

# Report on the 2022 Annual Conference of the North Georgia UMC

*By Debbie Poss and Don Slater, CFUMC Lay Delegates*

The 2022 Annual Conference of the North Georgia United Methodist Church was held at the Classic Center in Athens, Georgia, on June 2-4. Presided over by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, the theme of “A Place for You at the Table” seemed appropriate for the 1800 delegates attending the first in-person gathering of the conference in three years.

As first-time attendees, the Conference for us began with a Laity Luncheon. It was a chance to meet other lay delegates, some of whom were newbies like us, but many others who had attended numerous annual conferences in the past. We shared anxieties and expectations, and gained insight into the days ahead. (It was especially interesting to meet many of the youth delegates – high school, college, and other young adults who led us in prayer at many of the sessions over the next three days.) After a nice lunch, we heard an inspiring message from C. Russell Davis, Executive Director of North Georgia Camp and Retreat Ministries. His talk on “From Bibs to Aprons” focused on how we grow in the church as we grow in life. We begin by needing things done for us, just as babies need bibs when they are fed. As we grow and mature, we can then don aprons and serve others in our religious life as well as in real life. But as we grow in the church, so must the church grow and evolve – the church is always just one generation removed from irrelevance and extinction. And we need to listen to and value the input from that generation that will succeed us to make the church grow.

Thursday’s opening worship, like most of the sessions, started with pre-service music that would be typically found in many modern worship services. Bishop Sue’s sermon on finding room at the table was based on a CBS Sunday Morning piece from 2017, about a Haitian immigrant who initially felt shunned but had grown into a popular senior. He’s started a unique club called We Dine Together, which works to insure that no student eats alone as he had done upon arrival in Boca Raton. This club has spread now to many schools to help make outsiders feel accepted, just as the Bible says we should do in “hauling people to Jesus”. The sermon was very moving, fit in well with the conference theme, and set the mood for business sessions.

Business sessions and reports were organized around five areas of focus: 1) Community Engagement, 2) Scriptural Literacy and Imagination, 3) Health and Wellbeing, 4) Racial Justice and Healing, and 5) New Faith Opportunities and Communities. The opening session included presentation of the lay and clergy nominations to various standing committees of the North Georgia United Methodist Church, which met with approval. We also re-endorsed Rev. Dr. Byron Thomas (current Central South District Superintendent) as our episcopal nominee. The Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference will meet this November to elect new bishops, which, if he is elected, means Rev. Dr. Thomas will likely be assigned to another conference other than North Georgia in keeping with the Methodist tradition of itineracy.

The most disquieting moment of the first session came when the conference approved the disaffiliation applications of 70 churches. (A full list can be found at the end of this report.) The disaffiliating churches were predominately small and rural, most with congregations of 10-50 members. While this list represents approximately 9% of the total churches in the North Georgia Conference, their membership makes up less than 3% of the total membership. (The process for disaffiliation set by the 2019 General Conference allows another window for UMC churches to leave at the 2023 Annual Conference, if they apply and meet conditions this fall and winter.)

Friday morning started with an early, optional Service of Holy Communion, which was simple, yet moving. The first business session focused primarily on financial matters, including the approval of the lowest apportionment budget in 20 years. There was discussion on fully funding the pension program for clergy, the rising costs of health benefits, and instituting a 5.6% cost of living increase to paychecks for the first time in five years. Delegates also acknowledged the North Georgia Annual Conference's allocation to the Boy Scouts of America Abuse Survivors Settlement. A major topic of debate was the recommendation to relocate the United Methodist Center (main office headquarters of the North Georgia United Methodist Conference) from Peachtree Corners to Main Street in College Park. This would put it closer to the geographic center of our conference, as well as more conveniently located for interstate highway and transportation access – the approval carried easily. Recommendations for the Barnes Evaluation and Administrative Team (BEAT) program were also discussed and approved – this program earmarks sales proceeds from church properties into an endowed fund to use for new faith opportunities and innovative outreach.

