

Report on the 2023 Annual Conference of the North Georgia UMC

by Debbie Poss and Don Slater, CFUMC Lay Delegates

What a Difference a Year Makes!

The United Methodist Church is very much alive in Christ as was evident at the 2024 North Georgia United Methodist Church Annual Conference at the Classic Center in Athens, Georgia on June 13 – 15, 2024. We wish everyone could have seen the renewed enthusiasm, dedication, and spiritual excitement exhibited at that conference!

Presiding was Bishop Robin Dease (who was recently assigned by the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference as the episcopal leader of the South Georgia UMC Conference in addition to the North Georgia UMC Conference, effective September 1, 2024). The theme of the conference was, “Becoming an ACTS Church” and it was based on Acts 2:42-44 : *“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything.”* — (CEB) The Conference was designed to be a time of:

Affirmation

Celebration

Transformation and

Soul Care .

Representing Cumming First UMC were lay delegates Debbie Poss, Don Slater, and Barbara Ledbetter and clergy delegates the Rev. Gia Jones and the Rev. Dr. Matt Stewart.

The Rev. Matt Miofsky from St. Louis reminded us of the importance, the gift, and the responsibility of rest. God commanded us to rest – He blessed it and made it holy. Rest gives us time to meditate, to reflect, and to listen to God.

The Rev. Jasmine Smothers, pastor of Atlanta First UMC, reminded us that when Elmo (from Sesame Street) asked on Twitter (now X), “How are you?”, thousands of people responded – sharing their joys and sorrows. She reminded us that the Church should be asking the same question and listening and responding appropriately. We need to reach people where they are, putting people over politics, praise over problems, and poor and poor in spirit over prompted processes of church. We need to show that Pentecost is not a one-time event – it should be happening every day!

The Rev. Dalton Rushing, pastor of Decatur First UMC, shared information about the “least favorite disciple”, Mathias. He replaced Judas and is only mentioned twice in the bible. In fact, Acts is the book where decisions were made after Jesus’s crucifixion that changed the world. The disciples had to figure out what being Christian meant. They disagreed about many things

along the way but shared the same good news. We are still doing that. We are still being the Church.

In the business meetings, we heard reports from many groups and voted on a number of items. The highlights included:

- adopting a new 5-district structure to reflect better church representation (Cumming First UMC is still in a redrawn Northeast District, with the Rev. Dr. Douglas Gilreath still as our District Superintendant.)
- deciding on a new conference office location, one that is more centrally located and less expensive to maintain (the former Sugarloaf UMC in Gwinnett County)
- adopting a 25% reduced budget, that is in alignment with our current local church footprint, and
- electing new boards, committees, and commissions.

To us, the most exciting part of the conference was the involvement of the youth asking for more equitable representation at conference and many youth answering the call to ministry following the Ordination Service on Friday evening.

The saddest part was knowing that The Rev. Dr. Terry Walton was really going to retire, and the best part was seeing the Rev. Gia Jones being ordained as an Elder in Full Connection. Of course, CFUMC receiving an award for “Church of Excellence in Outreach and Missions” was a great moment, too!

At the closing service, Bishop Robin Dease preached on Acts 8:1-8. “Even in the most challenging times, God is mobilizing people to accomplish something. The very things that threaten to slow down the gospel, to slow down the spread of Jesus's grace, they only fuel it... The Bible should never be used to discriminate anyone... We water down Jesus to pacify people... Preach the truth about the love and grace of Jesus...Challenge is where growth begins.” She challenged us to become an ACTS church. Her sermon can be heard in full by clicking [here](#).

More details can be found on the North Georgia website by clicking [here](#).