

## Highlights of the June 7-11-2019 Iowa Annual Conference By Mary Taeger

Our Iowa Conference Lay Leader Margaret Borgen opened the Laity Session of the 2019 Iowa Annual Conference Session, telling attendees she hoped they left the session inspired and with “new tools in their tool box.” You may listen to her full Laity address and watch other Conference presentations at [www.iaumc.org](http://www.iaumc.org). The Laity Session and its concurrent Clergy Session kicked off the Conference Friday evening, with all lay people of the Iowa Annual Conference welcome to attend the Laity Session.

Bishop Laurie Haller offered a message to the laity before departing for the Clergy Session. She acknowledged that it was somewhat of a hard time in the UMC right now. “But, she said, it gladdens my spirit to see all of you here and know that what unites us as United Methodists is our deep love of Jesus Christ and our determination to make a difference for Jesus around the world.” The bishop referenced *The Nature of our Theological Task* document from the Book of Discipline, which had been distributed to the laity attending the session. Identifying her takeaway from the document, Bishop Laurie said, “Our theological task is to love God and love our neighbor.” “It’s that simple,” she added. “Love God and love our neighbor.” Our summons, our call,” she continued, “is to understand and receive the Gospel promises in our troubled and uncertain times. God is doing a new thing in our midst as United Methodists,” Bishop Laurie said. “And our task is to love God and neighbor in the midst of that new thing. Each person must determine how Jesus is calling him or her to make a difference.” She said as well that her prayer for Annual Conference Session attendees is that others will see Jesus in them.

Bishop Laurie’s address to us set the tone for the following 4 days of worship , elections of delegates, ordination and memorial services and debating and passing legislation. I must admit I was not looking forward to this year’s annual conference, fearing the differing points of view within the membership, regarding Human Sexuality could become very contentious. In her Episcopal address on Saturday, Bishop Laurie stated “It’s difficult for you and me to enter God’s kingdom when we’re not willing to give up our wealth, as well as admit our poverty of spirit,” she said. “It’s hard to have treasure in heaven when we refuse to love our neighbor, are reluctant to accept the immigrant, won’t reach out to those who are mentally ill, or are unwilling to believe that God created and loves and calls our LGBTQ brothers and sisters as much as God loves and calls each one of us.”

She told the congregation that her heart breaks when the church cannot love each other enough to stay in connection.

Music as usual was varied and inspirational. The Mabaan Choir of the South Sudanese Congregation, of Des Moines, provided music on Friday evening and Saturday, wearing colorful ethnic dress, and praising God with much enthusiasm. Phil Carver was the music leader for most of the sessions, always at the ready for the perfect song, when necessary pauses in the business occurred. His leadership and talents will be sorely missed, as his position with the Conference, after 23 years, has been assigned to a clergy person. The extra's he has given above and beyond his "job" with the conference will be hard to replace. We have benefitted from his involvements with our Healthy Church initiative activities most recently, and other previous assistance over the many years as have many other congregations in the Eastern half of the Conference. He was honored for his service at the Laity Session and again on Tuesday before adjournment.

21 Lay Ministers and 13 Lay Speakers were certified during a service on Saturday afternoon and honored at a reception on Saturday evening.

28 retiring clergy were honored Saturday afternoon in plenary, and again at a reception during supper break.

On Sunday, 16 persons were commissioned following completion of "course of study, or for the work of a Deacon, or Transferring in from another conference, or as a provisional elder, and 5 persons were ordained as elders. Following the ordination service, with Bishop Laurie washing the feet of the 21 newly commissioned pastors, communion was served to all of us by them.

Some business was conducted throughout the 4 ½ days and it was interspersed with worship, special speakers, awards and meal break events. On Saturday, I did lunch at Trinity United Methodist church, where an ethnic meal is served by the Hispanic Congregation, and J-FON presents the program. J-FON (Justice For Our Neighbors) is our organization that provides counseling and legal services to immigrants in Iowa. On Sunday evening the meal break I attended was at Wesley United Methodist Church, sponsored by United Methodist Women. Our speaker was Bev Nolte, who has been a Missionary in South America and the United States, and traveled extensively in Africa and India. This was a special celebration of our 150 years in mission work with women children and youth around the world.

Monday's lunch break was a Peace walk with a hundred or so others from HyVee Hall to downtown Des Moines, where we heard from our Bishop, the Des Moines Mayor and others, about the work United Methodists are doing for justice and peace.

During the times we spent on business, elections and legislation, we heard clergy and lay members differing opinions about budget issues, selling of Pictured Rocks Church camp, Drones, Immigration reform, Climate Crisis, Children's mental Health, Firearms and Child Safety, and Disavowal of the

Traditional Plan that was passed at the special session of General Conference in February, 2019. We eventually elected 6 Delegates for Laity and 6 Delegates for Clergy to represent our Conference at the 2020 General Conference, 6 delegates each to represent Iowa at the Jurisdictional Conference and 6 delegates each as alternates for both conferences. We passed most of the resolutions presented, some with amendments, except the call to close the Iowa Drone Center in Des Moines which failed. The amended Resolution disavowing the Special General Conference Action was passed by a wide margin of 595 (68%) in favor to 280 opposed. The full amendment is available on the website at [www.iaumc.org](http://www.iaumc.org). It reads in part:

Therefore be it resolved, we urge the Iowa Annual Conference (IAC) to express disapproval of the Traditional Plan and apologize for the harm inflicted on LGBTQ+ persons, their families, and the body of Christ. "We affirm that all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God," (paragraph 161.G of the United Methodist Book of Discipline) and assert that no human being is incompatible with Christian teaching. Bishop Laurie reminded the body that her actions must be governed by the Discipline and unless and until it is changed by the General Conference she is obligated to uphold it.

During the discussion to sell Pictured Rocks Camp, and other budget cuts such as realigning District Superintendants from 8 to 4 (they now have 2 districts to cover), reducing monetary allocations for our 3 Iowa National Mission Institutes, abolishing Field outreach ministers and creating a new similar position covered by 2 clergy for the entire state, as well as many other reductions it became apparent that the need for the deductions is caused by congregations lack of full payment of apportionments. A task force is being assembled to address this considerable shortfall, to put in place better education about the benefits the conference provides for all members of the United Methodist Church in Iowa, and potentially put consequences in place for non-payment of apportionments. Giving in all categories has decreased since 2013 by 6.7 million.

Due to our hard work in attending to business with little negativism at the microphones, we were able to conclude the business of the Conference by noon on Tuesday, instead of the original late afternoon scheduled end time.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen