

Proceedings

Morning 1 Proceedings for April 24

(pause)

BISHOP LAURA MERRILL: Beloveds in Christ, good morning. Let's thank our worship team one more time for their offerings, for their sharing of themselves.

(applause)

I want to introduce myself. I am Laura Merrill. I am the bishop of the Arkansas Annual Conference. Arkansas, yes. I am a White and Latina woman. I am blessed and privileged and pleased this day to welcome you to the second day of the General Conference session. I am glad to call this session to order. Before we begin, I want to say that I appreciate very much the intention of the Committee on Presiding Officers to represent the diversity of this body and the fact that they've said that out loud. I am going to take a moment to greet visitors and members of this Conference in Spanish, just for a moment before we begin.

(speaking in Spanish)

(simultaneous interpretation from Spanish) (indecipherable) members of this body and we thank the Lord for your presence, especially for those who have had to travel far to be here. May God bless you all and all of us as we do our duty in the name of Christ.

Thank you for that privilege this morning.

(applause)

Thank you.

And now I want to call to order this second plenary session of the postponed 2020 General Conference. At this time I'm going to invite Bishop Jonathan Holston, L. Jonathan Holston, to offer us the Episcopal Address.

(applause)

BISHOP L. JONATHAN HOLSTON: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening. My name is Jonathan Holston, and I am pleased to serve as the resident bishop of the South Carolina Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. Isn't it wonderful to be gathered in this place in Charlotte, North Carolina. When we gather together, we gather as one. We gather as laity and clergy, as visitors and friends. We gather as people of faith from across the globe, people who love God, people who are called to be who God needs for us to be, and we gather with the sense that we are all different, yet we all serve the same risen Savior. We are grateful that God has blessed us to be a blessing and we are gathered in this place here today. There's plenty to do in the hours and days ahead, and we are grateful for God's blessings yet to be revealed in our midst, so let us pray:

The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

BISHOP HOLSTON: Almighty God, we thank you for meeting us at the crossroads of grace and mercy. Create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Fill our minds throughout this day and the days to come with whatever things that are worthy of praise. When the world shouts hate, help us to love. When the past won't let go, help us to love. When we feel broken and betrayed or rejected, help us to love. Even when it seems impossible and doesn't make sense, help us to love, for the hope that lives in each of us is of a love that has no end. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

My friends, much has happened since an Episcopal Address was delivered in Portland, Oregon, some eight years ago. Since 2016, TikTok launched, Saudi Arabia legalized women driving, the northern white rhino became extinct, Notre-Dame burned, ChatGPT was created, and elephants are being studied to treat cancer. Hm, elephants.

No matter what room we find ourselves in, it seems there's always an elephant looming in the corner. Elephants in our homes, elephants in our work places, elephants in our churches, elephants in our Church, in our beloved United Methodist Church. There's one elephant that we can't seem to shake. We call it by many names, stress, anxiety, worry, uncertainty, fear. A former United States ambassador and pastor, Andrew Young, once described the paradox of our humanity in this way: We live in the tension of who we are, who we say we are, and who we want to be.

Who we are, who we say we are, and who we want to be. We know this as the same tension inherent in the Gospel teachings between the now and not yet nature of God's reign. We say that we are a people of God called to embody God's kingdom revealed in Jesus Christ, a community of love, justice, generosity, hospitality, peace, and hope. But we fall short, marred by division and rancor, and yet even in our shortcomings as imperfect humans, we strive for who we want to be, holding before us the vision of God's kingdom built, the hope of Christ fulfilled as we move toward that vision with courage. All of this because we know that God prevails. The victory has already been won in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As a community of believers, we serve a mighty God who has plans for us. Plans to prosper us and not harm us. Plans to give us hope and a future. As Christians, we know that the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard our hearts and minds. As United Methodists, we know that we are connected to the love, grace, and saving power of Jesus Christ. Throughout Scripture the good news of Jesus Christ, the message of hope was always declared against a noisy backdrop of world events. Events like the development of civilizations, the rise and fall of kingdoms, the advancement of technology.

The gospel message is always present for those who have eyes to see it in spite of the immediate circumstances. Even today, in an ever-evolving culture that is at once impossible to fully comprehend and agonizingly difficult to look away from, we struggle to tune out the noise and keep our eyes focused on what is important.

So much has happened in our own lives and across the world, and yet the good news: The message of hope is still being shared as United Methodists the world over—Make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Eight years have dragged on, and now seem to have flown by. Eight years of highs and lows. Eight years of opportunities and challenges. Eight years of the tension between who we are, who we say we are, and who we want to be. Eight years of the now and the not yet of God's reign. Eight years of this journey, this spiritual journey, that we are now on and we continue to go together. All of this is evident in news headlines from each year.

(video on 2016 events)

Minnesota, United States. A mere eight months after launching worship, the Northwest Minneapolis Hmong United Methodist Ministry welcomes eighteen new Christians as they take their baptismal vows and claim a new identity in Christ. On this one day, ministry leader Toubee Yang and Rev. Dan Johnson are baptizing thirteen adults, one youth, and four children in Long Lake. This is who God needs for us to be.

(video on 2017 events)

Fuerzas Unidas, Honduras. Rev. Héctor Rodríguez goes about walking around the gang-controlled neighborhood surrounding Aposento Alto United Methodist Church. If he comes across children, he stops and prays with them. Aposento Alto's 230 members are mostly young people; they're children of gang members. Their church has a special motto: "This is your house, this is your home, no matter what." This is who God needs for us to be.

