

IX. DAILY PROCEEDINGS

SUNDAY AFTERNOON AND EVENING

June 5, 2016

Laity Session

First United Methodist Church, Carrollton, Texas, 3:30 p.m.

The laity session of the North Texas Conference was held at First United Methodist Church of Carrollton. After introduction of nominated Conference Lay Leader Jeff Bouis, youth representatives of the Conference Council on Youth Ministries led a service of remembrance for North Texas Conference laity who were members of past Annual Conferences and died during the last year.

The 2016 Harry Denman Evangelism Awards for Laity and Youth were celebrated with video tributes. Award winners were Judy Kline (Greenland Hills UMC), adult, and youth Haley Macha (Stonebridge UMC).

Wil Murphy was the guest speaker. He spoke to the gathered members regarding the conference theme, Witness, introducing testimonies from Henry Martinez and Jason Redick regarding their witness in ministry and inviting members to bear witness to Jesus Christ in all they do.

Conference Lay Leader Linda Parks closed the session.

Clergy Session

Christ United Methodist Church, Plano, Texas, 3:30 p.m.

The North Texas Conference clergy gathered at Christ United Methodist Church, Plano, and Bishop Michael McKee called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. Vic Casad moved that local pastors be included throughout the business session. The motion was seconded and the body approved. Host pastor Don Underwood welcomed the clergy and opened with prayer.

Bishop McKee addressed the session, harkening back to the early beginnings of Methodism. He reminded clergy that we gather to remember what our callings are. We are people of the covenant. He introduced Jan Davis and thanked her for her service to the North Texas Conference. He gave a special thanks to those on the BOM and to Jan Davis, chair.

In her opening remarks, Jan Davis thanked the clergy of the North Texas Conference for the privilege of serving with them. She then thanked the BOM, its executive officers, and Duane VanGiesen.

Davis introduced Jill Jackson-Sears, Candidacy Registrar, and thanked her for certification of candidates.

Jackson-Sears invited all to a ministry training. She called attention to Question 19, the list of certified candidates, added Martha Valencia to the list from the Metro District since 2014, and asked that any corrections be submitted in writing. Jackson-Sears then introduced Marsha Middleton for the Local Pastors Report.

Middleton noted the list of those who have been licensed and appointed as local pastors—full time and part time. Clergy voted to approve, as well, Question 21c—students from other annual conferences serving as local pastors and enrolled in a school of theology listed by the University Senate. Bishop McKee gave a special word of appreciation to Middleton and to local pastors.

Larry George addressed Questions 24a and b, as well as Questions 25 and 26, concerning those who have been appointed from other annual conferences or Methodist denominations and those who have been approved to serve from other Christian denominations. The body voted to approve. George then introduced Billy Echols-Richter, Chair of Preparations and Qualifications.

Echols-Richter read the names of those recommended as Provisional Members, both deacons and elders. They came forward, faced the body, and each was voted on individually. They were all approved as provisional members, were received with a standing ovation, and Bishop McKee shook their hands.

Echols-Richter called attention to Question 29, those being continued as provisional members, adding the name of Alex Williams, and Question 30, those coming from other Christian denominations who have had their orders recognized.

Echols-Richter then read the names of those recommended to be elected as members in full connection, elder. They came forward, and Bishop McKee asked them the historic questions for elder. Each was voted into conference membership and introduced to the body. All new members in full connection received an extended standing ovation.

The following persons were presented for election into full membership and ordination: As elders: Edgar Bazan, Scot Bontrager, Patrick Hoffman, Clayton Horton, Steve Martinez, Jenna Morrison. Susan Robb was approved to transfer from deacon to elder.

Larry George addressed Question 38 concerning those who had been received by transfer from other annual conferences of The United Methodist Church: Andrew Fiser. George addressed Question 41, as well, concerning those transferred out to other annual conferences.

Stan Copeland addressed Questions 42a and 42b, discontinuing provisional members Scott Melton, Mona Millard, and Walt Lunde, Jr. Bishop McKee called for a vote on Question 44 – those granted the status of honorable location-retired. The question passed. The body then voted on Questions 46b and c, to allow withdrawal of conference membership by Virgie Holbrook and James Dorff.

The Bishop reminded the body that those who died during the year would be remembered later in the evening. He then called for a moment of silence, following which he offered prayer for those elders and local pastors who died during the year.

The body voted to approve those ordained members on personal, family, or medical leave.

The names of those retired elders, deacon, and local pastors were read: elders—Charles Carnahan, James Dorff, Sandra Minor, Ben Read, Judith Reedy, David Rucker, Billy Shaddox, John Soper; deacon—Katherine Betz; local pastors—Walt Lunde, Jr., Patricia Mahaffey, Mona Millard, Carlos Nascimento, John Richardson. Their retirement was approved. They were invited to the front of the session where the Bishop shook their hands and they received a standing ovation.

Elizabeth Moseley presented Questions 58–63 regarding specialized ministry and lay ministry.

Question 64 named those who constitute the Board of Ministry Committee on Investigation. They are: Tommy Brumett, Jeremiah Booker, Linda Roby, and Dyan Dietz, clergy; Debbie Chapman, Lucretia Facen, and Clay Womack, alternate clergy; Sharon Spratt, Richard Stanford, and Gary Southard, laity; Susan Anderson, Frank Jackson, and Kay Porter, alternate laity.

Question 68 named Patty Evans as the diaconal minister who died during the year. The Bishop offered a prayer of thanksgiving.

Question 72 named Linda Elms in retired relationship to the annual conference as diaconal minister.

Jan Davis reported on those elders and deacons approved for less-than-full-time service. Davis concluded her report by saying that she had great hope for our conference and denomination and will miss the conference as she takes an appointment to serve the Arkansas conference. Davis received a standing ovation. She announced that Timothy Morrison will chair the BOM for the next quadrennium. Davis made one correction to Question 74, changing the final day of service for John Rosenburg at Spring Valley UMC to June 30, 2016. She then moved passage of the entire report of the Board of Ordained Ministry, and it was approved. Bishop McKee thanked the interim pastors for jobs well done. The clergy session concluded at 4:54 PM.

The full reports of the divisions of the Board of Ordained Ministry are printed in this journal in Section IV. AGENCY REPORTS under the heading, Board of Ordained Ministry.

Worship Service

St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Plano, Texas, 7:00 p.m.

At opening worship, sacred dancers from the Sacred Dance Ministry of St. Luke “Community” UMC presented the cross. A multi-church choir made of members from St. Luke “Community” UMC, St. Paul UMC, and Hamilton Park UMC provided the music of the evening. Candidates for commissioning and ordination carried in lanterns as they accompanied the families of the saints to be remembered in the opening hymn.

Larry George remembered the saints that have been influential in so many lives. George said that when Irish poet Seamus Heaney died in 2013, he texted three last words to his wife: “Be not afraid.” An Irish graffiti artist painted those words on the side of a building in a gritty part of Dublin. When asked why, he said, “For good people in hard times.” George gave thanks for those departed companions in faith who dedicated themselves to the ordained and lay ministries of the church, believing that God had called them to “Be not afraid,” that their witness—their courageous living and compassionate loving, their joyful sacrifices and their tireless service could, in truth, become the very gifts of God ... a witness that continues to guide and inspire all, even in hard times of loss, and bereavement, and even fear.

George invited people to stand in grateful memory of each one who had particularly touched their lives. The names of the 11 North Texas Conference clergy and clergy spouses who died in the last year appeared on screens during a time of remembrance, while the Mass Choir sang “I’m Determined to Walk with Jesus.” Those remembered included elders Jefferson E. Davis, Jr., James Marion Gatlin, Jimmie H. Mobley; local pastors Lewis N. Stokes and Billy Wilder; diaconal minister Patty Evans; and clergy spouses Vernice (Mrs. Joseph) Funk, Margaret A. (Mrs. Douglas) Hoke, Denise Johnson (Mrs. Charles) Stovall, Lanelle (Mrs. Ira) Thompson, and Marcia (Mrs. Richard) Wilson.

During the worship service, guest musical director and singer, the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Wilson, assistant vice president for student life and dean of students at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, performed Handel, Mahalia, Bach and boogie. She involved the congregation and walked down the aisles singing, “Will You Be a Witness for My Lord?” Throughout the evening the choir performed inspirational songs of witness.

The preacher for the evening was Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly, resident bishop of the Tennessee Conference. Elected bishop in 2012, Bishop McAlilly has led small churches in the Mississippi Delta to large congregations in Tupelo, Mississippi. He has also helped establish new ones in the suburbs of Memphis.

Bishop McAlilly repeatedly asked “Can I get a witness for Jesus?” as he discussed how fear can make one do strange things. He emphasized that “fear” is not a new emotion for the people of God. The disciples felt it when they were left without a leader (Jesus). Fear gripped them until Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit onto them. We (the Church) do not live our lives as though we have the power of the Holy Spirit. Chronic anxiety keeps crying “Wolf!” just like the Three Little Pigs.

Bishop McAlilly shared many stories of fear in his childhood. He addressed the fear of losing our children to a killing spree at their schools, and counseled turning to the scriptures to gain courage and release from fear. He said that if United Methodists are going to be relevant in this world, we need to give the church back to Jesus Christ. He added that “he is not afraid of what is going to happen to The United Methodist Church because Jesus said ‘He is the Way, the Truth and the Life.’” The church needs desperately to believe that it is possible for things to be different. He concluded by saying that there are those who cannot and those who will not, but then there is “you.”

Near the end of the service, North Texas Bishop Michael McKee led a commissioning ceremony for young people participating this summer in outreach ministries around the state, including Project Transformation, Connect to the Kingdom, Bridgeport Camp and Conference Center, Lydia Patterson Institute, and Summer Interns in Ministry.

The offering was dedicated to Project Transformation and North Texas Conference camps. Bishop Michael McKee blessed and commissioned five groups of interns to go out and be witnesses for Christ. These groups were: C2K (Connect to the Kingdom), who will send 10 college interns to do over 12,000 volunteer hours in mission-oriented ministry including painting houses in the urban areas of Dallas; eight Bridgeport Camp counselors, who will serve over 1,500 campers and 500 volunteers; 122 Project Transformation interns, who will build relationships with approximately 1,100 inner-city kids and help improve the reading skills of these young people; Lydia Patterson Institute (El Paso) interns, who will work at University Park UMC; and six young adults in the NTC Summer Intern in Ministry (SIM) program, who will work with ministers and get a “taste” of exploring their vocational and baptismal callings. These intern programs encourage young people to the service callings in their lives.

A reception hosted by Bishop and Mrs. McKee honored Bishop McAlilly, his wife Lynn, and the families of those being remembered.

MONDAY MORNING SESSION

June 6, 2016

St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Plano, Texas

Organization of the Conference

Cynthia Wilson led the conference in opening music. Bishop Michael McKee opened the session with prayer and welcomed and thanked everyone, especially Bishop McAlilly, for the wonderful worship experience on Sunday night. Robert Hasley, senior pastor, welcomed all to St. Andrew.

Conference Secretary Judith Reedy then organized the conference. Reedy moved that the bar of the conference be established as the chancel area and the entire floor of the sanctuary, as well as the middle section of the first balcony at St. Andrew UMC, Plano, that the side of the sanctuary be established for those requiring sign interpretation, and that the visitors' section be established as both sides of the balcony. The motion was approved. Reedy moved the election of persons to serve the 2016 business sessions as assistant secretaries: Kenny Dickson, Adam White, and Marsha Middleton; head teller, Dretha Burris; and the teller group, as appointed by each of the district superintendents. They were elected.

Reedy moved the approval of legislative item number one in the conference workbook, [LA 1], for the equalization of clergy and lay members. The motion was approved.

Bishop McKee then called on Larry George to introduce the consent calendar. George explained that the consent agenda would facilitate the business of the Annual Conference and that if any items needed floor debate, a written request signed by five voting members of the Annual Conference must be presented to the Conference Secretary within twenty-four hours.

Episcopal Address (as delivered by Bishop McKee)

It had been a long day. It was the second week of General Conference. Bishop McAlilly and I decided to take the train from the convention center to the hotel. It was packed. A young man was standing at the door smoking a cigarette. As the door was closing, he placed his arm inside so as to reopen the door. He threw the cigarette down and boarded the train. He was standing face-to-face with Bishop McAlilly and me. He looked at our name tags and saw the writing on them. The theme of General Conference was imprinted, "Therefore Go."

