 ‘March Against Fear’

By Kathryn Crawford, Centenary United Methodist Church, Memphis, TN [First published on website 7/18/2016]

Centenary United Methodist Church, in collaboration with Germantown United Methodist Church, hosted an event on June 25 to mark the 50th anniversary of James Meredith’s March Against Fear.

“A Call to Courage: Commemorating James Meredith’s March Against Fear 50 Years Later” was the name of the event that took place at Centenary and highlighted the fact that the community continues to grapple with the same shameful and fearful events that were taking place 50 years ago and to enlighten a new generation.

Meredith was the honored guest and gave poignant remarks.

First, Meredith challenged the African American population to get behind making changes in its own community. According to Meredith, studies have shown that if every woman over the age of 30 agreed to become a godmother to a child, problems plaguing the African American community could be reversed within 15 years.

He also emphasized the importance of teaching children the Ten Commandments and “The Golden Rule” before the age of five. The correction to a community’s problems, according to Meredith, still lies within the home. The family is the most important piece of a child’s development.

Congressman Steve Cohen from the 9th Congressional District made inspiring remarks and commented on the fact that Congress has failed to allow a vote on the continuance of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. District 29 Tennessee State Senator Lee Harris, was also present. Tennessee State Representative John Deberry and Shelby County Commissioner Willie Brooks proclaimed the day as a Day of Courage.

Dr. Aram Goudsouzian, chair of the Department of History at the University of Memphis and author of Down to the Crossroads: Civil Rights, Black Power, and the Meredith March Against Fear, was the guest speaker.

Goudsouzian spoke on the significant role Centenarians played following Meredith being shot on the second day of the 1966 March Against Fear.

Rev. James Lawson, then pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church, along with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael and others visited Meredith at Bowd Hospital and vowed to continue the March.

Centenary United Methodist Church became the strategic headquarters. Members and others from the community kept the church open 24 hours a day to house, feed and transport marchers. Some members took marchers into their homes. On June 8, King led a group of 21 from Centenary to continue the March. Meredith rejoined the March on June 25, 1966, after celebrating his birthday with his mother who had baked him a homemade birthday cake.

The Withers Collection Museum and Gallery in Memphis shared an exhibit of the 1966 March Against Fear. Centenary members, Rev. W. Frank Jones, Mattie Jones and Vivian Holmes shared reflections of their life experiences during the tumultuous 1960s in the South.

Dr. Marie Milam created a collage reflecting the 1966 March Against Fear, from beginning to end.

There was also a panel discussion moderated by Dr. Charles McKinney, Neville Frierson Bryan Chair of Africana Studies and an associate Professor of History at Rhodes College in Memphis. McKinney’s area of scholarship includes the Civil Rights Movement.

Panel participants included:

- Dr. Maxie Dunnam, fifth president of Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, and pastor emeritus of Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis. He stressed the importance of the church’s commitment to social action. He stated that the community cannot change without the church partnering with leadership and taking a leading role as the moral compass.
- A.C. Wharton, former mayor of Memphis and Shelby County Tennessee. He reminded attendees that, in Shelby County, registering to vote is not the crux of the problem. Over 400,000 voters are on the roles; however, during the last mayoral election for the City of Memphis, only 25 percent of registered voters chose to participate.
- Archie Willis, III, founder and president of Community Capital in Memphis. Willis’ father, A. W. Willis, represented Meredith during his fight for enrollment in the University of Mississippi. He was a member of Centenary and present during the strategy sessions at the church in 1966.
- Vanecia B. Kimbrow, an attorney in Memphis who specializes in real estate and community development law in the nonprofit and government sectors. She charged upcoming generations to take their place at the head of the line to change their communities. She admonished them to not just take advantage of the opportunities to improve their own lives, but to reach back and help someone else. Because of the continued need for “a call to courage,” the question was raised by Meredith: “What are we afraid of?”

Meredith declared that if we need “a call to courage,” there is obviously the presence of fear. These topics were explored during the panel discussion and the signing of the Covenant for Social Justice – signed by Dr. Deborah B. Smith, current senior pastor of Centenary United Methodist Church, and Rev. Richard Smith, current senior pastor of Germantown United Methodist Church in Germantown, Tennessee, east of Memphis.

Both pastors expressed their disdain that we continue to discuss and fumble with issues that were present 50 years ago and that continue to plague our community. It is important for the children of Christ to be bold against the fight against violence, fear and voter disenfranchisement.

Meredith and both pastors reminded everyone of the teachings of John Wesley, one of the founders of Methodism. The audience was left with the Covenant Call to Courage and Faithfulness, which included the charge to “readily acknowledge that racism, intolerance and hostility can permeate our lives, our culture and even our churches. We speak compassionate inclusiveness, but far too often we settle into patterns and practices which defy this call of Jesus and his desire that we model how to live and how to love.”

