

Newsletter of the
Association of Retired
Ministers and Spouses

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To ARMS! is
published in Spring,
Summer, and Fall.

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To ARMS!

MAY 2024

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1

Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors

by the Rev. Alvin J. Horton

Compromise is no longer a dirty word...at least in The United Methodist Church, that is. When the denomination's General Conference removed from its *Discipline* all punitive language around issues of human sexuality it finally opened the door to everyone, regardless of their view, to join in fellowship, mission, and worship.

For some progressives, I'm sure, the church did not go far enough in affirming LGBTQ+ persons. For others of a more traditional perspective, the church will seem to have taken a pass on what they believe is a Biblical mandate on marriage and sex. But now, both are welcome in The United Methodist Church. Compromise is no longer a dirty word.

I grew up a Southern Baptist on the buckle of the Bible Belt in Mobile, Alabama. When I became a United Methodist at the young age of eleven I felt I had come home to my faith. I loved the notion that we can differ theologically, and politically, and in so many other ways, and yet still be brothers and sisters in faith. When I retired from active pastoral ministry, I was serving First United

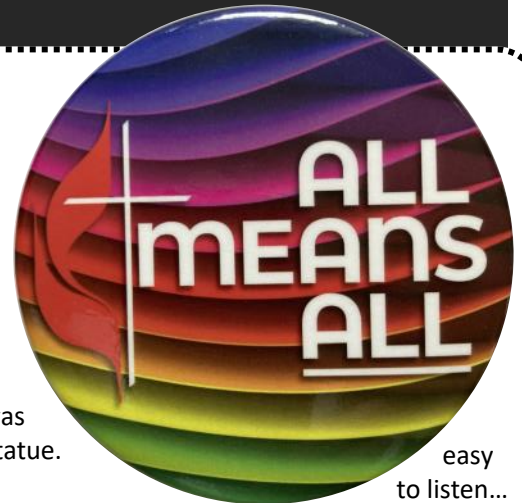
Methodist Church in Charlottesville. Yes, that's the downtown church right across the street from what was the Robert E. Lee statue. Need I say more?

Compromise was hard then, very hard. Dialogue was difficult, but necessary. It's never easy to listen to others, especially to those with whom you differ. But that's the very nature of compromise...and I believe, love.

Just before the Pandemic, a group of folks at Bon Air United Methodist Church in Richmond distributed throughout the community a pin that said, "All Means All." I think it meant that everyone, especially those in the LGBTQ+ community, was welcome at Bon Air Church.

Today, following General Conference action, I believe it could mean that everyone, regardless of their progressive or traditionalist views of human sexuality, or most anything else, is welcome in The United Methodist Church. All means ALL.

It's not easy to sit across a fellowship table, or lean across a study table, or kneel at the Lord's Table, with people with whom you disagree. It's not



easy
to listen...

and learn. But that's what the Lord teaches. Love is rarely easy; it's often very hard. However, some of my most fulfilling ministries have been in places where people differed theologically and politically, but joined in a loving fellowship that bridged all divides.

Yes, "Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors" may be a slogan we have yet to live into completely; but maybe we just made a good start. In his sermon, *Catholic Spirit*, John Wesley asked, "Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion?" His sermon was based on II Kings 10:15 in which King Jehu asks Jehonadab, "Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours?...If it is, give me your hand." I believe that's the spirit of the teaching of Jesus. It's the spirit of God's love.

All means ALL.



...and KNOW that I am GOD

PSALM 46

The United Methodist Church General Conference

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

General Conference adopts new, historic Social Principles

By a vote of 523 to 161 after a lengthy debate, General Conference voted on May 2, 2024, to eliminate the 52-year-old assertion in the Social Principles that “the practice of homosexuality... is incompatible with Christian teaching.”

In the same vote, delegates affirmed “marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant that brings two people of faith (adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adult persons of consenting age) into a union of one another and into deeper relationship with God and the religious community.”

Although not considered Church law, the Social Principles are legislative statements approved by the General Conference and included in the *Book of Discipline* and the *Book of Resolutions*.