What does "therefore go" mean?

My friend answered that was a part of our faith.

Are you religious?

Yes.

What are you selling?

Nothing.

What are you selling?

The door opened at our stop, and I said, "We are selling nothing. It's free."

There are those times we are caught flat-footed and words escape us. Packed like sardines on the train for five minutes with no words coming to my mind.

Perhaps I should have stayed on the train and engaged in conversation. Walking two blocks to the hotel, I remembered one of my favorite lines: grace is the absolutely free gift from God that costs

you nothing but demands everything from you. The demand of the free gift is what is challenging for me and for all of you. What does God expect of me? What does God expect of the church I serve? What does God expect of the church I love? What does God expect of the North Texas Annual Conference?

Early last week, David Brooks, a *New York Times* columnist, wrote a column entitled, “In Defense of Big Love.” He wrote about the difference between beauty and sublime. When one looks upon a flower, it is beautiful. When one gazes at a sunset on a mountain range, it is sublime. “We have big loves and little loves.” One part of the brain appreciates beauty and little loves. Another part of the brain appreciates the sublime and big loves. He explained that on Memorial Day we honor those who served. They were animated by big love—serving one’s country, and a little love—protecting their buddies. Religious people have a love for God that is both big and little.

Most people have love for their churches and the people who are a part of that particular body of Christ. That is a little love. But there is a compelling call for us to re-engage in big love. It is appropriate to care about those who are closest to us and for the church in which we are members; however, it is time for us to engage in the big love for those persons who have no vital relationship with God in Jesus Christ. This is a God-sized love.

Has the Church been focused on its own instead of ones who have no relationship with Christ? Maybe the young man on the train was confused because the Church has not offered a big enough love.

Recently, I was in a gathering when we were invited to offer the peace of Christ to those around us. For several minutes people went around the room saying familiar words: the peace of Christ be with you. And also with you. What if we were as focused on offering the peace of Christ to a young man who boards a train as we are with each other? Do questions of that sort come to your mind?

Once again I’m drawn to the Acts of the Apostles. Reading the earliest history of the church is fascinating to me. In the first chapter, the apostles are gathered around the risen Christ. They ask him if this was the time when he would restore the kingdom to Israel. His reply was to tell them to not worry about the time. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Jesus was outlining a big vision for those first apostles. We know the story. It is bold. It is full of courage! It is a new thing. It is a big love! And I have to believe that our God is calling us to that new thing: to be bold, to have the courage to love as God loves. In other words, God wants to introduce us to people whom we do not know so that we may introduce them to the God who knows them, and loves them, and desires to be in relationship with them.

How do we discern who God is calling us to be or what God is calling us to do? What are the essentials so that as an annual conference we are not caught flat-footed with nothing to offer to a young man on a crowded train, or a family who moves from California to pursue a new career but knows no one, or a mother who works two jobs and her children are low-performing students needing someone to help them succeed, or an adolescent who believes he/she is not a beloved child of God?

How do you introduce them to the God who knows and loves them and desires a relationship with them? The “how” belongs to you because ministry is contextual. Ministry in Cuthand looks different and is different than ministry at Plymouth Park. The stories of the early Christian Church and its witness model for us the value of Christian ministry in context. Listening to our communities and people’s human hurts and hopes is essential for effective ministry of the laity and

the clergy. The core of the Gospel speaks with truth, but our practices of ministry evolve to not only be relevant, but to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Ministry is contextual, and yet there is accountability for our witness in the North Texas Conference. Again, this accountability for making disciples in local contexts is for laity as well as clergy. The strength of the early Methodist societies was the high expectations of members of those societies. A life of faith was a life of growing into the likeness of Christ. What set Methodists apart was John Wesley's emphasis on perfection: a sense that we as Christians were maturing and by God's grace we could grow into the likeness of Christ. What does perfection look like, not only for you as an individual, but for us as a church, the North Texas Conference? And as with any growth, or developing maturity, there are growing pains. But let's call them challenges; or because we are faithful and hopeful people—let's call them opportunities.

We must speak a common language. The early Christian community grew because it understood different contexts, but it was not easy. They grew exponentially as they looked beyond their own and learned to see people as God sees them—a Samaritan woman, an Ethiopian eunuch, and the dreaded Roman—as beloved children of God. The common language was centered in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And the life lived was for all—Jews and Greeks, males and females, freed and slaves. And the death was for all—Jews and Greeks, males and females, freed and slaves. And the resurrection was for all—Jews and Greeks, males and females, freed and slaves. The life, death, and resurrection was for you and me, but more importantly, for the people who are living in our communities who have no relationship with Jesus.

Living that life is a challenge and an opportunity.

The North Texas Conference is a healthy conference, and I will share more about that in a few minutes, but allow me to state challenges and opportunities for us.

As we gather here today, we are ten miles away from one of the fastest growing areas in Texas, if not the United States. The 380 Corridor from McKinney to Denton is beginning to explode with population growth. Celina, Prosper, Navo, Little Elm, and Aubrey are communities that are located between McKinney and Denton. From the Dallas North Tollway to west of Denton, the population will grow from slightly under 50,000 to almost 90,000 by 2025. In 2000, there were only 5000. What an opportunity to create new churches and communities of faith! Here is the challenge: the people who are moving along the corridor are not as religious, and we can and will explore and develop new ways for meeting new people with the Gospel.

We have the opportunity to fashion new ways of speaking and living the Gospel. Yet, we are not positioned to do so. The Cabinet and the four Centers are working on crafting a strategy. Elements of that strategy affirm the essential Christian belief in death and resurrection. The willingness to be open to new faces is vital.

There is population growth throughout the North Texas Conference. True, most of that growth is in the Dallas area with 80% of our church members living in the four counties of Dallas, Collin, Denton, and Rockwall. But there are people who do not have faith communities in the other 16 counties of the North Texas Conference, and they need our witness.

Years ago, I preached at Asbury First UMC in Rochester, New York. Dr. Bob Hill, now Dean of Marsh Chapel, Boston University, invited me. On Sunday morning after a blizzard the night before, imagine my surprise to preach to 900 persons in worship. In a conversation with Bob, I mentioned the difficulty in the Northeast to have growing churches. He said—that is an excuse. While population may have declined, and there may be some decay, there are still children in schools,

people living in communities, and people in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Those are words for us to hear. Instead of offering excuses of why we can't grow or have a Vacation Bible School or have a relationship with a public school, let's proclaim the Gospel. Let's move beyond a scarcity mentality to an abundant view that "we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us."

Another opportunity that we together will work on is One + One, the NTC initiative for each church to have a relationship with a local public school. We began last year. One hundred fifteen churches responded to the most recent survey regarding their involvement: East District: 40, Metro: 20, North Central: 26, Northwest: 29. Of the 115 churches, 94 (81%) reported that they served children in schools. The kinds of services, the numbers of children served, the numbers of volunteers, the averages, and totals regarding the services they provided are here.

Service Offered	Number of Churches	Average Number Served	Total Children Served
Reading	58	50	2,897
Tutoring	80	43	1,499
Mentoring	41	24	992
After-School	20	27	584
Summer Program	17	65	1,105
Feeding Program	29	843	24,450

Programs for children require adult volunteers. The table below lists the number of churches, the average number of volunteers per church, and the total number of volunteers. Note that no total is provided because volunteers may serve multiple programs.

Service Offered	Number of Churches	Average Number Serving	Total Adults Serving
Reading	58	12	663
Tutoring	80	12	416
Mentoring	41	13	510
After-School	20	9	163
Summer Program	17	52	880
Feeding Program	29	121	3,495

We served 24,450 children! And 3,495 adults were involved!

In addition, 54 churches (47%) reported they had other programs for school-age children than those represented in the chart, and 76 churches (66%) said they donated money to their local schools for other uses.

While the data represents both new and on-going programs, it is important to note that a number of these programs started in 2015 or 2016. Specifically, 33 (57%) Reading programs, 17 (21%) Tutoring programs, 17 (41%) Mentoring programs, 9 (45%) After-School programs, 7 (41%) Summer programs, and 11 (38%) Feeding programs started *after* we began the One + One initiative.

In summary, while the data reported only represents the 115 responding churches and cannot be generalized across the North Texas Conference, it is fair to say that churches in the conference are very active in their local public schools, that this initiative made a difference, and that many will continue to serve local schools.

We will continue One + One and invite and encourage other local churches to be involved.

I want to share some more good news. Often, we speak of vital congregations. What is a vital congregation? There is a metric index focusing on key signs of vitality.

- Professions of Faith—number of worshippers to make one profession of faith
- Small Groups—% of total worshippers who are adult Christian formation participants
- Mission—% of worshippers involved in a mission experience
- Mission Giving—% of local church spending going to mission
- Worship—% of congregations growing

Now let's observe where NTC is, as of the end of 2014:

- Professions of Faith—In the United States, the average number of worshippers is 23 required to make one profession of faith. In NTC, 16 worshippers are required to make 1 profession of faith. Only Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference and New York have better numbers; a conference with limited resources and a conference in the Northeast. Our rank is #3.
- Small Groups—U.S. average worshippers in small groups: 61%. NTC: 83%. Rank #5.
- Mission—48% of U.S. worshippers involved in mission experience. NTC: 88%. Rank #2.
- Mission Giving—% local church spending to mission giving, 18% vs. NTC 21%. Rank #7.
- Worship—30% of our churches are growing, which is average. But we aren't average in resources or talent. Rank #31.
- Overall Vitality—The North Texas Conference and the Baltimore-Washington Conference have a vitality index of 35% of our churches, only eclipsed by the Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference—37%. Rank #2.

This is not a moment of pride—but exhortation. Focus • focus • focus on making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Much of what we do is effective ministry, and we can build on the foundations that are already present. Let's work with these desired outcomes:

1. Continue growing the number of vital congregations, reach new people for Jesus Christ, intentionally forming mature disciples of Jesus, and send persons out to serve their communities. Effectiveness is defined by reaching new people.
2. Develop more young and diverse clergy and lay leaders.
3. Impact communities in the NTC through ongoing partnerships with public schools.

In conclusion:

1. We need to be more explicit with the message that our call is to reach new people for Christ.
2. Areas needing particular attention and emphasis at this time are the Highway 380 corridor, the southern sector of Dallas, and small membership churches in town & country settings.
3. As we seek to develop young and diverse leaders, we must leverage our financial resources and engage our human resources to form young persons as disciples of Jesus Christ.
4. In addition to the theological education provided by the seminaries, the conference must provide training for what is needed for vital congregations through Residency for those seeking ordination, the Course of Study for local pastors, and Continuing Education opportunities for other current pastors.

5. The Bishop, Cabinet, and conference centers will work to align and resource all of the “business” of the church to bring more vitality and fruitfulness to our witness. This will include attending to congregations, pastoral positions and clergy who are no longer vital and repositioning assets to bring vitality.

Personally, I want to thank you for your faithfulness and your commitment to reach new people for Jesus Christ. God bless you.

Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant

At the conclusion of Bishop McKee’s address, Cammy Gaston and Sheron Patterson (symbolizing this year’s 60th anniversary of the ordination of women in The UMC) led a service of reaffirmation of baptismal covenant for the conference. They invited all to move, as led, to one of twelve stations (prepared and served by deacons in celebration of this 20th year of the Order of Deacons), touch the water, and remember their baptism. Handbells and organ played, and Cynthia Wilson led the congregation into the closing song, “Witness.”

Committee on Episcopacy

Carmen Emery was accompanied on the platform by other committee members. She introduced Joan McKee to the conference, and Mrs. McKee was greeted with applause. Emery presented Joan with a gift, and Mrs. McKee thanked the conference for “just letting me be me.” She was especially thankful for the conference’s responses of kindness at the death of her mother. Emery thanked Bishop McKee for his service. Bishop McKee spoke of his fondness for the North Texas Conference. Emery thanked those who served on the Episcopacy Committee, particularly commending Scott Smith for his service as chair.

Agency Highlight: C. C. Young

A video followed, highlighting the ministry of C.C. Young. Bishop McKee recognized those representing C.C. Young to the Conference: Denise Aver-Phillips, Tom Christian, Russell Crews, Jennifer Griffin, and Heather Simpson.

