

**Among many other agenda items during
the four-day event, the Annual Conference:**

- Celebrated the ministry of the laity at the annual Laity Banquet;
 - Heard an update from the District Task Force committee;
 - Received an offering of over \$40,000 for the AWF Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry;
 - Collected 2,929 UMCOR relief kits;
 - Established a \$10.9 million budget for mission and ministry for 2017, a slight increase of 0.4% from 2016;
 - Acknowledged a 2.86% increase in missional giving, which is the greatest increase since 2001;
 - Celebrated the three winners of the Harry Denman Evangelism Award: The clergy winner is Rev. Rurel Ausley. The lay recipients are Kristen and Ben Wallace and the youth recipient is Riley Newton;
 - Celebrated Dr. Frank Buckner receiving the Francis Asbury Award;
 - Honored Ruth Goff Penton as the 2016 “Alice Lee Award” recipient;
 - Recognized Lynn Hamric for receiving the Susanna Wesley Award for Excellence;
 - Witnessed Texasville UMC receive the Local Church Heritage Award;
 - Celebrated the Venture Crew from Foley UMC as they received the Bishop’s Scouting Award of Excellence;
 - Greeted clergy serving in extension ministries;
 - Recognized newly licensed local pastors;
 - Received approximately 202 health plan participants at the biometric health screenings;
 - Passed two petitions and two resolutions;
 - Honored Dr. Steve Furr for his service as lay leader for two quadrenniums;
 - Fixed pastoral appointments, which may be found at www.awfumc.org/apt2016;
 - Celebrated over 139,000 members of the Alabama-West Florida Conference; and
 - Announced the 2017 session of the AWF Conference will meet June 4-7 at Frazer Memorial UMC.
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THE GREAT COMMISSION: SENDING DISCIPLES



SEEK - ENGAGE - NURTURE - DEPLOY

2016 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference

The 2016 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference was held June 12-15 in Montgomery, AL, with the theme, "The Great Commission: Sending Disciples." Bishop Paul L. Leeland, presiding over his eighth annual conference session since becoming the resident bishop, welcomed clergy and lay members to Frazer Memorial UMC in Montgomery.

Special Mission Offering Recipient: AWF Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry

AWF Disaster Response & Recovery Ministry is the beneficiary of the 2016 missional offering. Churches from within the conference collected money and presented their offerings at opening worship. Rev. Michael Lawler delivered the offertory prayer. Lawler is the pastor of Elba FUMC in Elba, AL, where severe flooding occurred in late December of 2015. Amelia Fletcher, director of this ministry, spoke to the opening worship congregation and expressed her appreciation for the support they have received. The conference collected \$40,356.82 for this ministry.

Opening Worship

The Opening Worship Service of the 2016 Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference session was held Sunday evening, June 12, in the sanctuary of Frazer Memorial UMC in Montgomery, AL. Bishop Gregory Palmer of the West Ohio Conference preached the sermon based on John 20:19-23 entitled, "The Recovery of Sentness." He passionately told of instances where Jesus continues to show up in our own ministry and lives. He explained that his presence pierces a tense and anxious atmosphere and said, "God never quits on us!!" He continued, "You will never have any ministry that is worth anything unless that ministry takes on flesh and blood. Ministry will mean taking on flesh in every situation and every circumstance." At the conclusion of his message, the congregation affirmed his words with a standing ovation.

A mass choir from around the conference, and led by Wayne Sigler of Frazer, provided inspiring music for the service including moving renditions of, "All Creatures of Our God and King," "I am Not My Own" and "Send Me." The scripture reading was read by Rev. Sheila Bates. Rev. Bates returned home to the AWF Conference from Nashville, TN, where she is serving as the Director of Student Faith and Leadership Formation, Collegiate Ministries Office at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. Robert McMichael and Jarvis Wilson, talented worship leaders from the Atlanta area, returned to conference this year and led an inspirational and spirit-filled worship medley.

Bishop Paul L. Leeland paused for a moment before the opening prayer to reflect on the tragedy that happened early Sunday morning in Orlando, FL, and reminded the conference that we have a rare opportunity to be agents of God's unconditional love in this world. The Opening Worship Service also celebrated the 20th anniversary of the ordination of the Deacons in the UMC. Deacons in the AWF Conference participated in various parts of the service and processed into the service together. We give thanks to God for their ministry!

Service of Commissioning & Ordination

The Service of Commissioning and Ordination was held Monday evening in the sanctuary of Montgomery First United Methodist Church. The congregation represented family members and special friends of those being commissioned and ordained. Prior to the start of the service, the cathedral choir of Montgomery First UMC presented worshipful music led by James Seay. The service included the commissioning of one provisional deacon and four provisional elders and the ordination of one deacon in full connection and five elders in full connection.

Imagine No Malaria

The Alabama-West Florida Conference celebrated a significant milestone earlier in 2016. The conference raised one million dollars in cash, therefore reaching our goal of saving 100,000 lives for Imagine No Malaria. We celebrated this in Tuesday's afternoon business session through a responsive litany and the singing of, "We Are Marching." Bishop Tom Bickerton, chief spokesperson for the campaign and Bishop of the Western Pennsylvania Conference, thanked the conference via video for our dedication to this initiative. Rev. Paula Roane, Rev. Pam Barnhardt, Rev. Emily Kincaid and Rev. Mike Owenby, deacons in the AWF Conference, led this joyful time.

Service Remembers the lives of Clergy & Clergy Spouses

Thirty clergy and clergy spouses who passed since the 2015 AWF Annual Conference session were remembered Monday during the Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion. Bishop Paul L. Leeland offered the opening prayer and Rev. Rurel Ausley of Crosspoint UMC delivered the inspiring and uplifting sermon entitled, "Jesus Wept" based on John 11:21-35.

Retiring Clergy Honored for Years of Service

Eighteen clergy were recognized upon their retirement by Dr. Jim Sanders during Monday's Order of the Day. Together, the retiring clergy have over 400 years of service in our conference. Rev. John McCullough spoke on behalf of the retiring class. Back by popular demand was the "passing of the torch." McCullough presented a stole to Rev. Lisa Pierce, who was ordained as a deacon in full connection Monday evening, signifying new leadership in the conference.

Episcopal Address

Bishop Paul L. Leeland delivered his Episcopal address to the body of the conference on Monday afternoon. He recapped the theme the AWF Conference has adopted the past quadrennium, "SEND" (Seek, Engage, Nurture, Deploy). He emphasized that, "every congregation can be invitational and missional regardless of size." Leeland also mentioned the Four Areas of Focus, which guides the work of the conference. Communities of Transformation was recognized for their work with ministry with the poor and he thanked the conference for their dedication to raising \$1 million for Imagine No Malaria. Bishop Leeland also invited everyone to a visioning day on October 3, 2016, in Pensacola, FL, to explore a new way to engage in ministry called "Fresh Expressions." He also highlighted the Antioch Project that works with healthy and good churches, that could be great churches, by focusing on people within their zip codes.

Special Guests

The conference was honored by the outstanding leadership of several guest speakers. Dr. Kevin Watson, Assistant Professor of Wesleyan and Methodist Studies at Candler School of Theology, led two teaching sessions. Bishop Gregory Palmer of the West Ohio Conference preached the opening worship service and the Service of Commissioning and Ordination. We welcomed President Cam West of Huntingdon College as well as Blake Horne, director of the United Methodist Children's Home and Christopher Tomlin, director of the Methodist Homes for the Aging. Coach Tim Hutton gave the *Mary Ellen Bullard Leadership Address* at this year's laity banquet.