Following in the footsteps of James Meredith, who started out alone, fear must be replaced with enough courage to take the first step. Meredith started with five, but ended the march at the capital in Jackson, Mississippi, with more than 15,000 followers, 220 miles later.
“Lynn and I are delighted to be reassigned to the Nashville Episcopal Area.”

That was the message Bishop Bill McAlilly posted on his blog a day after the conclusion of the 2016 Southeastern Jurisdictional (SEJ) Conference that ran July 13-15 in Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, for which the theme was Hope and Unity in Christ, based on Hebrews 6:18-19a.

McAlilly is the resident bishop of the Nashville Episcopal Area that includes the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. He was elected bishop in July 2012 and assigned to the Nashville Episcopal Area, beginning in September 2012.

To read Bishop McAlilly’s full message on July 16 about his reassignment for 2016-17, visit his blog at www.bishopbillmcalilly.com. It’s titled “Four More Years.”

The SEJ Committee on Episcopacy announced 2016-2020 episcopal assignments and reassignments on Thursday evening, July 14, in Stuart Auditorium at Lake Junaluska Conference and Retreat Center where the SEJ Conference took place.

Episcopal elections

To the surprise of many, even though two days and many ballots were anticipated for election of five bishops to fill the five openings (created by five retirements) in the SEJ, all five bishops were elected in ten ballots on one day by 375 delegates from 15 conferences in nine states.

The five bishops elected (in order of election) are:

- Sharma Lewis from the North Georgia Conference assigned to the Virginia Conference (Lewis is the SEJ’s first African American female bishop.)
- David Graves from the Holston Conference assigned to the Alabama-West Florida Conference
- Leonard Fairley from the North Carolina Conference assigned to the Kentucky and Red Bird Missionary Conferences
- Lawson Bryan from the Alabama-West Florida Conference assigned to the South Georgia Conference
- Sue Haupert-Johnson from the Florida Conference assigned to the North Georgia Conference

Rev. Sky McCracken from the Memphis Conference withdrew his candidacy for the episcopacy before the ninth ballot. McCracken was endorsed and nominated by the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. To read the text of McCracken’s presentation to the SEJ Conference’s delegates, find this story on the Memphis Conference website at www.memphis-umc.org.

McCracken, superintendent of the Purchase District and dean of the Memphis Conference cabinet, posted on his Facebook page on July 13: “Thanks to all of you for your affirmation and support. I am a blessed man. And we have elected five great folks as our episcopal leaders.”

David R. Reed, Memphis Conference lay leader and first elected lay delegate from the Memphis Conference to the SEJ Conference, said after the election, “While we are disappointed that Sky was not elected and certainly would have been sad to lose him to the episcopacy, we rejoice that he will still be among those who ably lead our Memphis Conference. He has such a wide range of leadership gifts for the many opportunities ahead.”

McCracken’s vote count started with 106 on the first ballot and decreased with each succeeding ballot.

If McCracken had been elected, he would have been the first United Methodist bishop ever elected from the Memphis Conference, according to Ann Phillips, archivist and historian for the Memphis Conference, and Dr. Joe Geary, director of Connectional Ministries for the Memphis Conference.

Phillips said there (have been) several bishops who started out in the Memphis Conference, but Geary explained they were elected through other conferences where their memberships were at (the) time (of election).

Standing ovation

At the opening of the late afternoon business session on Wednesday, July 13, Bishop McAlilly received a standing ovation from the assembled SEJ delegates in appreciation for his calm episcopal leadership during a difficult period at the 2016 General Conference in May in Portland, Oregon.

At General Conference, McAlilly was called to preside during a business session of contentious debate about the United Methodist Council of Bishops’ “Way Forward” proposal that outlined steps for the church to deal with issues of human sexuality. At one point, McAlilly’s fitness to preside with fairness and impartiality was questioned by a General Conference delegate from another jurisdiction. After a recess, McAlilly returned to the chair and completed the session.

As delegates and attendees from the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences gathered for a reception on Thursday evening, July 14, to celebrate McAlilly’s reassignment to the Nashville Area, McAlilly said he was “deeply blessed” by the affirmation he received from delegates to the 2016 SEJ Conference.

Human sexuality

On July 12, the day before the start of the SEJ Conference, the SEJ College of Bishops issued a statement that calls on United Methodists in the SEJ to follow processes the denomination’s polity has in place while working to change or maintain the church’s current position on human sexuality. To read the full statement, visit Bishop McAlilly’s blog at www.bishopbillmcalilly.com.