Center for Connectional Resources

Jodi Smith presented the report from the Center for Connectional Resources. She introduced Anne Todd, Chair of Standing Rules Committee, who presented Legislative Items #2–5.

Standing Rules

Legislative Item #2 [LA 2] addressed a decision made by the General Conference in 2012 to do away with the Committee on Investigation (Clergy). The committee was later reinstated by decision of the Judicial Council, so this item was a request from the Conference Nominating Committee to reinstate the Committee on Investigation (Clergy) in the structure of the North Texas Conference, in accordance with the Judicial Council decision. It was approved.

Legislative Item #3 [LA 3] addressed a decision made by the General Conference in 2012 to do away with the Committee on Investigation (Diaconal); the Judicial Council overruled that action. This item was a request from the Conference Nominating Committee to reinstate the Committee on Investigation (Diaconal) in the structure of the North Texas Conference, in accordance with the Judicial Council decision. It was approved.

Legislative Item #4 [LA 4] was presented by the Conference Nominating Committee to provide additional conference-wide representation to the Committee and for a chair at-large to be elected for that committee. It passed.

Legislative Item #5 [LA 5] proposed to reduce the number of persons serving on the Courtesy and Resolutions Committee, as some of the planning tasks are now being handled by the Annual Conference Planning Team or the Committee on Episcopacy. It passed.

Bishop McKee invited the Conference to join him in thanking Anne Todd for her years of service.

Board of Pension and Health Benefits

Jodi Smith introduced Larry Womack, thanking him for his service. Womack talked about the rising cost of health insurance across the nation. In an endeavor to balance providing the best health coverage with making that health insurance affordable for churches, the Board of Pension and Health Benefits rolled out a plan last year, including dental and eye care.

Under the auspices of the Affordable Care Act, the Board of Pension and Health Benefits will offer six health insurance options in 2017. Rather than setting the coverage level for churches at the highest premium level, the second tier level will be offered, while the first tier level will continue to be available for \$17 extra per month and paid by those being covered. This mitigates the coverage increase from 8% to only 3% by utilizing the premium rebates from the year 2013-2014 totaling \$104,000.

Womack then presented Legislative Item #9 [LA 9], recommending the adoption of the percentage increase known as the “Cost-of-Living Adjustment” (currently 0%, as published by the Social Security Administration) as the established rate for the annual increase for pre-1982 service years. The resolution carried.

Womack then presented Legislative Item #7 [LA 7], proposing a 6.2% reduction in the BOPHB apportionment budget. The item carried.

Bishop McKee thanked Larry Womack and his team for the work that they do.

Commission on Archives and History

Jodi Smith introduced John Dillard, chair of Commission on Archives and History, to make a special presentation. Dillard reported that the annual conference has begun the process of digitizing 150 years of work, currently recorded in the Journals of the annual conference, but soon to be accessible by way of the conference website. He introduced conference archivist Francis Long. Long recognized three churches: First UMC, Richardson, which is 130 years old; Warren Chapel UMC, also 130 years old; and Floyd UMC Church in Greenville, 100 years old. She thanked those who have given journals for the collection at Bridwell Library at Perkins School of Theology, SMU. She recognized those churches that have church historians and encouraged all congregations to name an historian.

Dillard then announced that in 2017, the NTC will celebrate 150 years in service to our Lord. The Commission recommended ways to celebrate this upcoming sesquicentennial: write your church’s history, make a poster for next year’s annual conference session and bring it with you, plan a special worship service or make a video, include historical hymns at next year’s annual conference, or produce a cookbook with a recipe from every church in the annual conference.

Legacy Churches

Jodi Smith introduced the celebration of Legacy Churches, and Bishop McKee spoke about these churches. As the bishop called each church's name, he invited any who had served or worshipped in that congregation to come forward. The first was Price Memorial UMC, Denison. Following the close of WWII, in 1952, Price Memorial was established near what came to be Perrin AFB in "Frontier Village." At one time, as many as five weekly meetings were held to help persons with addictions, as well as to offer other significant and helpful services. Price Memorial UMC leaves behind a legacy of sobriety and peace.

The second was Wesley Memorial UMC. The first service was held there in 1909 as the South Wilcox Church. A tornado struck in 1948, but those in the church showed resilience. In 1949, they became Wesley UMC. In the 1970's a move was made to the west side of McKinney. The church is now landlocked and voted to close in order that their legacy might contribute to new places for new people along the Highway 380 corridor.

The third legacy church was Oak Cliff UMC, organized in 1887. Before Oak Cliff was annexed by the City of Dallas, it was its own municipality. The wonderful legacy of Oak Cliff UMC can be seen in its having given birth to Tyler Street UMC. Now, as Oak Cliff has voted to close, they have merged with Tyler Street UMC. While it may initially seem sad to see a church close, the legacy of congregations like the Oak Cliff UMC continues as proof that the church is not in the building.

The final legacy church was Arcadia Park UMC. It was established in 1934 in a suburban community west of Dallas and voted to close in 2015.

Bishop McKee said that the closing of a church is not as if everything dies. The church is really the lives we touch. These churches are not monuments; they honor the lives we touch. There is a season to all of our work. Bishop McKee prayed, and the conference celebrated the legacy of these churches as everyone stood to sing the "Doxology."

Process of Assessment of Local Church Potential

In accordance with ¶213 of the Book of Discipline, the North Central District Superintendent established a task force to consider the future of Elm Ridge UMC, located on the Highway 380 corridor, an area exploding with new people and new homes. Billy Echols-Richter, chair, explained the work of the task force and referred to the Mission Field Assessment Report. Echols-Richter acknowledged that conversations had been painful and difficult, with the task force recommending that Elm Ridge UMC be discontinued. Ron Henderson, District Superintendent, reported that the cabinet had also voted to discontinue Elm Ridge UMC.

Bishop McKee then called on Melvina Noles to speak to a handout which had been distributed to all conference members. Noles made a personal statement about her parents—her mother, who had died in the past year, and her father, who served Elm Ridge as their longest serving pastor. Noles reported that a couple joined the church the day before, even knowing that the church might be closed. She described Elm Ridge as a financially solvent church that has been able to help the community. Vote was taken on Legislative Item #20 [LA 20], motion to close Elm Ridge; the motion carried, and Bishop McKee led the conference in prayer.

First Witness

Bishop McKee introduced the first of four speakers, who were invited to offer their personal witness. The bishop explained that Dallas County Judge Clay Jenkins had called him to talk about the possibility of the North Texas Conference providing water coolers to Sandbranch, an unincorporated area of southeast Dallas County. When Bishop McKee went to Sandbranch to participate in the water cooler distribution, he met Mark McPherson, who had joined Christ UMC, Plano, in December, 2015.

McPherson said that he has lived in the area of Christ Church since before the church was built at its current location. He watched its construction and observed how the church served the community; he was drawn to the congregation's witness. One Sunday he noticed an item in the bulletin about disaster relief training. He had seen his dad do that and had always hoped to do it himself, perhaps discovering along the way some place where his training as an environmental lawyer might be needed.

McPherson got in touch with Marji Hill and ended up eventually on a roof and having chain saw training as well. While he was working on a lot with chain saws, Hill began talking about an area close by that had no running water, no sewer, no trash pickup. He could not believe that there was such a place so close.

On February 29, he first put his feet in Sandbranch, where he heard a pastor say that in two days 10 different governmental agencies were going to show up. McPherson knew that the community needed its own voice, its own expertise, its own plan to work with each of the governmental entities. He also knew that the community could not afford such services; so, for the first time in his life, he took on a pro bono case.

For the general population, McPherson says he became involved in Sandbranch by "divine coincidence," but he knows there is nothing coincidental about how God used him in a specific place at a specific time. McPherson says that he was prepared for just this witness opportunity by having been born and living in a rural area, having a father and grandfather who were pastors, and coming to the Dallas area following law school.

Retiree Videos

Katherine Betz recalled her ministry at C.C. Young as the most memorable and spiritual experience she could have had—being with the residents and their families, especially those who were dying in the hospice area. The person who spiritually journeyed with her throughout her ministry was Joan La Barr—from seminary, through ordination, and throughout her time at C.C. Young. Other companions on her journey were Walt Purkey and Terry Parsons. Laity were just as involved as these clergy colleagues, encouraging her along the way, especially Richard Stanford. Her plans now include supervising "honey-do" projects, having the opportunity to visit her family in Florida, and to being able to go and be with the grandchildren.

Kathy is living out her witness by learning to be an ombudsman for the State of Texas, advocating for those who have no one to be their advocate. She sees a need for an older adult ministry program which teaches people how to be with older adults.

Charles Carnahan has spent most of his time in extension ministry outside the conference, and he appreciates the opportunity he has had to see the church worldwide. He has been fortunate to be able to travel on behalf of the church, representing agencies of the church, and to experience the

breadth and depth of the church. He expressed thanks to his colleagues, both ministers and bishops who have appointed him beyond the local church. He especially thanked William Boyd Smith, who was a mentor to him early in his ministry and taught him how to do ministry well. At this point in his life, Charles is probably going to take a break and reflect and refresh his spiritual journey. He will be intentional about enjoying activities such as golf, exploring, being a sugar artist ... and not having to report to anyone.

The way Charles has lived out his witness is through the way he has lived his life, trying to be clear that what he does is ministry—living out his call—even if he is not in the pulpit every Sunday.

Linda Elms has enjoyed working with children, hearing them ask questions, seeing them go through confirmation, watching them grow up. She is thankful to the parents who enabled her to do children's ministry. She thanked Frank Alegria and the congregation at Duncanville for being so supportive of children's ministry and the many things they do. She began in the Northwest Texas Conference and she thanked the many women and men who helped her there. She and her husband will be moving to Katy, Texas, to live with their daughter for a bit and stay close there. They will also travel.

Through her years of diaconal ministry, Linda always felt that her servanthood was her witness: going on mission trips; being a part of the community, especially in the behind-the-scene events that happened at church; doing whatever was necessary to make ministry happen.

Walt Lunde appreciates most loving and serving the people, particularly the people of Pleasant Valley UMC, where he served for eight years before going to Lovers Lane UMC, where he is currently appointed. It has meant a great deal to serve people all over the globe. The most important person in his life in fulfillment of his ministry has been his wife, Cissy. It has meant so much to Walt have the support of his wife and children. Professionally, the love and guidance of his district superintendents, Carol Woods and Cammy Gaston, has been significant. Additionally, senior pastors Mark Craig, Paul Goodrich, and Stan Copeland have played a big part in his ministry, as have mentor pastors Rene Lawson and Jack Gibson.

Walt will be continuing part-time on staff at Lovers Lane UMC, yet he is looking forward to more time with Cissy and his family. Pastoral care has been Walt's highlight, and there have been many sacred moments that people have shared with him in their toughest times and in their times of joy.

Mona Millard gave thanks to have been able to see the transforming power of Jesus Christ in different people in her ministry, especially one congregational member, who now sits on death row but whom she has witnessed develop in his relationship with Jesus Christ. Seeing the children grow and mature has been a delight, and she gives thanks to God for giving her the strength to do what she needed to do.

Mona has six acres in East Texas and plans to live in the country, but she does not plan on really retiring. She will continue in ministry on her own and will be working part time for two churches in East Texas.

Sandra Minor spoke of the people and helping them find their way to Christ as having been the most important part of her ministry. She is thankful to many people, especially the Vista Ridge UMC congregation, who made her transition from seminary to ministry so easy. She stays in contact with them; they are her foundation.

Sandi wants to be wife, mother, grandmother, and continue ministering to all those God puts in her path. Retirement is rather bittersweet. She is not quite sure what God will put in her path; but with

every fiber of her being, she has sought to be an obedient disciple of Christ and to carry that abroad and at home in ministry. She has loved and prayed for people at the side of the road. She has a firm belief that God loves everyone equally and that people are called to learn how to prop each other up on every leaning side. That is her witness.

Ben Read loved meeting different church members. It was always amazing to him when, in Bible studies, he could just see the light bulbs flashing in their minds; it made understanding scriptures easier to them. He thanked his wife because when he was discouraged, she lifted him up. Ben has had several pastoral mentors along the way, especially Ray Hennigh who taught him what ministry was all about; David Shawver, Glenn Vickers, Gary Regan, and a host of others have meant a lot to him over the years.

