

Summary of 2023 Annual Conference of the Western North Carolina United Methodist Church

The 2023 Western North Carolina Conference was a wonderful weekend filled with God's grace, the opportunity to connect with one another and with God, and the holiness of our commitment to love God and one another. Below are some highlights of our time together in holy conferencing.

The Annual Conference:

1. **Commissioned** 16 Emerging Community Pastors, recognized 86 Lighthouse Churches, celebrated a grant of \$5.2 million over the next five years to reinvest in areas of disaffiliation and with a commitment not to abandon our members in these areas.
2. **Committed** ourselves to be a Church that welcomes anyone and everyone: welcoming immigrants; reckoning with the realities of racism; developing a more strategic response to strengthen the Black church; honoring the faith of people across the political aisle from wherever we are sitting; and including LGBTQIA+ persons in all aspects of the life of our church. We also heard witnesses from those who are offering ministry through storytelling, hosting diversity conversations in rural contexts, and church planting in digital spaces.
3. **Ordained**, commissioned, and licensed 29 clergy for ministry in local churches and extension ministries and commissioned a deaconess for ministry. The service concluded with an invitation to clergy to renew their vows of ordination, and a number of persons stepped forward to explore a call to ministry.
4. **Passed** two creation care resolutions, which asked each church to make this ministry one of their priorities and urged our denomination to add fossil fuels to the filters for responsible investing; elected three new lay delegates to the 2024 Jurisdictional Conference; and learned about the Western North Carolina Conference's role in co-hosting with the North Carolina Conference, the 2024 General Conference next year in Charlotte.
5. **Communicated** a consistent focus on grace, connection and holiness as our pathways to healing in the midst of a difficult season in our nation and in our communities. The Bible Study focused on the great commandments of Jesus

(Matthew 22) and the great commission (Matthew 28). Bishop Carter preached on holiness as love of God and neighbor and the closing service included prayers and anointing for healing for lay and clergy leaders returning to their communities.

6. **Received** an offering of almost \$50,000 which will help to plant new churches in Ukraine and in areas of Europe where Ukrainians are living as refugees, and which will train laity and clergy in response to trauma in our communities. We also approved a budget that represents a 2% decrease in the conference and general church apportionment to each local church.
7. **Announced** the appointment of pastors to our 757 churches and extension ministers to chaplaincy, campus ministry, community development, higher education justice and mercy ministries, and missionary service; commissioned the district superintendents as missional strategists for the coming year; experienced inspiring worship and beautiful music; and left with a renewed sense identify as a people called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the 44 western countries of Western North Carolina and beyond.

We give God glory for the Holy Spirit's presence at Annual Conference and commit ourselves to joining Jesus' work of grace, connection, and holiness in the world.

