

## REPORT ON CALIFORNIA-NEVADA CONFERENCE SESSION JUNE 10-13, 2022:

### ***“LET LOVE BE”***

Hello, sisters, brothers, siblings in Christ Jesus! We are Andrea Stone your Lay Leader, and Mary Dewitt your Church Council Chair. We bring you greetings and share news from our siblings throughout the California – Nevada Conference of the United Methodists. In June, we attended this 174<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference as your elected representatives for NCUMC. It was held June 10-13 in Sacramento. Our pastor Gail Chiew also attended the Session, as a clergy member. The conference was packed with intriguing and informative activity. We came home inspired and filled with hope for the future. This, our written summary, barely begins to describe what took place at the Conference. To find out more, please call us, and/or check out the conference session videos on the Conference website

[www.cnumc.org/eventdetail/13134569](http://www.cnumc.org/eventdetail/13134569).

We thought it might be helpful before talking specifically about this year’s session, to briefly explain the difference between a Congregation, a Conference, and an Annual Conference/Conference Session. The United Methodist Church is a connectional and democratic denomination. Every local church (i.e., congregation) is linked to an interconnected network of UMC organizations and resources that join together in mission and ministry. At every level, Laity and clergy work together closely to determine and meet needs, determine the direction of the organizations, and run the organizations. Every country is divided up into regions, called Conferences, and each of these is headed by a bishop. Conferences provide the primary groupings of Lay and ordained church leaders for discernment and decision-making throughout the denomination, and each conference holds a regional Annual Conference Session (commonly called “Conference” or “Annual Conference”). At the local level, the organizations are the congregations.

The regional conference that NCUMC is part of is called the California-Nevada Conference. It consists of more than 370 United Methodist Churches and Fellowships, and nearly 80,000 people of faith and different cultures throughout Northern California and Nevada. Although we seldom see others from these other churches or fellowships, we share a rich heritage of faith with them all. Our shared faith in God and the following of John Wesley’s tenets bind us together no matter where we live or who we are or what we do.

Annual conference sessions are part business, part inspiration and ideas for keeping our own congregations vital, and part spiritual renewal. You might notice a few familiar faces if you view pictures of the event. For example, we ran into our prior pastors, Dave Bunje and Dave Niu, sat with Ana Niu one day, and spent some time catching up with each.

### **The Epistle to the Romans, Chapter 12, was the inspiration for the conference Session Theme, “Let Love Be.”**

If you could’ve joined us at the conference session, you would’ve been greeted often by our speakers with “Welcome Siblings,” or some similar phrase. It was a special reminder that though we are many, separated by distance, and from many different ethnicities, cultures, and gender perspectives, we are all part of the same family of God.

The Conference Session was led by Interim Bishop Sally Dyck on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and by Bishop Warner Brown on Monday. Throughout the event, there were many, many inspiring and insightful speakers.

With courtesy and kindness, this year’s Conference attendees addressed legislation (sometimes controversial) about how we deal with challenges in our world. New clergy were ordained and we celebrated them, along with newly certified Lay Ministers and Lay Deacons and Deaconesses. We celebrated retiring and deceased clergy (and their spouses), and fixed/confirmed/prayed for blessings upon the appointments of pastors to the various charges throughout the region for the coming year. We watched humble and inspiring videos from retiring pastors, who shared how their favorite Bible passages helped them to meet needs throughout their careers, and how their greatest joys affected their service to meet others’ needs. We shared Worship and Holy Communion.

Young people were included and acknowledged both indirectly and directly. If you’ve watched any of the Children’s Worship Videos the Conference has had made and put on their website throughout the Pandemic, you’ll be familiar with Mort the Snail – who helps Rev. Ray Bradeyfindley teach kids each week about God’s love and kingdom on earth. Well, Mort made a surprise appearance at the Conference, to give us all greetings and remind us of these fun

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worship videos as free resources for our congregations. Also, several dozen youth and young adults were present throughout the conference as delegates, and also had a few specific events of their own there.