Friday morning's second business session dealt mostly with resolutions, with Bishop Sue presiding over a thorough discussion with speakers equitably divided between both sides. Of the half-a-dozen proposed resolutions, only the two supporting native American sovereignty and recognition of the eastern tribe of the Cherokee nation passed easily. The other resolutions, dealing with refinements of the disaffiliation process and moving the quadrennial General Conference from U.S. presidential election years, all failed by roughly a 90%-10% margin.

A solemn Service of Remembrance was held to honor the lives of some 42 clergy and spouses who've passed away over the past year, as a bell was rung for each in their memory. Rev. Jane Brooks preached, and beautiful music was provided by the St. John UMC choir in Augusta. A special offertory was collected in their honor, raising over \$20,000 for UMCOR.

Friday afternoon's session ended with a multicultural service, where music and the message were modeled in a program presented in English, Spanish, and Korean.

Because the morning's discussions on relocating the United Methodist Center and on resolutions had run long, the afternoon session on Racial Justice and Healing was delayed to Saturday morning, and unfortunately somewhat abbreviated. The major item for this final business session was the resolution of property for church closures over the past year. Seven churches had shuttered, being unable to fund their pastors or meet insurance payments (although half had actually merged with another nearby UMC church). This was an especially poignant vote for Don, since it included closing Avondale Pattillo UMC in which he had grown up. A somewhat heated debate then took place about what to do with some of these church properties, which ordinarily would be sold with proceeds going into the Barnes Fund. Since one church in particular had been founded and built by former slaves on land donated by black families, a discussion ensued about whether it would be appropriate to return the property to their descendants – the question was ultimately referred to the North Georgia UMC Board of Trustees for resolution.

The final service late Saturday morning was a Service of Licensing, Commissioning, and Ordination for some 40 new local pastors, deacons, and elders. This was a very emotional service both for those being ordained after years of prayer and preparation, as well as for nearly all in attendance – many a tear were shed.

Links and more information can be found on the following pages.

Links to more information from the 2022 North Georgia UMC Annual Conference:

- PDF of the North Georgia Annual Conference Handbook:  
<https://www.ngumc.org/files/fileslibrary/annual+conference+session/handbook+annual+conference+2022.pdf>
- CBS Sunday Morning news clip shared by Bishop Sue in her Opening Worship:  
<https://www.cbsnews.com/video/at-one-high-school-no-one-eats-lunch-alone/>
- Introducing the Five Areas of Focus: <https://www.ngumc.org/newsdetail/5-values-5-areas-of-focus-16513585>
- Nominations Report for Standing Committees of the North Georgia Annual Conference:  
<https://www.ngumc.org/files/websites/ngumc/Nominations+2022+Version+2.pdf>
- Endorsement of Rev. Dr. Byron Thomas as Episcopal Nominee:  
[https://www.ngumc.org/newsy\\_detail/north-georgia-delegation-endorses-byron-thomas-as-episcopal-nominee-12949785](https://www.ngumc.org/newsy_detail/north-georgia-delegation-endorses-byron-thomas-as-episcopal-nominee-12949785)
- Adopted Resolutions by the 2022 North Georgia Annual Conference:  
[https://mcusercontent.com/8c4a2bf5df821f76fea333283/files/77a213cc-411c-4f46-f619-7bcfd7fcfbc5/2022\\_Resolution\\_for\\_Action\\_by\\_the\\_General\\_Board\\_of\\_Church\\_and\\_Society.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/8c4a2bf5df821f76fea333283/files/77a213cc-411c-4f46-f619-7bcfd7fcfbc5/2022_Resolution_for_Action_by_the_General_Board_of_Church_and_Society.pdf) and  
[https://mcusercontent.com/8c4a2bf5df821f76fea333283/files/2624dd8b-289e-def1-3ff8-d1e475dcd93c/2022\\_Resolution\\_to\\_Support\\_Native\\_American\\_Sovereignty.pdf](https://mcusercontent.com/8c4a2bf5df821f76fea333283/files/2624dd8b-289e-def1-3ff8-d1e475dcd93c/2022_Resolution_to_Support_Native_American_Sovereignty.pdf)
- Video and photos from the 2022 North Georgia Annual Conference:
  - Day 1: <https://vimeo.com/716755354>
  - Day 2: <https://vimeo.com/716983370>
  - Day 3: <https://vimeo.com/717136750>

