

## 2018 Annual Conference wrap-up



**Theme:** Drawing on John 15:1-17, the theme of this year's annual conference session was "Discover Joy: Live Deeply!" We focused on the pathway to a deep, well-lived life, which comes as we abide in Jesus. We

connected to our collective story of how God has named and claimed us, heard a variety of "Why Jesus" stories, and explored practices that sustain us and give depth to our spiritual lives—those that allow us to discover the joy that comes when we invest ourselves in growing in our love of God and neighbor. And we celebrated the multitude of ways that we are sent into the world to live fully and offer the goodness we have discovered in living in the way of Jesus.

**Bishop's Episcopal Address:** In his 2018 Episcopal Address, Bishop Ough talked about how when we remain in Jesus, his joy is our joy, and he explored what it means to be Love First congregations—focused on loving God and loving our neighbors. The three most distinctive characteristics of Love First churches are that they live the United Methodist way, tell their Jesus stories, and generate Love First fruit, he said.

**Teaching sessions with Olu Brown:** In two teaching sessions, Rev. Olu Brown explored the importance of knowing, claiming, and reclaiming our personal "why" stories and underscored the critical task of staying connected to the vine so

we can be inspired to transform the world. One of the worst things that can happen is for us to become "professional Christians"—doing church, worship, and prayer by the numbers, he said. He urged us to be "catalyst evangelists"—those who go before to create an opportunity or atmosphere to connect people to Jesus.

**Missional Report:** The Dakotas Annual Conference is reaching the next person for Jesus. On Thursday morning, Annual Conference attendees learned about how the conference and churches are creating a culture of call in a variety of settings—laity pursuing new ministry paths, new clergy growing in leadership, churches launching new services. Clergy and laity shared their God stories about answering God's call.

**Lydia Project:** United Methodists in Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota are invited knit or crochet 10,000 purple scarves. This initiative the Lydia Project, after Lydia in Acts 16. The scarves will be distributed at General Conference 2020.

**Recognizing those entering new chapter of ministry:** At a Celebration of Life in Ministry worship service Friday evening, hundreds of United Methodists gathered to remember 12 friends and colleagues who have died over the past year, honor 14 retiring clergy, and celebrate one elder being ordained, one elder being commissioned as provisional members, and 20 newly licensed local pastors. Thanks be to God for this group of dedicated leaders!

**Festival at the Canaries Baseball Park:** Attendees enjoyed time in fellowship of music and food at the Sioux Falls

Canaries Baseball Park on Thursday evening. Each district fielded a kickball team. The games kicked off with a barbershop quartet singing “Take Me Out to the Ball Game.” The teams squared off in two rounds of games. Referees for the evening included Bishop Ough, Rev. Rebecca Trefz, Keith Shew, and Jeff Pospisil. The Southeast District team, “the Ough-megas” walked away as the victors.

**Legislation:** Members of the 2018 Annual Conference Session voted Saturday to approve a 2019 budget totaling \$7,306,501, a decrease of 4.4% or \$319,664. They elected Rev. Rebecca Trefz, clergy delegate and Beata Ferris, lay delegate to the 2019 special called General Conference session. Rev. Roger Spahr, clergy, and Matthew Bader, laity, were elected alternates. They also voted on the General Conference constitutional amendments as amended and approved the consent calendar.

**Miracle Offering:** At the end of the Annual Conference session, nearly \$43,000 had been given to the 2018 Miracle Offering Called: One Word, Many Ways.



## **Journey Toward Vitality**

“God’s vision for every congregation in the Dakotas is to provide joyful expression to Jesus’ core missional imperatives: to love God and neighbor, to reach new people, and to heal a broken world,” said Bishop Bruce R. Ough, presenting the 2018 Episcopal Address.

Looking at 2017 numbers, there is evidence that being intentional about these imperatives is bearing fruit within our conference:

- People professing their faith in Jesus through our churches increased by a whopping **112 percent**.
- Total professing membership increased **2.4 percent**.
- Weekly average attendance in Sunday School or other weekly education classes increased by **17 percent**.
- People served by our community ministries of outreach, justice, and mercy increased **11 percent to 193,954 individuals**.
- We are engaged in **18 church plants and multiplication projects** across the Dakotas Conference.
- For the seventh consecutive year, the Dakotas had an increase in average worship attendance—which **grew by 5.5 percent**.

“I desire to spread God’s love to every person in Dakotas; don’t you?” said Ough. “The Dakotas Conference is going on to perfection in love. When our conflicted, divided, broken world looks at the people called United Methodist practicing the three simple rules, they will exclaim, ‘Look at how they, in all of their diversity, love Jesus, love one another, and love us! They are a Love First church! There is hope for the world!’”