

FORWARD - 2021 Annual Conference of GNJUMC

Submitted by Arun Thangaraj, Lay Delegate to the Annual Conference



The Annual Conference of the Greater New Jersey United Methodist Church was held on May 24th and 25th, 2021, via Zoom. Attendance exceeded 1500. A little over 500 of the attendees were eligible to vote. At the conference we passed legislation, witnessed the ordination and commissioning of 13 clergy, celebrated the retirement of 22 clergy, and listened to reports from various office holders and groups.



Bishop Schol welcomed us to the conference and invited us to celebrate our way forward. He noted that it was the 65th anniversary of the ordination of women in the United Methodist Church. He praised the many wonderful ministries in GNJUMC and highlighted A Journey of Hope. The conference passed legislation to strengthen A Journey of Hope—ensuring equity, ensuring congregations in low income communities are apportioned shared ministry at a reduced amount and ensuring that all congregations are treated the same regardless of their shared ministry.

Carolyn Pendleton presented the Lay Leadership report. Superintendent Hector Burgos presented the Ministry report. Nominations to various committees, commissions, boards and councils were presented and approved by a vote of 476 to 19.

A Service of Remembrance followed.



We then passed the Trustee enabling legislation by a vote of 460 to 7. This empowers the trustees to handle property sales and leases, set minimum salaries for clergy and approve 11 advance specials for mission and ministry in the community. The legislation in support of 11 ministries known as Conference Advance Specials passed by a vote of 450 to 19. Some of these ministries are Ranch Hope/ Victory House, The Maker's Place, Pennington School, Camp YDP, Christian Outreach Project, The Neighborhood Center, etc.

The conference discussed retirement plans and health insurance plans for clergy and passed legislation by a vote of 394 to 63 to authorize the plans offered. An amendment to the motion to mitigate any increase in out-of-pocket costs was referred to the Council on Finance and Administration (CF&A) by a vote of 306 to 183.

A motion to close churches in Randolph, Millville and Jersey City passed by a vote of 450 to 39.



Rev. Vasanth Victor, President, CF&A, shared with us that billing collections this year are up 29% over 2020, and that our churches have received about \$5.9 million in PPP funding in 2021. But for the first time in 15 years GNJ was unable to pay 100% of its apportionments and only paid out 66%, due to a \$6M shortfall in the 2021 budget. This is because GNJ has been significantly underbilling congregations for many years, in the areas of employee healthcare insurance and property insurance. Over the past 9 years GNJ's reserves have been drawn down by \$10M, with draws from designated funds and property sales making up the shortfall. All of this came to light last Fall, after the former Treasurer of GNJUMC was invited to retire. Legislation was passed at a special conference earlier this year, to stop the underbilling and put GNJ on a path to financial recovery. A motion to postpone the GNJ Designated Fund Policies discussion until the financial and property sales reports are provided at the adjourned session, October 14, 2021, passed by a vote of 355 to 155.



Day 2 of the conference opened with a Service of Passage. Appointments of pastors to churches were announced. Several reports were then presented.

A report by United Methodist Women dealing with the Intersection of Peace and Justice and calling for bold action was approved by a vote of 464 to 19.

The report from United Methodist Men extolled the importance of men's ministry with statements such as: "Everything desired from and through men comes as a result of men growing spiritually and maturing as disciples: family blessings, stewardship, service, outreach, prayer, spiritual leadership, lifestyle evangelism and faithful obedience. Men are foundational to the life and

health of the church. When a man lives daily in surrendered faith, God is honored and many lives are blessed. When a man comes to Christ, the family follows. When a woman comes to Christ, the man and the rest of the family may not find Christ.” This language was deemed to be sexist by the Conference and a motion was passed by a vote of 498 to 23 to remove the sexist language from the United Methodist Men’s report.



A motion that CF&A review all recommendations with a financial impact passed 469 to 21.

A motion was passed to make the nomination process more inclusive by extending the deadline if underrepresented ethnic groups and women are absent from the nominations.

A motion to make the Educational Society of GNJUMC a subcommittee of the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, passed 467 to 15.

Day 2 concluded with an ordination service at which 13 candidates were ordained.

