

The Upper New York Annual Conference ran three and a half days and had as its theme “Together in Prayer: Moving Beyond our Comfort Zones 2019”. These days were filled with inspiring worship, great music and motivational speakers, while at the same time conducting the general business of the Upper NY Conference.

Bishop Webb shared the following message: “We need a fresh word! We need to be reminded of who we are and “whose” we are... We need to be reminded that amid this season, God is doing a new thing”. Our theme “Together in Prayer: Moving Beyond our Comfort Zones 2019” is never more relevant. With the upcoming uncertain times in our denomination and conference divide on the topic of human sexuality, we find that our “form is impacting our function”. This division impacts our ability to accomplish our task of convincing the world to see Jesus. He asked us to remember the words of the prophet Isaiah 42: 9 and 16. “Behold the former things have come to pass. Now I declare new things; before they spring forth, I proclaim them to you... I will lead the blind by a way they do not know, in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them and rugged places into plains. These are the things I will do and I will not leave them undone.” He repeated this prophecy many times and asked us to choose to step out of our comfort zone and into God’s promise and future. He used Peter’s walking on water as an example. He took a leap of faith by stepping out of the boat and so should we.

Our main speaker was the Rev Dr. Vance Ross from Atlanta, GA. He continued to emphasize the theme of our conference and used the scriptures from Matthew 6: 5-15 in which Jesus tells us how we should pray. He made three major points. 1. Prayer should be for divine revelation and inspiration not for public commendation. Jesus favored closet prayer. 2. Prayer as Jesus prayed does not ignore corporate for personal. God is not exclusively mine or yours. 3. Are we praying to exchange our will for God’s will or are we insistent on the cosmic bellhop. Prayer moves us from our desires to God’s desires.

Most of the work the conference accomplished was done without much discussion from the delegates and always with prayerful consideration and respect. The election of delegates to the next General Conference took time but was accomplished. Election of trustees took a little longer due to there were concerns raised that the trustees didn’t have an ethnic cross section of representatives. After allowing nominations from the floor elections took place.

The rest of the time was taken up with resolutions and petitions mainly ones addressing the General Conference ruling on LGBTQIA+ decision. Two were ruled out of order by the Bishop, stating they went directly against the Book of Discipline. Three that passed with regards to this issue of LGBTQIA+ resolved to 1. Condemns the General Conference decision to pass the Traditional Plan, 2. 2020 General Conference adopt a structural realignment of the Methodist Church that allows both traditional and progressive ideas to stand and 3. Our UNY Conference create a team to examine any large scale separation movement which are not already addressed in the Book of Discipline.

With a constant reminder of the theme “Together in Prayer: Moving Beyond our Comfort Zones 2019”, regardless of which side of this issue you stand with, we were and should always be in prayer with God for his discernment not ours.