Ben's main plan is to be able to travel and visit their 11 grandchildren. He is going to attempt a small garden. He has lived out his witness in trying to be a living witness to God's love, especially in the church camps where he has worked—26 of them. His gift has been more in teaching than any other field. His favorite scripture comes from Romans 8, which says that there is nothing which can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Ben has tried to be a witness to that truth.

David Rucker gave thanks for the times when you see someone's life change and you realize that God was able to use you in a way that affected that change. He thanked his wife Camille who has felt blessed in her own calling to be a pastor's wife. He is grateful for people in the local churches, especially for the people in those churches who have stated their support.

David plans to be a part-time associate this next year at Cornerstone UMC. He has been involved in teaching the Dave Ramsey courses and hopes to continue to do this. He has loved walking this journey with others and seeing the impact made on people when they realize they have made a difference. He has loved being in mission with others.

Billy Shaddox felt called to work with smaller churches and work with people. He thanked his wife and family. He was married a month and a half after he took his first appointment. Jack and Clara Gibson went along with him and his wife on this journey, and he is grateful.

Billy said that retirement is not something that one does. He is a follower of Jesus Christ, and he will continue to follow him after retirement. He will continue to try to live in a way that illustrates what he believes. The past two years have been years of crisis for his family, and they have had the opportunity to demonstrate their beliefs.

Jack Soper served 25 years as the North Texas Conference representative to the Texas Conference of Churches and embraced its ecumenism. They were able to do significant work there. He is grateful for the companionship of his wife Marti and for the 10 years of service with her at Arapaho UMC. He also expressed gratitude for Harold Beck, a professor who served as his mentor when he was studying scripture at Boston University School of Theology.

Jack is being trained to be an interim pastor. He has read a thousand books, and he now plans to write one. He expects to do some fly fishing. He is clear as to how he has lived out his witness. He quoted scripture from Galatians where Paul said, "It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me, and the faith I live is the faith of the Son of God." When Jack bears witness to the gospel, it is with the church, and particularly the churches he has served, as they have truly lived out the essence of shalom, which means that we are all living out the will of God that holds us together. He has loved being a United Methodist minister. He cannot imagine doing anything else.

Chair of Conference Relations Committee Stan Copeland invited Bishop McKee and Jan Davis to assist him in presenting pins and certificates to the retirees and in thanking them for their years of service: Kathy Betz, Charles Carnahan, Sandra Minor, Ben Read, Judith Reedy, David Rucker, Billy Shaddox, Jack Soper, Walt Lunde, Patricia Mahaffey, Mona Millard, Carlos Nasciemento, John Richardson, and Linda Elms.

On behalf of the Annual Conference, Bishop McKee declared his thanks to the retirees for 300 years of ministry, and they received a standing ovation.

Keynote Speaker

The first keynote speaker was Danielle Shroyer, author of *A Boundary-Breaking God*, graduate of Baylor University and Princeton Theological Seminary, and theologian-in-residence for The Journey Church. She lives in Dallas with her husband and two middle school children. Shroyer started by stating that people just aren't much coming to church these days and that blame has been cast in many directions. It is not that people don't want to get up anymore on a Sunday morning. It is that they don't believe the same things in the same ways anymore, if they believe it at all. They don't pray; they don't give; they don't read the Bible; they don't attend; they don't volunteer with the church, and they don't share their faith with others. Most of them came from Christian families, but they have changed their focus from Christian to family.

What does it mean to bear witness in the world of ISIS, and the November presidential election, and global warming, and Black Lives Matter, and gun violence? What does it mean to bear witness in a world that has stopped watching? Most eyes these days are more likely to be on the newest Facebook feed. This makes us despair and fearful; and when fear takes over, we simply move in circles. We are more likely to take the buzz-feed approach, to use whatever is necessary to get people's attention. This amounts to a lot of noise. It does nothing to quell fear.

You graduate from seminary and your job is to turn their heads past you to Jesus. At the end of the day we are sitting in the marketplace, demanding that people respond the way they once did. We are called to make disciples. We would not be sitting here today had it not been for a great cloud of witnesses. Be their witness to Jesus because it's all we know.

How are we to bear witness? We are not so much to call attention *to* Jesus; rather we are to bear witness *like* Jesus. The Buddhist tradition requires that we listen. To bear witness is to live a life of compassion. It requires us to abide when everything inside us wants to flee, to do anything but listen. We would much rather be doing something to feel worthy.

We live in a world that may scorn us for being Christian, but our responsibility is to bear witness, because we are to become people of compassion. Bernie Glassman is both Jewish and Buddhist. He is founder of the Zen Peacemakers. Years ago, he brought a group of people to Auschwitz to meditate for five days. In the center of their circle was a red box. Inside was the death book, the names of all who lost their lives at Auschwitz. They took turns chanting the names of the dead. They chanted the names carefully, bearing witness to the horrors of human existence; there was now nothing anyone could do, but that was enough. Who else but resurrection people have the ability to go into a place of death and bear witness to resurrection and hope?

When Shroyer asked Nicole Flores what she thought scrolling on social media past horrors does to our souls, her response was, "I don't know, but it worries me." What if we just stopped trying to save the church and instead funneled all our energy to bearing witness to all the suffering in this world? Maybe we can trust that we can just be the church, regardless of whether anyone is watching. When we become the church, the right action arises by itself. Loving action arises when

we listen. It begins with attentive eyes and open hearts – every day – honoring the people right in front of us. Bearing witness is a sacred art. Love your neighbor as yourself and tell them, “I see you.”

MONDAY AFTERNOON BUSINESS SESSION

Barbara Marcum opened with prayer.

Board of Ordained Ministry

Jan Davis, chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM), presented the board’s report. She noted that the commissioning classes are getting progressively younger; the board has been actively recruiting younger, diverse, passionate candidates. Davis recognized Jill Jackson-Sears for her work in recruiting. She further stated that the BOM covers the entire life of clergy persons.

Blair Thompson-White and Matt Tuggle have been working to redesign the residency program which they will launch with this new commissioning class.

Davis invited Timothy Morrison to join her so that they could thank everyone. Morrison asked for all BOM members who had served during the last quadrennium to stand. He then asked for those who had served on the district committees to stand. He recognized Duane VanGiesen for his time spent in organizing.

Morrison introduced Marsha Middleton, who recognized those persons who had completed licensing school in the last 12 months and joined the ranks of local pastors. Middleton noted that this year is the 200th anniversary of the Course of Study School. Middleton invited Joseph Baker, Steve Knox, Sungmoon Lee, Deana Roe, Chad Mogus, Jamie Nelson, and Leon Veazey to come forward and be recognized for completing the North Texas Licensing School. In addition, Middleton introduced Daniel Lewis and Wayne Walters, who completed licensing school in other conferences and Georgiennette Haddock, a new local pastor who was not required to finish licensing school since she has a Master of Divinity degree.

Billy Echols-Richter, standing in for Elizabeth Moseley, presented certificates for those who have gone through several steps—course work, practical experience, interviews, and written work – to be trained as experts recognized by The UMC in specific areas of ministry: Christine Bouton, sacred music; Kay Ash, music and children’s ministry.

Echols-Richter, chair of Preparations and Qualifications, presented those being commissioned on the deacon track: William Mauldin, Camille Reeder, and Adam White. He then presented those being commissioned on the elder track: Megan Davidson Danner, Raegan Gilliland, Jane Graner, Patrick Littlefield, Chad McSwain, Geoffrey Moore, Katie Newsome, Samantha Parson, and Ramsey Patton. All came to the front to be recognized.

Echols-Richter then presented those to be ordained as elders: Edgar Bazan, Scot Bontrager, Patrick Hoffman, Clayton Horton, Steve Martinez, Jenna Morrison, and Susan Robb. (Robb is transitioning from deacon to elder.) They received a standing ovation.

Bishop McKee said a special word of thanks to the BOM and to Jan Davis, chair, as she is appointed to a church in the Arkansas conference.

Center for New Church Development and Congregational Transformation

The report began with a video. Jim Ozier stated that being a witness is the purpose of the Center for New Church Development and Congregational Transformation. Ozier referenced Saul's receiving his sight back and being instructed by Ananias to be a witness, be baptized, and have his sins washed away. Why delay?

Gloria Fowler said that hundreds of churches have already decided to get up and get going. They have been involved in the Healthy Church Initiative (HCI). The center has completed over thirty of these initiatives. She focused on two of those. Jill Jackson-Sears spoke to the effectiveness of HCI, which gave Lake Highlands UMC foundation and momentum. It helped the church learned more about itself. Small Church Initiative (SCI) was featured with a video on Ponder UMC; it revealed to them ways they could improve. It enabled them to embrace change. It identified programs which they loved but which were not benefiting the church. They are now focused as a church together on the same things.

Ozier asked all churches who have gone through the HCI over the past three years to stand. He recognized that there are other processes to help churches be a living witness. Ozier called the congregation to pray. In his prayer, he said that sometimes we are frozen rather than chosen. At that time a "statue" appeared on the stage in the form of a golden cowboy—frozen.

Ozier and Fowler went on to address their recent study on the impact of various initiatives on their churches. They discovered that churches that are doing something are better than churches who are doing nothing. Edgar Bazan spoke to this and to the joining of Oak Cliff UMC and Tyler Street UMC. Ed Lantz, pastor of Tyler Street, spoke of the process to help two congregations become one, with their district superintendent guiding them. They began worshipping in various and multiple ways.

Ozier encouraged churches not to delay. Derek Jacobs spoke of his starting The Village in 2008, of the highs and lows, and the incredible impact of the new churches. A donor gave 10 acres for this. Ozier said that almost all of the new churches struggle just to get to viability, the expense is so great. Most meet in schools and strip-mall shopping centers. Ozier showed a video of Melissa UMC. Tommy Brumett talked about the members of First, McKinney, who lived in Melissa, and how excited they became about a new church start. They did hit a flat spot, and they struggled. They wondered if they should continue. Stacey Piyakuhn recalled the moment when Jim Ozier called to ask if she would consider going to Melissa. Her first question was, "Where is that?" She called it the best decision she had ever made. There are new faces, and they have walked through valleys; but they are encouraged and have a good foundation. Ozier observed that First UMC McKinney had chosen to be a living witness and become a mother church rather than remain frozen in time. Ozier encouraged other churches to consider being mother churches.

Not every church grows the same way, noted Ozier. He then introduced Mike Baughman, pastor of Union Coffee Shop, a new and different church start. Baughman talked of seeing an ancient map on which was an area marked, "Here Be Dragons." We fear the fire of the unknown and avoid the path of dragons, unless, of course, you have ever wanted to ride a dragon. If you want to ride a dragon, there is no better place to be than "Here Be Dragons." It can be a warning, but it can also be an invitation. The Land of Dragons is the unknown wild space that most church planters operate in—where many are consumed by the threatening terrain, and some learn how to fly and bring the fire back to the church that sent them. This is why we need to support the bishop's capital campaign. Baughman said that, in the toolbox session later in the afternoon, he would tell the stories of 12 Methodist church planters who have broken conventional rules of church planting, four of whom are from the NTC. Union is one of those who still finds ways to contribute. Most of

those who worship at Union fit the description of Shroyer's Post-Christian, and the average age is 25. Three seminary students have emerged from Union, one of whom, Katie Newsome, will be ordained tonight; small children's capes for sick children all over the world are made out of Union with the cross and flame on them and distributed. Baughman encouraged the conference to dream, to visit the new church starts; and while there, to ask to see the dragon.

Ozier asked all planters and new church starts to stand and be recognized. He then asked how one would make the statue come alive. What if instead of waiting, we welcomed people with open arms, and what if we went out and invited others? As he spoke, the frozen statue began to come alive. The statue then began to dance, as the conference applauded. "Get up!" exclaimed Ozier.

Agency Highlight: Lydia Patterson Institute

Larry George, Director of the Center for Missional Outreach, introduced the Lydia Patterson Institute, which, for over a hundred years, has met the challenges of providing for students in multi-cultural and sometime dangerous environments. George recognized Dr. Socorro de Anda and her very effective leadership of LPI for 21 years. A video showed the rigorous course work and extenuating situations of students who sometimes go on to be university professors, returning back to LPI to teach. Faculty and staff are committed to instilling solid values and academically superior education. Over 98% of the students at LPI graduate, a testimony to the academic excellence of LPI; and they accomplish this in a deteriorating barrio. LPI is in desperate need of repair. The roof leaks, and the building is in serious disrepair. LPI will continue in order to build a better world on both sides of the wall. Bishop McKee thanked de Anda and encouraged the conference to include LPI in a vacation or trip.