## Disaffiliating North Georgia UMC Churches, as of 30 June 2022

### North East District

*Banks, Dawson, Habersham, Hall, Habersham, Hart, Forsyth, Franklin, Jackson, Lumpkin, Madison, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union, and White Counties*

Center UMC, Hoschton  
Chattahoochee UMC, Helen  
Coosa UMC, Blairsville  
Dry Pond UMC, Eastanollee (near Jefferson)  
Gaines Chapel UMC, Canon (near Lavonia)

### North West District

*Bartow, Catoosa, Chattooga, Cherokee, Fannin, Floyd, Gilmer, Gordon, Polk, Murray, Pickens, Walker, and Whitfield Counties*

Adairsville UMC  
Beech Creek UMC, Rome  
Chapel Hill UMC, Rome  
Dawnville UMC, Dalton  
Emerson UMC  
Fairview UMC, Dalton  
Faith UMC, Cartersville  
Finley Chapel UMC, Rome  
Fishers Chapel UMC, Summerville  
Lawrence Chapel UMC, Menlo  
McCaysville UMC  
Metropolitan UMC, Rome  
Nellie Peters UMC, Calhoun  
New Hope UMC, Summerville  
Oak Hill UMC, Lyerly  
Pine Chapel UMC, Resaca  
Sam Jones Memorial UMC, Cartersville  
Smith Chapel UMC, Tunnel Hill  
South Broad UMC, Rome  
The Way UMC, Woodstock  
Tunnel Hill UMC

### Central North District

*Fulton and Clayton Counties*

Ebenezer UMC, Roswell  
New Life UMC, Atlanta  
Sardis UMC, Buckhead

### Central South District

*DeKalb, Henry, Newton, and Rockdale Counties*

Gaithers UMC, Covington  
Mansfield UMC  
New Hope UMC, Locust Grove  
Newborn UMC  
Prospect UMC, Covington  
Sewell UMC, Mansfield  
Starrsville UMC, Covington

### Central West District

*Carroll, Cobb, Douglas, Haralson, and Paulding Counties*

Bowdon First UMC  
Garrett's Chapel UMC, Bowdon  
Union UMC, Waco

### Central East District

*Barrow, Clarke, Oconee, Gwinnett, and Walton Counties*

Bold Springs, Monroe  
Union Chapel, LaGrange

### South East District

*Baldwin, Columbia, Elbert, Greene, Hancock, Lincoln, McDuffie, Morgan, Oglethorpe, Putnam, Richmond, Taliaferro, Warren, and Wilkes Counties*

Concord UMC, Eatonton  
Union Chapel UMC, LaGrange  
Mt. Zion UMC, Washintgon  
Bethel UMC, Wilkes County  
Smyrna UMC, Washington  
Quest UMC, Grovetown  
Norwood UMC  
St. Paul UMC, Lincoln County  
Ruckersville UMC, Elberton  
Bethlehem UMC, Elberton  
Middleton UMC, Elberton  
Woodlawn UMC, Elberton

### South West District

*Butts, Coweta, Fayette, Harris, Heard, Jasper, Lamar, Meriwether, Monroe, Pike, Spalding, Troup, and Upson Counties*

Arbor Chapel UMC, Warm Springs  
Ayres Memorial UMC, LaGrange  
Calvary UMC, Shady Dale  
Carmel UMC, Gay  
Franklin UMC  
Godfrey UMC, Madison  
Greenville UMC  
Harmony UMC, Franklin  
Hillsboro UMC  
Hopewell UMC, Whitesville  
Manchester UMC  
Mt. Gilead UMC, Sharpsburg  
New Hope UMC, Monticello  
Pleasant Grove UMC, LaGrange  
Powell Chapel UMC, Villa Rica  
Raleigh UMC, Woodbury  
Trinity UMC, Durand