The final version, with adopted amendments, is due to be available by January 1, 2025. Cokesbury is also in the process of publishing a study guide, *Social Principles of The United Methodist Church 2025-2028*, which can be pre-ordered now but will not be available until May of next year. This 64-page booklet will include the official text of *The Social Principles*, exercises, a topical index, and the denomination’s Social Creed.

A Retiree’s (and delegate’s) Look at General Conference *by the Rev. Rob Vaughn*

Who would ever believe that the words JOY and General Conference could be in the same sentence?! Retirees, thank you for your work and faithfulness in getting our United Methodist Church to this place. The influence and voting participation by our Virginia retirees in 2019 to elect a delegation that was committed to a church marked by the full inclusion of ALL, an action repeated in many other annual conferences, helped make the 2020/24 General Conference a truly historic event.

Passing by very wide margins was legislation for the first part of worldwide regionalization (now needing ratification), a globally written revision of the Social Principles, and the removal of harmful language.

There are many moments to commend to you if you’ve not been watching. One is the Young People’s Address (Search YouTube for “Late Morning Plenary: April 24”) and another is the sermon of our first Native American

bishop, David Wilson (Search YouTube for “Worship: May 1 - General Conference 2020”).

Bishop Wilson shared the wisdom of one of his elders noting the importance of making decisions not for the moment for the next generation, but for seven generations out.

Having personally participated in nine other general conferences, the difference between this year and previous conferences was substantial. Instead of the usual experience that was like the U.S. Congress at its worst, this General Conference seemed closer to Holy Conferencing than ever before. The sense of how we move forward to be the worldwide church God desires drove most all conversation and decision-making. My friends in the Central Conferences and those who are far more traditional than I all shared the same feeling. For some of the details of legislative changes and analysis, see our Virginia

Conference webpage: vaumc.org/gc2024. It contains a very robust group of links, as does the United Methodist News Service website: www.umnews.org.

How do we continue what began at General Conference? One way is to participate in this year’s annual conference. If you choose to be present for only a portion of the time, please choose Friday morning, June 21, for the vote on regionalization. **This critical change in how our denomination is organized requires a constitutional change. To take effect, two-thirds of all the delegates to all the annual conferences are required to vote yes** (this is an aggregate vote). Your participation is absolutely vital!

If you need more information to prepare, you can register for the conference’s webinar on regionalization by going to: <https://vaumc.org/event/regionalization-webinar-gc2024>.

General Conference Needs You! *by the Rev. Matthew Benton*

The postponed 2020 General Conference met from April 23-May 3, 2024 in Charlotte, NC and passed some historic legislation: new and revised Social Principles, removed language harmful towards LGBTQ+ persons, allowed the question of marriage to be left up to the conscience of pastors and congregations, and passed a new governance structure called Worldwide Regionalization.

Worldwide Regionalization renames Central Conferences as “Regional Conferences” and creates a U.S. Regional Conference.

The U.S. Regional Conference would allow a space for U.S. only issues (like pension and health care plans) to be discussed, freeing up future General

Conferences to discuss matters that relate to our global witness.

Regionalization includes one General Book of Discipline that all United Methodists will hold in common and will allow Regional Conferences to adapt other portions of the Discipline according to cultural contexts, as

Central Conferences currently have the ability to do. Additionally, Worldwide Regionalization ensures that the gains toward an inclusive church won at this year’s General Conference will be protected within the U.S. church, regardless of the work of any future General Conference.

Worldwide Regionalization legislation

includes amendments to the *United Methodist Constitution*. As such, the next step for this legislation is to go before every Annual Conference around the world for ratification. The constitutional amendments will require 2/3 of the worldwide aggregate vote in order to be ratified. This is where you come in!

The Virginia Annual Conference is one of the largest conferences in the Connection, and **retired clergy make up a significant portion of the voting membership of our Annual Conference. You have the opportunity and ability to help shape the future of The United Methodist Church as we seek to live as an equitable and world-wide body!**

We need you!