Fellowship Time

Reagan Gilliland called on Lisa Greenwood and Jack Soper to play "Lamentations or Taylor Swift." It provided considerable comic relief for the entire conference.

Second Witness

Kim Brannon began by telling a story that started at last year's annual conference. It happened when Bishop McKee challenged everyone last year to spend one hour, one day a week, mentoring one child. This spoke to her. She had always been interested in working with children and so she left annual conference last year resolved to find a child. Before she could find a child, the child found her.

She received an email from friends at Project Transformation asking her to spread the word in her church about finding someone to work with a special little boy in their after-school program. He has learning differences and some health concerns. They were looking for someone to work with him once a week; he needed some one-on-one attention. She felt like God was knocking her on the head with this information. This was her special child. Later that week she went to the after-school project at Grace UMC and met Isaac, her special child, a funny, autistic, diabetic child being raised by a single refugee mom from the war-torn South Sudan.

From the moment she sat next to Isaac at one of those little tables where your knees don't fit, she and he both knew that she would be coming back. They became fiercely protective of one another. One Wednesday, she was with Isaac as they walked by the beautiful historic stained glass windows in the sanctuary at Grace. Isaac became transfixed, looking at the picture of Jesus in the Garden with the light shining through the glass. Brannon asked him if he knew who Jesus was. Isaac said,

“God.” Brannon knew from his answer that Isaac would always know that Jesus was with him and God would give him strength and courage.

Isaac will always have to struggle. He has learning differences. He has a mom who struggles with language and culture and poverty. But, what Brannon knows about Isaac now is that he is equipped, empowered by the Holy Spirit. He will do great. Her hope is that those listening will be inspired by Bishop McKee this year, or by Danielle Shroyer, and will come away saying, “So this one time at Annual Conference....”

Afternoon Keynote Address

Bishop McKee introduced the afternoon keynote speaker, Scott Chrostek. He met Chrostek many years ago through Bill Ritter when they were at a large church conference for pastors. Bill, Scott, and Bishop McKee share a love for the Detroit Tigers. He went on to say that the Texas Rangers have replaced the Tigers as his favorite team. Chrostek is the pastor of Resurrection Downtown, and he will talk about what he has done there in a place where people who come are nominally Christian at best. Chrostek and his wife are in ministry there together.

Chrostek said that he is still a Tigers fan and had not expected a baseball introduction. He introduced his wife Wendy by a picture. They met at Duke Divinity School. He noted that she was not here because they have a young son named Freddy. He explained why it was important to introduce Freddy, because for the last 8 years, he and his wife had been struggling with infertility. Then they were surprised and they are thankful; still they know that this is not the story for everyone in their situation.

He was called to plant Resurrection Downtown which is located in Kansas City, Missouri. He needed to report to three different superintendents, three different bishops, and to Adam Hamilton—seven different bosses. Chrostek recalled the parable of the rich man who asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, and he said that the passage was about requiring extravagant generosity and is at the heart of what leaders of churches are called to do—embody extravagant generosity. This is easy to say, but hard to swallow.

Chrostek said that our ability to do this hinges upon our openness to this passage of scripture. This was not Chrostek’s path; his family had only gone to church on Christmas and Easter, and this scripture was not his guide. He was aiming for Wall Street. His degree was in economics. He found himself at an early age where he wanted to be yet he was empty. Somehow he found himself at Duke Divinity School and came face to face with the appointive system. He found himself in places where there was no running anything. His first pastoral visit was to 99-year-old Dolly Case whose home was insulated by mattresses in the window and who had chickens.

He sat in a rocking chair beside her. He listened and he prayed with her. As he got up, she edged toward the porch and in one moment, she wrung the neck of that chicken and gave it to Chrostek. Here was this woman who had nothing but chickens in her front yard. She had nothing and yet found a way to give him something. For the first time, he understood Luke 18. Dolly Case witnessed to him.

Our witness begins when we give even when we think we do not have much to offer. Most of the people in downtown Kansas City have a lot to give but they do not know how to give. The work that they are doing does not match who they feel they are in their heart. How does the work that we do in the church affect uber drivers? In other words, does the work we do affect people who are walking up and down the streets? This is the stuff that Jesus did everywhere he went. Are we doing this? How? This was the driving question that they asked in downtown Kansas City.

Chrostek described the unlikely nine people who were the “misfits” elected to help start Resurrection Downtown. He said he did not have many gifts but he did have the gift of being able to consume volumes of coffee, so he went with that. For the next 31 days, he went to 33 coffee shops, initiating conversations, marking each one by moving a penny from his right pocket to his left until he had moved 35 pennies each day. Many responded by trying to get out of the conversation as quickly as possible but Chrostek would hand them his card and some would pass that card on to someone who needed a pastor. The “misfits” were present all over downtown at races and events, handing people water, inviting them to Resurrection, giving of themselves to strangers so that they could become friends. Within the first four months, the 9 turned into 400. Now they worship over 1,000 on Sundays.

FOCUS was their group who literally focused wherever they went on having the eyes to see everyone wherever they went, for inviting and engaging, for building Christian community. Everyone had a different thing they could be doing, according to their gifts. To some, it looks like playing Fantasy football games; to others, video games. Make friends out of strangers to introduce them to Jesus Christ. Not only do you invite others, you say yes when they invite you. He said yes to attending a Snoo Dog concert. He sought to get invited everywhere he went.

We need to be engaging all different mediums, so we need to be wherever people are speaking in ways they can understand. Always stay open to interruptions, because if you are looking to meet new people, to be interrupted by those who do not know God, all that work happens outside. He recalled a meeting at a coffee shop with a fully tatted guy while Chrostek was planning worship with someone in his church. The tatted man sat down with them as they planned. An attorney from the church walked in while they were planning. He joined them. By the end of that time, they prayed for each other. The guy with tattoos is now their worship leader. You have to stay open to interruptions. God calls us to stay open and equips us to respond. Chrostek invited everyone to close by praying the covenant prayer.

Toolbox Sessions

The toolbox sessions featured sessions by keynote speakers Scott Chrostek and Danielle Shroyer, and Witness with Music was led by worship leader Cynthia Wilson; all of these shared their thoughts on witnessing. Mike Baughman spoke on how successful church planters are turning conventional wisdom upside down. Wes Magruder addressed the practice of dialogue around difficult issues and Marti Soper and Becky David Hensley introduced the Luke 4 Initiative’s practice of inviting Witness-Stories—of evoking individuals’ experiences of what breaks their hearts and might change the world for them, calling them to leadership. First UMC Garland’s relationship with the Islamic Association of North Texas served as an example of Witness-Stories that lead to action. Book signings by the keynote speakers followed the toolbox sessions.

MONDAY EVENING

Service of Ordination

St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Plano

Reverend Robert Hasley welcomed the conference to St. Andrew United Methodist Church, Plano, for the service of ordination, recognition of orders and commissioning. Music was provided by St. Andrew UMC Chancel Choir and Bishop Arts Brass with Dr. Cynthia Wilson serving as guest worship leader and Dr. Jonathan M. Gregoire as organist. Each musical selection supported the message of taking the Word to the people. Nineteen servants of God were presented, on behalf of

the Board of Ordained Ministry in this Annual Conference, for commissioning or ordination in three different capacities.

Those persons commissioned for the work of an elder were: Claudia Megan Davidson Danner, Raegan Jane Gilliland, Jane Carnathan Graner, Patrick Evan Littlefield, Chad Edward McSwain, Geoffrey Christome Moore, Katherine Harrison Newsome, Samantha Ann Parson, and Ramsey Burke Patton.

Those persons commissioned for the work of a deacon were: William Hower Mauldin, Camille Elaine Reeder, and Adam Gilbert White.

The persons ordained as elders were: Edgar Gerardo Bazan Garza, Scot Christian Bontrager, Patrick Michael Hoffman, Clayton McLain Horton, Steven Dale Martinez, Jenna Nicole Morrison, and Susan Gorham Robb.

As Bishop Michael McKee placed his hand on the each person, he called upon Christ Jesus to “pour out your Holy Spirit” upon these messengers of God’s Word as we send them out to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.

The evening’s sermon was provided by Bishop William T. “Bill” McAlilly, resident bishop from Tennessee who wove wit and storytelling to share many powerful messages for the newly ordained and commissioned clergy. He said he received his “real” ordination when an experienced pastor asked him to accompany him to an auto accident site of some college girls shortly after he had been ordained. This event taught him how to talk to someone in the face of pain and suffering. The night of Jesus’ ordination his question was, “Whose feet will you wash?” He washed all his disciples’ feet, even though there was treachery in the inner circle.

He reminded them that they were being set apart to work for Jesus, and that we cannot be unbaptized. In our baptism we are no longer human. There is a cognitive dissonance that occurs when the story we tell about ourselves is not an accurate picture. To love one another is to lay down any claims that we are better. We will sense God sending us to love. Bishop McAlilly told the ordinands to “love one another, serve one another, and go wherever God sends you. This is your call; I pray that you will receive it.”

The offering for the evening supported The Zip Code Connection. The Zip Code Connection is a way to connect the Word to communities and to each other. The current communities being served by the Zip Code Connection are in South Dallas/Fair Park and in Red River County. As the service ended, the congregation sang This Little Light of Mine, with each person passing offering the flame of their candle to the next as a symbol of taking the light into the world.

A reception for the newly commissioned and ordained followed immediately after the service in the Smith Worship Center.

TUESDAY MORNING BUSINESS SESSION

June 7, 2016

Cynthia Wilson opened the morning session with music, and Dianna Masters led in prayer. Bishop McKee introduced the ordinand reflections.

Videos of Newly Ordained

Steve Martinez said that small churches must not be abandoned. He was Mexican-American living in Western Pennsylvania, where he grew up in the United Methodist Church and saw how they were Christ to people. He thanked Milton Gutierrez, Roy Spore, and Cheryl Murray for mentoring him; he also expressed gratitude for the inspiration of his aunt. Martinez is excited about the future and the call to speak out into the world.

Clay Horton is interested in helping people align their values with their lives. He noted that we can spend millions consuming products that oppress people or millions on lifting people out of their poverty through their hard work. The church has the opportunity to live into our baptismal vows and stand up against violence and trafficking. He remembered sitting by the bedside of a dying 90-year-old husband of a woman. He had not attended church with her but asked to be baptized there in her presence. Horton did that. He is excited about a lifetime of watching God work.

Jenna Morrison is excited to serve in the NTC and said that learning will give her the most joy. Ministry is about looking at people and seeing them as children of God, created for a purpose; it's like a camera lens that allows God to change our aperture to what God is teaching rather than the setting of our own ego. Her college pastor Kip Gills was a great mentor to her. The best witness has been her brother, who has taught her healing out of brokenness and getting to have "do-overs" as Jesus modeled.

Edgar Bazan finds joy in teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. The wisdom of the gospel strengthens people. Preaching and teaching and having relationships are ways to witness as an encourager. Bazan has been surrounded by mentors: Owen Ross, Andy Stoker, and Tim McLemore. Because of his ministry, he is what he is, and he is excited to do whatever lies ahead. God calls us to move forward.

Patrick Hoffman has a passion for helping people grow and experience God's grace through all the means of grace that we have—worship, Bible study, sacraments, mission trips. Being a witness is recognizing the love of God that is always around us. He hopes to show up in presence to that witness. Two years ago, he began dating and ended up in El Salvador on a mission trip with his wife Jen. She is his partner in ministry, and he could not imagine having a better partner in ministry. He is excited to be able to see how the church will continue to witness to the love of God.

Scot Bontrager is most passionate about connecting people with the head and the heart of the gospel, what it is to be truly Christian. His daily routine includes the hospital, hospice, and teaching. Most of the time his ministry is just showing up, just being in the room with people. A witness loves the person in whatever context. Bontrager believes in radical openness to whatever comes next. He tries to stay more in tune with what is God doing here. As a member of the Order of St. Luke, he prays the daily offices. The classroom is a big part of his ministry.