Missional initiative

During the SEJ Conference, the SEJ College of Bishops released a statement of missional initiative for 2016-2020 that Bishop McAlilly posted on his blog on July 14. Read it at www.bishopbillmcalilly.com.

SEJ budget

The SEJ voted to reduce its 2017-2020 budget by 60 percent. The Memphis Conference apportionment will be $53,009 ($13,252 per year).

The $1,774,000 budget passed as recommended by the SEJ Committee on Finance and Administration (CFA), chaired by Jim Allen, director of Administration.

Continued on page 16
From Tanzania to Tennessee, Soard traveled over 8,000 miles to attend Memphis Annual Conference

By Lane Gardner Camp, Director of Communications [First published on website 7/8/2016]

Eric Soard probably said it best on his Facebook page with this June 14 post: “If this was camp and they gave awards (for) who came from farthest away, I bet I would win.”

He was referring to how far he traveled to attend the 2016 Memphis Annual Conference, June 19-22, in Jackson, Tennessee.

Soard and his wife, Elizabeth (Liz), journeyed more than 8,000 miles from Tanzania, Africa, for his commissioning as a deacon during the Service of Commissioning and Ordination.

The Soards had to take four planes and were 35 hours in transit. One way.

Eric was commissioned by Bishop William T. (Bill) McAlilly, resident bishop of the Nashville Episcopal Area that includes the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences, and Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey, resident bishop of the Louisiana Conference, who was the guest preacher for the service.

Soard lives in the Lake Zone of Tanzania, Africa, where he is assigned and serves, along with Liz, as a United Methodist missionary with the General Board of Ministries. Follow their blog at http://ingodslife.blogspot.com/

SEJ Conference

trative Services in the Tennessee Conference, who sang “Go Tell it on the Mountain” as he delivered the CFA report.

Ever since a restructuring approved in 2008, the SEJ has been trimming its budget. The 2012-2016 budget eliminated operational funds to agencies, but continued to fund debt service. Debt service payments will end in 2016 and are not included in the 2017-2020 budget.

In memory

Bishop William (Bill) Morris was remembered Wednesday morning, July 13, along with other SEJ bishops who have died since the 2012 SEJ Conference. Morris formerly oversaw the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences. He retired from the episcopacy in 2004 and died in 2016.

Boards and agencies

During the SEJ Conference, Memphis Conference United Methodists were nominated and elected to serve on General boards and jurisdictional committees. They are (in alphabetical order):

- Dr. Cynthia Davis of Christ United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN -- SEJ Committee on Investigations
- Isabelle Dillard of St. John’s United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN -- General Board of Church and Society
- Rev. Autura Eason-Williams of Capleville United Methodist Church in Memphis, TN -- SEJ Committee on Finance and Administration
- Bishop Bill McAlilly – SEJ Committee on Coordination and Accountability
- Rev. Kristofer Roof of Peace Tree United Methodist Church in Collierville, TN – SEJ Agenda Committee

Memphis conference delegation

The Memphis Conference delegates to the 2016 SEJ Conference are listed below. They were elected at the 2015 Memphis Annual Conference.

LAY DELEGATES (in order of election) were:

- David R. Reed, Martin First UMC, Martin, TN – head of delegation
- Elyse Bell, Paris First UMC, Paris, TN
- Sandra Burnett, Lone Oak UMC, Paducah, Kentucky
- Isabelle Dillard, St. John’s UMC, Memphis, TN
- Alternate Delores Smith, Milan First UMC, Milan, TN
- Alternate Deborah Watlington, Lambuth Memorial UMC, Jackson, TN
- CLERGY DELEGATES (in order of election) were:
  - Sky McCracken, Purchase District superintendent, dean of the Memphis Conference cabinet and episcopal nominee
  - Eddie Bromley, Milan First UMC, Milan, TN
  - Autura Eason-Williams, Capleville UMC, Memphis, TN
  - Jonathan L. Jeffords, St. John’s UMC, Memphis, Tennessee
  - Alternate Cynthia D. Davis, Christ UMC, Memphis, TN
  - Alternate Steven Louis Douglas, East Trinity-Beech Bluff-Mt. Pleasant Parish, Jackson, TN

Pages and tellers

Individuals from the Memphis Conference (in alphabetical order) who served as pages and tellers during the SEJ Conference were:

- Alt. Deborah Watlington, Lambuth Memorial UMC
- Alt. Autura Eason-Williams

From left: Deborah Watlington and Autura Eason-Williams

From left: Delores Smith and Cynthia Davis

For more news from the 2016 SEJ Conference visit sejumc.org.