- To **make plans to attend Annual Conference** in Hampton this June!
- To **attend the business session on Friday morning** when the vote will be taken!
- To **support ratification of this groundbreaking legislation!**
- To **help shape the future of a Church to which you have devoted your life!**

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about Worldwide Regionalization legislation, **the Virginia Conference Delegation is offering a webinar on May 29.**

Additionally you may email vaumcgc@gmail.com for more information on the webinar or to have any questions answered.

In Memoriam



Remembering those who have died since our last report in December 2023

Retired Clergy

Robert J. Donnelly (9/26/34) RE	November 16, 2023
Barbara Minter (08/27/35) RE	November 20, 2023
Edward P. Gant (07/23/30) RE	November 29, 2023
Isaac E. Harper (8/13/51) RL	December 15, 2023
Robert H. Woodfin (9/23/42) RE	December 19, 2023
Howard F. Holley (4/26/56) RE	February 14, 2024
James H. Blankenship (1/27/30) RA	March 3, 2024
Laughton L. Corr (10/25/32) RE	March 4, 2024
Murray L. Sallinger (9/7/37) RL	March 29, 2024
Manning B. Harrell (7/24/30) RE	April 24, 2024
James Delano Righter (7/21/38) RE	May 12, 2024

Retired Bishops

Thomas Barber Stockton (7/26/30) RB	October 18, 2023
Timothy W. Whitaker (10/5/48) RB	March 28, 2024
Carlton P. Minnick Jr. (9/8/27) RB	May 4, 2024

Retired Diaconal Minister

Viola G. Turner (10/7/31) RDM	December 27, 2023
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Clergy Spouses

Mary C. Oberdick (Rev. Jan G. Oberdick)	April 13, 2022
Rebecca W. Barclay (Rev. Richard Barclay)	October 24, 2023
Carol J. Stribula (Rev. Charles Stribula)	November 16, 2023
Clydia D. Collins (Rev. Donald L. Collins)	November 23, 2023
Anne D. Blankenship (Rev. James Blankenship)	February 14, 2024

Widows/Widowers of Deceased Clergy

Sandra G. Parker (Rev. Steven Parker)	November 13, 2023
Hilda S. Kyle (Rev. Edward H. Kyle)	January 19, 2024
Helen K. McMullen (Rev. Conley McMullen)	February 24, 2024
Ruby S. Hoover (Rev. Lawrence B. Hoover)	March 3, 2024
Edna K. Paylor (Rev. Earle W. Paylor)	April 3, 2024
Marilyn C. Davis (Rev. Paul Benj Davis Jr)	April 11, 2024



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To Arms! Is published on line via RetireeNet, ClergyNet, SpouseNet, and sent to ARMS members upon request.



Want to support ARMS?

Send suggested donation of \$10 per person to:

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110 Ridgeway Rd.
Warsaw, VA
22572-4255

Make check payable to "Virginia Conference UMC" with "ARMS donation" in memo line.

ARMS Retreat set for Oct. 9-10

The theme for this year's annual ARMS Retreat, set for October 9-10 at Eagle Eyrie Retreat Center in Lynchburg, is "Singing in the Wesleyan Tradition: And Its Importance in both Personal and Church Life."

The Rev. Roger Dowdy, an ordained Deacon in the Virginia Conference, will be the keynote speaker. He is founder/director of CROSS-PATHS Ministries, a field-based, ecumenical ministry service devoted to strengthening worship liturgy and the arts, spiritual life, and leadership of congregations. Roger's two presentations will center

around I Corinthians 14:15— "I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also." He says, "Our time together will be a prime opportunity to explore the spiritual richness of sacred songs, 'ancient & modern.'"

All retired elders, deacons, diaconal ministers, and local pastors— as well as their spouses, widows, and widowers— are members of ARMS and welcome to attend. Participants are encouraged to bring hymnals as well as their



Singing in the Wesleyan Tradition and its importance in both personal and church life

Faith We Sing song books. Display tables will also be available for participants to share their retirement hobbies. Watch for more details in the coming months.