Susan Robb was first a high school teacher and understands the importance of education. Education breaks the cycle of poverty and oppression. She sits on the board of New Friends, New Life, helping women get an education; it tells them about the love of Christ. The heart of everything we do is education about the love of Jesus Christ. The sacraments explore calling through the Lord's Supper, and they express deeply a way to witness. Susan's husband has great integrity through his quiet faith; he shows love. Alyce McKenzie was a great witness who taught her that preaching should not be boring. The world is deeply hungry for peace, for fidelity.

Council on Finance and Administration

Bishop McKee reminded the conference that we come together every day to remember that we are children of God and that we pray with a common voice. May we model the church that God is leading us to become. Bishop McKee called on Jodi Smith to bring a piece of legislation that was missed yesterday. Smith called attention to Legislative Item #18 [LA 18] and Legislative Item #19 [LA 19]. Both should have been on the consent calendar.

Legislative Item #18 [LA 18] calls for the merger of Marvin UMC and Whitewright UMC. Legislative Item #19 [LA 19] calls for the closing of Living Faith UMC. Bishop McKee asked that we take the items together. They were approved.

Bishop McKee thanked Clayton Oliphint and all the members of CF&A. Although Oliphint lamented following Cynthia Wilson's worship with the presentation of apportionments, he went on to list all the signs of life, including Wesley campus ministry on the campus of the University of Texas at Dallas, new church starts, Healthy Church Initiative and Small Church Initiative, camping experiences, camping opportunities, Project Transformation interns and SIMterns (Summer Interns in Ministry). Lives are being changed. The NTC had a payout of 95.33% in 2015. That is reason to rejoice. Oliphint thanked the Northwest District for achieving 100% payout for the 24th year. He also thanked the East District for paying 100% the 21st year. The Metro District achieved a payout of 96.5%, the highest payout for that district in 10 years.

Oliphint presented three legislative items for the 2016 Annual Conference. CF&A recommended the election of Jodi S. Smith as Conference treasurer for the 2017–2020 quadrennium. The second item was the recommendation of Ratliff and Associates as the auditing firm for the Conference Treasury for the 2016 audit. This will be the fourth year to engage this firm. A change in auditors is recommended every 6–8 years. The final recommendation was a budget that had been adjusted downward slightly as a result of General Conference actions. The final General Conference portion of the NTC budget is now set at 3.59 rather than 3.62 million, as printed in the Conference workbook. The final conference budget would, therefore, call for an increase of .87% rather than 1.93%, as originally anticipated. This reduction means that the total apportionment budget is now a .64% increase over last year. CF&A worked very hard to hold the annual conference budget to an increase of only .48% or a little less than ½ of 1%. CF&A is recommending the final total for General, Jurisdictional and Annual Conference Apportionments be set at \$11,774,900, for a net increase of .64% over the previous year's budget. Our churches, by contrast, showed an approximate 3% increase in their budgets for the year.

Oliphint moved the adoption of the three items.

Bill Gavitt asked how much money is available for scholarships for certified candidates. Oliphint said that last year the NTC paid \$185,000 for 40 certified candidates. Oliphint said that if a person will get certified before they go to seminary, there is much more funding available to them. Gavitt moved to increase the budget by \$200,000 for the purpose of scholarships. Bishop McKee stated that Highland Park UMC has dedicated \$150,000 to scholarships for the coming year. Ouida Lee spoke in favor of supporting scholarships for candidates; but, since the churches in the conference will be called to financially support these scholarships, she suggested including a commitment requiring the recipients to serve a specified number of years in the NTC. Roy Atwood, member of Greenland Hills UMC, lay member from the Metro District, and Perkins student, rose for a point of order to state that this condition already exists: Scholarship recipients commit to serve for 5 years in the North Texas Conference. Oliphint spoke against Gavitt's amendment to add to the budget for scholarships. Frank Alegria rose in support of Gavitt's amendment. Oliphint said he believed

the capital campaign would help with the matter of student debt. The motion to amend the budget by \$200,000 failed.

The budget presented by CF&A passed.

Oliphint updated the conference on the CF&A work on the capital campaign. Two years ago, Mission Advancement based in McKinney was engaged to conduct a feasibility study. They have been in conversation with significant entities and are very excited about what the capital campaign could mean for the NTC. The cost of land is becoming prohibitive for new church plants to try to buy land. This is a concern, in addition to the debt load of young clergy. The capital campaign will be conducted differently from previous campaigns. This new format has worked well in Indiana.

Bishop McKee explained that repairs and upgrades to Bridgeport are really needed. The bishop pointed out that part of forming persons for Christian discipleship is how we do camping. Secondly, he explained that we know we have to get back in the land business, in partnership with new church starts, because no matter how well they do, buying land is an expensive business in the growing North Texas area. Finally, Bishop McKee noted that the NTC is looking for more than 12 million dollars for this capital campaign. The campaign leaders will not be going to every church to tell them what their percentage of the total goal should be theirs. Instead, they will be seeking out individuals to help the campaign move forward. Bishop McKee said that he and the conference need to be comfortable with the way the money is raised. It will take a year or two, but we will be able to significantly fund the work.

Oliphint stated that anyone interested in making a lead gift in the campaign should share with the bishop at the break. Bishop McKee said that we have the capacity to do well. Oliphint asked all the members of CF&A to stand, and he thanked them for their service, as did the conference. Oliphint thanked the center directors for their work and Jodi Smith for her work as treasurer.

Young Person's Address

Bishop McKee called the young people to the chancel platform; and Sidney Weidenbach, incoming chair of Conference Council on Youth Ministries, introduced the executive officers for the coming year. Weidenbach reported that each year the youth raise money for youth. This is called Youth Service Fund (YSF), and each year there is an in-conference organization recipient and an out-of-conference recipient. This year Wesley-Rankin and Accelerate were those two organizations. Accelerate is for those who have aged out of foster care. The youth raised over \$5,000.

The district day event for next year will be on August 7th at Hamilton Park UMC. This year more than 400 attended at Highland Park UMC. The mid-winter was a success this year, and next year there will be not only two camps at Bridgeport but one off-campus at Go Camp. The youth are very excited to be a witness.

Anna Shipley shared a story of faith. It happened in Rowlett, the day after Christmas 2015, when a natural disaster (tornado) occurred. The church opened its doors, and there was constant witness to the love of Christ—from wake-up songs at 5AM, to being the hands and feet of the church around the clock. Four days later, she was greeted by a 4-year-old boy with a piggy bank. “Well, this has quarters in it. I want you to give these quarters to people so that they can wash their clothes.” Shipley encouraged the conference to let their witness be just as intentional.

Audrey Chumley, outgoing chair, thanked the conference for their support, Bishop McKee for always taking selfies with them, and for the love of the entire conference. Chumley told the conference that youth have the opportunity to be a resource throughout the church. Young people

love to share their faith through social media. The youth challenged everyone to share their love of Christ through story.

Laity Address

Bishop McKee introduced Conference Lay Leader Linda Parks and, noting that this was her last year to serve as conference lay leader, expressed appreciation for all of her service. Parks introduced Jeff Bouis as the incoming lay leader. She shared that for the last four years there have been four youth on the Board of Laity, including the CCYM president and a youth district lay leader. She reported that it had made such a difference. Their voices are so committed, and they are brilliant. Parks introduced a video showing pictures sent in by various churches involved in ministry and mission. Seventy churches responded to the request to send pictures of their laity at work.

Bouis asked Parks what sort of things she had done to get her through the quadrennium as lay leader. She responded with advice to speak from the heart, quoted from Philippians 4 (“Do not worry about anything”), and showed a prayer shawl that has been her companion for a little over 25,000 miles driving around the conference. Parks has been inspired by smiles, hugs, and encouragement from the laity, the hundreds of photos received in the past two years of laity in service, and the stories shared at all four District Laity Days with Bishop McKee.

Parks said the laity are willing to be in partnership with the clergy, willing to rise to the challenge of disaster, and knowing that we are not through yet.

Bouis comes to the post as faculty for Heart Paths, a 3-year program in the formation and training of other spiritual directors. He is looking forward to meeting more people and hearing how they are engaging in ministry. He believes that God is present in all things and working in all things, so he looks forward to seeing how the laity and the church can join God in the work that God is already doing in the North Texas conference.

Parks expressed the honor and privilege of having served for the last four years and ended with a poem entitled ‘Bits and Pieces,’ thanking everyone for being bits and pieces in her life.

Award Presentations

Bishop McKee presented the Harry Denman Evangelism Awards, recognizing clergy, youth, and lay persons for outstanding service in evangelism. The adult laity recipient was Judy Kline, who was currently on a mission trip in Alaska. Her home church is Greenland Hills UMC, where she and her team created the Global Village Market.

Haley Macha was the youth laity recipient. She attends Stonebridge UMC and has just completed her sophomore year of high school. She served this past year as a chaplain for CCYM and has been elected vice-chairperson for the coming year. Haley was nominated and selected by her peers to receive the award.

Andrew Forrest was the clergy recipient of the 2016 Harry Denman Award. Forrest is a third-generation UMC minister who serves the Munger Place Campus of Highland Park UMC. The campus opened in 2010 and has gone from 0 to 1,093 members in six years, with an average worship attendance of 973. Young children and families fill the halls of the church and their education building. Forrest recognized his father, David Forrest, from the West Virginia Annual Conference who had come in to surprise him.

The Francis Asbury Award, an award to recognize and encourage support of higher education and campus ministries with the United Methodist Church, was presented to Brittany Burrows. Burrows currently serves as the Campus Minister at the University of Texas at Dallas Wesley Foundation. In conjunction with Arapaho UMC, Brittany is the founding campus minister. Burrows has a long-standing commitment to collegiate ministry, having been involved with the Denton Wesley Foundation while a student at the University of North Texas and later serving as Associate Director for this ministry before moving into her current role at UTD Wesley.

The Bishop Oden Award reflects Bishop William B. Oden's passion for ecumenism and interfaith outreach. He was instrumental with what was, at the time, the beginning of an interfaith movement in the city of Dallas. Dr. Jonathan Palant, a gifted musician serving as minister of music at Kessler Park UMC, was this year's recipient. He is the founder of the ecumenical choir Credo and the Dallas Street Choir. They choirs have performed at the Stewpot, the Winspear Opera House, the Dallas State Fair Music Hall, and the George W. Bush Library. Palant has the talent to bridge what it means to be the people of God in this world. He thanked the conference for the award and said that the motto for the Dallas Street Choir is that they are homeless but they are not voiceless. He announced that the Dallas Street Choir has received an invitation to perform onstage at Carnegie Hall. This will be a concert by the homeless for the homeless.

Fellowship

Reagan Gilliland led four conference members in a brief comic break in the day's proceedings.

Center for Leadership Development

Marti Soper introduced two members of her staff—Becky David Hensley, Associate Director, and Kelly Carpenter, Coordinator for Children, Youth, and Young-Adult Ministries. The heart of their work has to do with supporting churches in the development of lay and clergy leaders for the future of The United Methodist Church in the NTC. Their goal is to help churches develop a systematic approach to faith formation that honors our Wesleyan tradition for all ages and stages at church, at home, and in the world. Soper identified the areas for which the Center is responsible. A video, *A Time for Children*, revealed a three-year General Church initiative for holistic ministry with children. The four focus areas include: sacred texts, teaching children to pray, pastoral care, and soulful self-discovery.

The Center staff is fully aware that one of the most effective tools they have is a vital camping and retreat ministry. Carpenter has researched other annual conferences, held focus groups, and dreamed about what could be for camping and retreat opportunities in North Texas. The result is a 5-year Strategic Plan which gives clarity to the mission to provide sacred spaces for all to grow in the Wesleyan tradition. She believes that they will be successful in accomplishing their mission as they focus on connecting with God and others, abundant life in Christ, Christian leadership, and sacred places set apart. They have moved all oversight and direction of camping and retreat ministries into the Center for Leadership Development. A newly formed committee will bring together representatives from Prothro Center at Lake Texoma, Bridgeport Camp and Conference Center, and the new offsite camping ministry—Go Camp.

The camping and retreat ministry is excited to be a beneficiary of funds raised through the conference capital campaign. A new staff member, Joseph Bradley, will begin work in July and will be responsible to liaison with all three camping locations. He will focus on developing integrated

curriculum and leadership development programs, as well as multi-generational and year-round retreat resources.