We learned that many congregations are languishing- especially those that aren't changing to address the personal and spiritual needs and technology savvy of those in their communities as those communities change. Three (3) UMCs have closed this past year. But, eight (8) new ones have started throughout our Conference with the support of the tithes that congregations like NCUMC make every year. With the enthusiastic involvement of various local groups, new congregations are springing up and existing congregations are changing throughout the conference and serving such diverse groups as Native Americans, Hispanic-Latinos, West Africans, Koreans, Fijians, Tongans, College ministries, impoverished persons of many races, LGBTQ+ persons, etc. Those church buildings with closed congregations are held in trust by the Conference, and when possible given to a new congregation that's growing.

We grieved together and prayed together— such as in response to an arson fire that occurred at St. Paul's UMC in San Jose the day before the Conference started, for recovery of the Tongan people from the January volcanic eruptions, over the closure of three churches due to loss of membership, over the schism about accepting LGBTQ+ members as equals that has led one congregation in our Conference to decide to leave the UMC, and over the pain experienced by LGBTQ+ members around the country who experience hateful treatment.

A lot of Business was interspersed throughout the event. For example, we reviewed and approved the Conference's budget for 2022/2023, and reviewed the effect on our churches of the lawsuit against the Boy Scouts of America (blessedly, due to high church standards, very few boys participating in Methodist church-sponsored troops over the years were exposed to predatory scout leaders.). Before the Conference Session, three resolutions specific to Peace and Justice were developed and submitted for full conference vote. Of these, one was from a delegation led by NCUMC's own Rev. Sharon Delgado, to Convene a Climate Justice Ministries Task Force. All three resolutions passed.

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We learned of - and acknowledged with clapping and prayers of gratitude - many of the activities of churches throughout the Conference to help others this past year, such as working in food programs, forums to present community issues, clothing drives, community meals, online presence, after-school programs, hybrid Vacation Bible School, post-wildfire cleanup and related emotional support, and more.

We learned of - and via clapping - celebrated that California-Nevada - our annual conference - is one out of (somewhat sadly) just eight of the 54 U.S. conferences that gave full apportionments last year (now called Tithes). Also, Cal-Nevada Conference achieved 100% giving over the last 5 years. California-Nevada conference also has the highest unrestricted assets in the Western Jurisdiction of conferences. This means partly that our Conference has a lot of resources to help new churches start, and to help existing congregations to stay vital.

**As a side note, we at NCUMC should take pride in the fact that our own congregation has met 100% of our apportionments to the District and the Conference for many, many years.**

Because United Methodists are a connectional church, we proudly add that these apportionment monies go not only into funding conference staff and services to support districts and local churches, they also go to help with the special support needs of churches and individuals locally and throughout our state, nation, and world.

We learned of some of the progress – and challenges - of the 85+ churches in our Conference who participated this past year in the Reconciling Ministry Network, which work to advance justice and inclusion for all LGBTQ people in The United Methodist Church and beyond.

As you've heard, much happened. More than we've reported here. So, what do we as a congregation and as individuals do with this information? Inspired by the 12<sup>th</sup> Epistle of Paul to the Romans, **our Conference challenges all of us here at NCUMC to reflect prayerfully on what we've heard and learned, to act on it and Let Love Be! Let us seek guidance and inspiration to move NCUMC forward with the changing times, so that we continue to be a Light to the World here from the top of Broad Street!**

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[Bible reading from the opening day worship service: (As interpreted by Eugene Peterson- The Message)

*Now hear the words of Paul to the Romans, Chapter 12, Verses 1-2, and 9-21:*

**12<sup>1-2</sup>** So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

**9-10** Love from the center of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle.

**11-13** Don't burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

**14-16** Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies; don't be the great somebody.

**17-19** Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."

**20-21** Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good."

This is the word of God for the people of God. Amen.