Bouie Stewart is the new Go Camp Director. His goal is to make camping and outdoor education accessible to every child in the mission field. This summer they will pilot the Go Camp program at two sites: Cochran Chapel UMC and FUMC Paris. The new model will provide opportunities for college students to develop leadership skills by working as paid counselors at the summer camps. In addition, the Summer Internship in Ministry program, launched last year, provides college students with a paid internship experience designed for those discerning a call to ministry. Soper called attention to the screen and showed several of last year's SIMterns and introduced the six new SIMterns for 2016.

Hensley reported that young people who are deeply involved in effective campus ministries and ministries committed to forming disciples, who are growing into leaders equipped to give a witness for Christ, are often attracted to the SIM program and the Leadership Development program. A video was shown, focusing on the SMU Wesley Foundation, led by Andrew Beard. Hensley concluded with the Luke 4 Initiative, a leadership training program that equips churches to lead transformational change in their communities and churches. It is an 8-month program that equips clergy and laity with tools for effective leadership through storytelling, building relationships, creating strong teams, and developing a strategy for effective action. A video featured Carol Sparks of Holy Covenant UMC telling the story of how Luke 4 has impacted that congregation and community.

Clergy Spouse Organization

Whitney Dowd introduced the Clergy Spouse Organization of the North Texas Conference. Michelle Corazao introduced the report, in which the spouses sang new lyrics to the tune of "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," promising that the clergy spouses group would rescue all clergy spouses and affirming the conference.

Keynote Speaker

Scott Chrostek recalled several passages of scripture where we hear, "God is with you" and where we hear that we can accomplish more than we expect. He asked the conference if we believe that. Then he reminded us that in the Lord's Supper, Jesus tells his disciples, "Remember me;" and twenty-four hours later, they are nowhere to be found. He comes back and says, "Remember, I am always with you, even to the end of the age." Chrostek said that no one has ever figured out how to be the leader Jesus was but that he has decided the only requirement is to be "the wrong person," totally ill-equipped because God calls misfits.

When Resurrection UMC Downtown was started, it was started with "the wrong people" and somehow God made it right. It was started at the wrong time, 6 p.m. on Sundays, and in the wrong place, a space which was not equipped, accessible, and had no functioning bathrooms. There were over 100 that first hot Easter Sunday. At one point, they started questioning and doubting. A fourth-grade teacher named Bryan Van visited and sang at church one Sunday night, then, without realizing it, Van found himself humming and singing those songs the next day quietly in his classroom. A little boy asked him what he was singing and asked him about the church. When he heard that there was no air conditioning in the church, the boy went back to his desk, built a hand fan, and asked for a popsicle stick to go with it. He then asked if the whole class could make one. Van had to go back to Resurrection just to take the hand fans. When he did, he shared the story with Chrostek, who shared the story with the congregation. The next time, Van brought the little

boy with him. The boy brought an envelope containing 2 dimes and 3 pennies, and that was the start of their capital campaign.

In John 4, Jesus cuts through the Samaritan village and talks to the woman at the well. She is a public disgrace; and, as he reveals to her everything about herself—including her flaws—he begins to build her up. She goes back and tells others what has just happened. Witnessing is not some big thing. It is something as simple as a mystic conversation with a misfit at a grace-given time ... and it can transform a city.

Chrostek then told the story of Bobby Jo, a woman he met as he was visiting another church. He learned that she had started drinking at age 12 because her father was always gone and her mother was addicted to pills. She became addicted to pills and began a life of prostitution. She was raped 16 times, had 24 broken bones, 2 abortions, and slept on an asphalt parking lot beneath a truck. Her father died, then her mother. She received a small inheritance and something happened. It was like God was talking to her. She bought an old nursing home in the northeast part of town with her own money and spent day and night repairing it. She decided she needed to meet her neighbors and discovered a houseful of prostitutes. Then she felt nudged to help. She invited them to join her rent free. Fast forward 12 years. She owns 12 old houses and 150 people live with her in Christian community. It is called the Healing House. They come to worship so that others can see how Christ is calling them to transform the world.

Everybody has a story to tell. Chrostek concluded by telling a story about becoming friends with a man named Bryan who one day asked him to have a conversation with him and later asked him if he was looking for property to build a church. Resurrection UMC Downtown raised \$6.5 million for a prime piece of land and cleared it for design and development. That piece of land should have been a commercial building, anything but a church, but then it would have been too expensive for them to buy. It is in the heart of the city. What would have happened if he had not taken time for the conversation with Bryan? What happens if we do not remember that God's love is there for us always?

General Conference Delegation Report

As the NTC delegation came to the chancel area, Bishop McKee said there is no group that has worked harder around the conference and across conferences in the past two years. Members of the delegation were affirmed by the conference. Tim Crouch, delegation chair, introduced the members of the delegation as probably the finest group of "Metho-nerds" in the entire connection. All participated at a high level. Crouch said that the delegation sang at the beginning of every meeting throughout the past two years, and they sang in the hallways at General Conference. Joe Stobaugh and Timothy Morrison put together a songbook. Crouch estimated 40 or 50 people came to General Conference from North Texas and supported them with prayers and presence. The Ukulele Choir from Grace Avenue UMC came as well and performed on the last day.

Crouch introduced Jan Davis to walk through their preparatory work. She confirmed the preparation of the delegation. They met monthly and had joint meetings with other annual conferences. Many members were instrumental in writing legislation: Ricky Harrison ("A Third Way"), Tim Crouch (CCUS), Clayton Oliphint and Don Underwood (Plan UMC Revised). Each delegate was assigned to a legislative committee and had a team of people working with him/her. Davis personally had a team of seven working on Higher Education and Ministry legislation.

The distinctive character of the delegation was listening—listening to voices of collective wisdom and to voices of new delegates. They had seven official listening sessions. They recorded all voices and compiled them for the delegation.

Crouch said the first eight days were very difficult. There was an atmosphere of distrust; they spent several days in protracted debate over the rules. It did not look like the church. There seemed to be no real way out. And yet in that darkest moment, some things were happening behind the scenes, and Don Underwood from the North Texas delegation was right in the middle of that.

Underwood said that during those eight days of General Conference, a remarkable and highly confidential conversation was taking place in a private room at the Portland Convention Center. The group was ideologically very diverse, ranging from very conservative to very progressive. It was diverse with regard to ethnicity and gender, but it was lacking in terms of global geography and age. The members of this group were confidential until the last evening when Underwood was given permission to list names of the members. They were: Bishop Warner Brown, Bishop Bruce Ough, Rob Renfroe with Good News, Maxie Dunnam, Tom Lambrecht and Patrica Miller with the Confessing Movement; Mike Slaughter, Adam Hamilton, Tom Berlin, Don Underwood, Scott Campbell, Randall Miller, and Matt Berryman, executive director of Reconciling Ministries Network, Patricia Hixon of Just Peace, Greg Bergquist, scribe, and later three Central Conference bishops.

The dialogue was characterized by utter respect for one another, in spite of radically differing viewpoints. The tone was utterly respectful, but there was acknowledgement of what appears to be irreconcilable differences. After a number of meetings, the consensus was reached that all options should be considered for the future by a commission that has both standing and robust inclusiveness for such a task and that is the Council of Bishops (COB). Up until this point, not even the COB knew of the existence of this group or of the discussions, and they agreed that Bishop Brown should go forward with the request to the COB for the appointment of a commission and for consideration of a called interim General Conference to deal with the findings and recommendations of said Commission.

The request to the COB led to an initial statement made by Council President Bishop Bruce Ough to the plenary, which was followed by a request from the plenary that the COB assume a greater leadership role and return with a more concrete and specific report. On Wednesday, May 18th, Bishop Ough returned to the plenary and read a statement which was affirmed by the plenary, a statement which empowered the commission to move forward in a leadership role with the endorsement of the 2016 General Conference. Underwood stated that this is an historic moment in our denomination—the offering of the bishops to lead on what is the theological/eccliesial issue of our time. Underwood believes there will be some needed structural change in our denomination, not just around the issue of human sexuality, but also around the role of the *Book of Discipline*, the architecture of General Conference, and the role of American Methodism in the context of a global church. We should hear God’s voice calling us to “be not anxious.”

Crouch called on Bishop McKee to share his thoughts on General Confernce 2016. Bishop McKee said that when he first heard of the conversation that had been happening behind closed doors, he was happy about it. He had been asking for four years for that kind of conversation to happen. He spoke of his professor, John Deschner, at Perkins School of Theology, who told the class that when the church began to restructure and merge with the Evangelical United Brethren, they would one day discover that they had created a leadership vacuum. He said that the Council affirmed this, not unanimously, but significantly. He is very pleased with where we are. In July, decisions about the commission will be made. He felt that, while the Council should have led in 2012, this time they will.

The Council of Bishops began meeting one afternoon at 4 p.m., and someone finally said they needed a break. The conversation had been so enriching that Bishop McKee was hopeful. He is in favor of creating paths forward for all of God’s children, but this is not easily done. He will spend

a lot of time in our districts and churches, talking about the important issues. He believes the issue is much deeper than human sexuality, but we have to come to a point where we acknowledge that there is a path for all of God's children. He asked that all read the statement carefully and objectively and allow space.

Crouch said that after that, they started to get some things done. Davis reported on the accomplishments: a slightly increased quadrennial budget of \$604 million; celebration of church milestones, including the 60th anniversary of women's ordination, the 20th anniversary of deacons, the 25th anniversary of Africa University; approval of full communion with the Moravian Church in North America; lamentations over the involvement of Methodists in the Sand Creek Massacre; approved a resolution opposing sports team mascots that demean Native Americans; votes to withdraw from the membership in the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; action not to divest from fossil fuels, choosing instead to influence corporations with engagement instead of divestment; passing a petition that allows deacons to directly contact their resident bishop to request permission to administer the sacraments, thus making it easier for deacons to have such authority in particular ministry situations; passing of legislation to encourage local churches to support their candidates for ministry; and votes to approve five more bishops to serve Africa and to add \$10 million to theological education in Africa and Europe to educate more pastors and theologians.

Crouch concluded by sharing a peace cross from the Korean delegation, which represented a prayer to unite Korea. The Korean delegation asked our delegation to pray for an end to the division. Crouch thought of this as a metaphor for our denomination, that we might move forward and find a way toward peace in order that all churches might be more effective in their mission. He then asked the conference to close with a song written by John Thornburg, "When the Founder of Creation," a song that was sung at General Conference. Underwood asked the conference to thank Crouch, and Joe Stobaugh led in this singing of the song.

Resolutions

Bishop McKee called for Conference Secretary Judith Reedy to read the resolution, Legislative Item #21 [LA 21] concerning human sexuality that had been distributed to all delegates. Reedy read the resolution, and Mitchell Boone, an author of the resolution, spoke to the resolution, saying that although his was the only name on the resolution, a group worked together on the wording of the resolution, believing that the only way to extend unity to one another is to extend grace to one another in tangible ways. Boone said that unity is not being of the same mind regarding human sexuality, but it is to remain together in spite of differences. The resolution is aspirational and represents the authors' desire to have conversation around human sexuality within the conference. They hope it will create space and allow all to be honest about their calling, both as laity and clergy—a calling lived out in individual communities of faith and the mission field they are trying to reach.

Boone said that the vote on this resolution could be a starting point, a new reality, wherein we can be open and honest about where God is leading us, the uniqueness of our call, and the context of our ministry, and that while we may disagree, we still know and serve the same God. He asked that we begin by refraining from labels we so quickly throw at one another and start having faithful conversations about where we are headed as a conference and most importantly as the Body of Christ. Boone then moved the adoption of Legislative Item #21 [LA 21]. The motion was seconded.

Fred Durham, retired clergy, rose to offer a substitute motion that the NTC, as it awaits the leadership of the Council of Bishops, take no vote on matters of human sexuality, including the

matter before the conference for this session. The motion was seconded, and Durham spoke to it. He said that the wisdom of the General Conference was a good plan for maintaining unity and moving forward. Also, even though the motion seems to be innocuous in its intent, when he received it, the label was “one small step in a greater strategy.” It implies that the bishops are on one side or other of the argument rather than seeking the unity of the church.

Mike Baughman, clergy from University Park UMC and Union, spoke to the motion before the body. He quoted Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Our lives begin to end when we are made silent about things that matter.” The original motion is not a statement for one way or another, but it encourages us to talk, and we need to speak. This is not an act of disrespect to the Council of Bishops. It will, in fact, help them if they know the conversation. We should not refrain from speaking.

Kent Roberts, laity from Highland Park UMC, spoke for the motion, stating first that he is for gay and lesbians being recognized as ministers and in marriage, but that he believes we need to stop talking—including via social media—and start listening to God. God is talking.

J.D. Allen, Boyd UMC clergy, spoke against the substitute because the original resolution provides space for us to listen. This is obviously a contentious matter, and we have had conversations in our conference only on a limited basis, seeking to love alike even if we do not think alike.

Ed Lantz, Tyler Street UMC clergy, spoke in favor of the substitute. He believes it is counter-productive for us as an annual conference to take a vote on this issue when the Council of Bishops is prayerfully trying to lead us.

Justin Hancock, extension minister, spoke against the substitute. As one who helped craft some of the resolution, he explained that all they were asking for is balanced, productive, fruitful conversation. He called us to be mindful, as he is, in living with the scars of liturgical exemption from the Americans with Disabilities Act, noting that to be silenced on the issue of justice for one group often means we are silent for all.

Reedy read the substitute motion, and Bishop McKee called for a vote. The substitute failed, and the original resolution was still before the body.

Marcus Womack, Grace Avenue UMC clergy, spoke for the resolution, stating that perfect love casts out fear. He is afraid that, without the resolution, we will not begin to talk with one another.

Martha Myre, clergy, offered an amendment. After discussion, Roy Atwood, Greenland Hills UMC laity, moved the question to vote on the amendment. The secretary reread the amendment. The amendment failed. The original resolution was still before the body.

Wes Crenshaw, Forney UMC laity, stated that he did not understand what was meant by “the new reality” in the “therefore” section. Boone explained the new reality as a hope that had emerged from those in conversation with one another about the resolution. Boone stated that would be a place where we could have open and honest conversation with one another about human sexuality.

Bishop McKee recognized Stan Copeland, Lovers Lane UMC clergy, who offered an amendment to insert “while joining the bishops and upholding the Discipline” in the “therefore” section. Copeland expressed fear that without this insert, the resolution might lead to a practice of disobedience and put the conference in a serious place.

Boone responded that the amendment was not friendly. A motion was made to call the vote on the amendment. The secretary read the amendment again; the bishop called for a vote by show of

hands. The vote was too close to call, so Bishop McKee asked for a standing vote. The amendment passed 356-325.

Wes Magruder, Kessler Park UMC clergy, called the question; the body concurred, and the amended resolution was before the body. The bishop called for a standing vote; the resolution passed.

Holly Gotelli closed with prayer.

TUESDAY AFTERNOON BUSINESS SESSION

The afternoon session opened with prayer and with a third witness by Payton Parker, youth director at St. Luke “Community” UMC. Parker’s witness took the form of a rap entitled, “All I Need Is You.”

Bishop McKee gave a special thanks to First UMC, Carrollton, for hosting the laity session and to Christ UMC, Plano, for hosting the clergy session. He then asked all laity and clergy from those churches to stand so that the conference could express appreciation to them.

Agency Highlight: SMU & Perkins School of Theology

A video highlighting SMU and Perkins School of Theology was featured. Bishop McKee recognized the new Dean of the Perkins School of Theology, Dr. Craig Hill, and announced that one-third of Perkins students are from the NTC.

Center of Missional Outreach

Larry George introduced the Center’s full-time staff: Marji Hill, Associate Director of the Center for Missional Outreach (CMO); Lynn Parsons, Director of the Zip Code Connection; George Battle, III, Connections Director for South Dallas/Fair Park (75215); and Melinda Watters, Connections Director for Red River County (75426). George recognized the oft-repeated refrain for this year’s annual conference session, “Can I get a witness for my Lord?” He recalled the witness of Micah as doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. He recalled Jesus’ witness of bringing good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. The CMO is grateful for cooperation of other programmatic and resource centers of the conference: the Center for Leadership Development for their Luke 4 Initiative and SIMterns; the Center for New Church Development and Congregational Transformation for working with emerging congregations to ensure that witness through missional action is part of their founding DNA and for helping established congregations to discover the vitality of faith renewed through outward-focused priorities; the Center for Connectional Resources for continually calling all to set budgets through the lens of missional, transformative witness. The deepest gratitude was expressed for the members and pastors of local churches and the clergy serving in extension ministry settings for the relationships built and the inclusive love offered.

George listed One + One and the Zip Code Connection as two ongoing arenas of opportunity to be authentic and faithful. Other opportunities are instantaneous, such as response to the Christmas tornadoes in Rowlett and Garland, and the spring storms which brought hail in Wylie and twisters in Clarksville. At those times, United Methodist Early Response Teams spring into action to aid individuals and families in hurting communities to recover and begin moving toward restoration.

George reflected on annual conference 2013 when Reverend Alexandra Robinson and Dr. Andy Stoker painted a focused vision of using the strength of our connection to engage deeply in ministry with those persons often marginalized in two specific Zip Codes—75215 in Dallas and 75426 in Clarksville. This vision called us to move our witness from occasional acts of mercy to continuing collaboration for transformation. Dr. Lynn Parsons became the Zip Code Director and George Battle and Melinda Watters joined the team as Connections Directors in Dallas and Clarksville. Meetings began to be held in both locations and relationships began to develop.

The core belief of the Zip Code Connection is that the church is called to be a catalyst for connection in the community. The vision remains the same as it was three years ago: that by 2025 both communities will be recognized as vibrant, thriving places—good places to live, work, learn, do business, rear children, and practice one’s faith. South Dallas has experienced increased voter participation, developed a strong coalition among community pastors, and opened pathways to employment for the formerly incarcerated. In Red River county, community engagement has seen the development of prayer support for every student by name in the public schools; it has expanded the means of addressing racial issues, including the uniting of two long-separate ministerial alliances; and it has birthed the Hub, a center for community fellowship and development.

George invited the conference to be a part of this great good news. He quoted Jim Henson, creator of the Muppets, who said that “kids don’t remember what you try to teach them; they remember who you are.” He referred to teen expert Josh Shipp who said, “Every child is one caring adult away from being a success story.”

Merger

Bishop McKee invited annual conference members to celebrate the merger of Schreiber Memorial UMC and Highland Park UMC.

Consent Agenda

Larry George presented the consent calendar. No items had been removed. Vote was taken, and the consent calendar was adopted.

Nominations Committee

Linda Parks, Conference Lay Leader, brought the Nominations Report, assisted by Jeff Bouis, incoming Conference Lay Leader. The committee’s report had been distributed to conference members in the bags they received at registration. Corrections were made and the corrected nominations report was approved.

Fourth Witness

Bishop McKee welcomed Theresa Gentry of Forestburg UMC in the Northwest District as the fourth witness. Forestburg is a small, very rural community with three churches. The average attendance on Sundays four years ago was 25–30, and they had one young family. Members and pastor were concerned about the future of their church; and in the spring of 2014, they began a young children’s Wednesday evening gathering with Bible stories, games, and a meal for Pre-K through 5th grade. This brought children but no growth on Sunday mornings.

In the fall of 2014, the church received an email from a young mother looking for a different church home for her family. In addition to the mother and father, there was a 16-year-old daughter and

a 10-year-old son. The son had cochlear implants to enable him to hear but did not communicate verbally and had a learning disability. In the church they had been attending, the son was placed in a room by himself and left alone while the other children did activities. The young mother wanted a church that would not only accept and love her husband and daughter but would also accept, love, and include her son in worship and children's programs. Forestburg welcomed the entire family. They joined the congregation; the daughter began bringing friends; and the mother volunteered to organize and supervise a youth group. The pastor guided them, and "Hands-on Youth" began in January, 2015, growing to an average attendance on Wednesday evenings of 25 teenagers in 6th–10th grades.

The youth are in Bible study led by the pastor on Wednesday evenings, and they provided a totally youth-led worship service for the congregation. This summer they are attending youth camp. The pastor has been able to connect with the teens and help the mother who started the group in developing and nurturing this program for the youth. In addition, the Wednesday evening young children's program, Kid's Klub, has grown; approximately 30–40 children and teenagers are in their Fellowship Hall every Wednesday evening. Sunday morning worship attendance and membership have increased to an average of 60. They had three baptisms in April, and the diversity of the congregation has increased. God has answered their prayers with abundance.

Keynote Address

Bishop McKee welcomed Danielle Shroyer back to the chancel platform for the final keynote address. Shroyer talked about bearing witness in a world of fear and wonder. She related the annual ritual of Pueblo Native American clans who come together for their most important summer ritual—the corn dance. It is vitally important to ensure a good corn harvest. They have intricate headdresses and complex foot movements and subtle chant intonations, and every detail is to be performed to perfection. And then, later in the day, they send in the clowns. Just as everyone is feeling solid and good and deeply reverent, the clowns come. They step on the feet of the man leading the dance to disrupt; they poke fun at the dancing; they tug at headdresses and yelp and whoop. They are a nuisance, and yet theirs is the most sacred role of all. They are the *koshare*, and their purpose is to disrupt form.

Why is this considered holy? Because the corn dance is a prayer for growth, and growth demands new forms. Resurrection is never life as usual. The *koshare* are not always enjoyed, but they are embraced because they remind the Pueblo that the world is not under their control, no matter how well they perform the corn dance. Heraclitus was adamant about professing the constancy of change in the universe, and he coined the term *Logos*. Despite all the change that happens, in the *Logos*, the Word, all things are connected and one.

John the evangelist knew this. Jesus continually disrupts our uniformity to bring us into fuller unity. His most sacred role is his willingness to unsettle us just as we are getting comfortable. He is not doctrine or statement or the *Book of Discipline* but the Word. Shroyer referenced Karl Barth, who was confronted with the uncomfortable truth that the Holy Spirit is not fond of being confined but continually disrupts our forms and was called the wild goose by Celtic Christians.

Shroyer said that we are asked to bear witness in a world of both fear and wonder, dance and disruption, to embrace the creative tension that is ever-present in this world. As Rudolf Bahro said, "When the forms of an old culture are dying, the new culture is created by a few people who are not afraid to be insecure." These people do not face the disruption with clenched fists, no matter how many times they are interrupted. They are willing to be open, even while they are dancing. They do not bear the burden of carrying all of the sacred. Shroyer said the question is not only

whether we can bear witness to the sacred but whether we can bear witness to the sacred in all its forms.

Shroyer reminded the conference that miracles nearly always are preceded by disruption in the gospels, whether it is a demon-possessed man, or a blind man shouting, or the biggest disruption of Easter. She also reminded the conference that old habits die hard, and we are terrified that disruption might lead to failure. What the world needs is people who trust the dance so much that even the clowns are welcome. There is no mythical “window of opportunity” that will be lost forever. The universe is a far more forgiving place than we often give it credit. As people of faith, we should know this. Scripture is filled with people who missed their window of opportunity only to find another, people like Abraham and Sarah, David, the Israelites.

The 14 billion year story of the universe says that life is supposed to happen, and it says that life happens even when we thought it would be rather impossible to happen. Life is more about invention than survival, about creation rather than dominion or defense. Bearing witness means living a life of creativity and not problem-solving. What we find when we take ourselves less seriously is joy. Joy has room for the harsh realities of the world and the awe-inspiring wonder of the world. Early studies show that people who experience awe feel much more connected to others and get along better with them. They become more generous and compassionate. Stability is over-rated.

Thank God for the clowns. How do we bear witness in a world of fear and wonder? We smile when they send in the clowns. Psalm 23 reminded Shroyer yet again that the love of God is not something she has to hunt down or put on her to-do list because she is assured that surely goodness and mercy will follow her all the days of her life. She encouraged the conference to remember that and to have the courage to dance, no matter what distractions come our way.

Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Order of Deacons and the 60th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women

Throughout the conference the 20th anniversary of deacons was celebrated; the deacons were recognized, and they participated in the worship services. At the close of the afternoon session, Bishop McKee asked all women clergy to come to the stage. The stage was overflowing, and the conference gave the women a long, standing ovation.

Closing Worship with Holy Communion, the “Reading” of Appointments, and the Sending Forth

Bishop McKee, the newly ordained, and the cabinet served Holy Communion to the conference as the names and photographs of churches and extension ministry settings and the names of those persons appointed to those places of service appeared on the sanctuary screens. Bishop McKee announced at the conclusion that the appointments for the 2016-2017 conference year were now “fixed,” and he offered the sending forth to adjourn the 2016 session of the North Texas Annual Conference.