Bremen, Germany. At the United Methodist Church of the Redeemer, Pastor Susanne Nießner-Brose and church members teach German to refugees from Russia. They minister to youth from Syria, Iran, Ghana, and Nigeria. Despite not having a youth program of their own because their congregation has no youth of its own. Says Nießner-Brose, "All the migrant work enriches us profoundly, and is a real turnaround experience for our church." Friends, this is who God needs for us to be.

(video on 2018 events)

Calumpit, the Philippines. Amid the government's brutal crackdown on drugs, Danga United Methodist Church is seeing its membership grow. The church, in the providence of Bulacan, used to have twenty to twenty-five attendants each Sunday. Rev. Mienie Tolentino now welcomes seventy worshippers most weeks, crediting a new program that offers support and hope to former drug traffickers and addicts. My friends, this is who God needs for us to be.

Kansas, the United States. Jennifer Ross leads Matthew's Ministry, volunteer-driven services for hundreds of families with special needs and at the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leewood, Kansas. From Sunday school to Bible study, from choir and handbell choir through parents' nights out and volunteer opportunities. "There's a place and a ministry role for everyone in Matthew's Ministry. It just requires a servant's heart," Jennifer says. "And just saying, 'Hey, what can we do to help you be a part of the church?'" Friends, this is who God needs for us to be.

(video on 2019 events)

North Carolina, the United States. The Committee on the Status and Role of Women of the North Carolina Conference invited male pastors to read real comments that had been made to female pastors in the conference. The men had not seen the comments in advance.

(video on comments to female pastors)

The video has been used by local congregations as a tool for change. This is who God needs for us to be.

Ngundu, Zimbabwe. United Methodists in Norway and Zimbabwe helped resuscitate an ailing primary school that was on the verge of closing. Thanks to a transcontinental partnership, Chabadza Community Development Program is constructing five classrooms, two teachers' quarters, and offices. Rev. Øyvind

Aske, who leads the UMC in Norway's board of Global Ministries, says, "The close contact and shared spirituality improve understanding, dignity, and a deep experience of participating in changing the world." This is who God needs for us to be.

(video of 2020 events)

Anyama, Côte d'Ivoire. United Methodist Women of Côte d'Ivoire have seen their dream of opening a processing plant for a popular traditional Ivorian dish become a reality, thanks in part to a \$200,000 grant from UMCOR. The women are taking attiéké, which is made from cassava semolina. Says Côte d'Ivoire Bishop Benjamin Boni, "The gospel of God's grace that comes from the life of Jesus Christ includes a social dimension that consists of ministering to the marginalized and addressing economic disparities." This is who God needs for us to be.

Texas, United States. Spotlight Musical Theater is celebrating ten years of ministry in Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas. The theater group of older teens and adults with disabilities works with professional artists for six months to create and perform an original musical. Associate Director Stephanie Newland sees tremendous growth among the members of the community as the writing and production of the performance unfolds. This is who God needs for us to be.

(video of 2021 events)

Democratic Republic of the Congo. Once-vulnerable women who learn trades at the United Methodist Church at East Congo's Mama Lynn Center are supporting themselves and becoming indispensable to their families. The church established a center to give hope to sexually abused, widowed, and abandoned women in the region. Bishop Gabriel Yemba Uda says, "When these women finish, the church is working to give them the means to start a new life." Friends, this is who what God needs for us to be.

Tennessee, United States. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Gordon Memorial United Methodist Church in Nashville began providing Sunday worship service through the church's conference phone line so members who couldn't attend in person could stay connected. The dial-up service also had been a blessing for those who have physical ailments or geographic limitations that prevent them from attending worship in person. Church member Tina Boone coordinates the calls. She goes beyond simply making sure the technology works, providing time of fellowship to her callers. This is who God needs for us to be.

(video of 2022 events)

(indecipherable) the United Methodist church in Hungary is helping care for hundreds of refugees fleeing Ukraine following the Russian invasion. Local church members offer data support for more than 170 refugees in Dorcas Summer Camp, Viktória Ósz-Kiss leads volunteers not only providing for these families with food, clothing, and shelter but church members also share spiritual and educational programs for the children. This is who God needs for us to be.

Idaho, United States. When Trinity United Methodist Church in Idaho Falls underwent renovations, installing showers and a washer and dryer and updating its kitchen, the Rev. Ruth Marsh figured they would be used primarily by scouts and other groups. Little did she know those upgrades would become a vital part of the church's ministry with the homeless. Rev. Marsh says, "People have come here and

said, 'I feel human again because I can get cleaned up, have a meal with other people, and have someone listen to my story.'" This is who God needs for us to be.

(video of 2023 events)

Alaska, the United States. Jimmie Hutson's wood stove burns all winter long and needs feeding every few hours. Living on a fixed income in Willow, Alaska, it's a blessing for Jimmie to be able to rely on free firewood from the Willow Community Food Pantry, a ministry of the Willow United Methodist Church. Jimmie is so grateful for the sisters that he also volunteers stocking pantry shelves and delivering firewood to others. This is who God needs for us to be.

The Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Although official restrictions on religious work create challenges for church leaders in Nepal, migrant workers are returning from abroad with a robust faith that invigorates the small Christian community there. Rev. Jeewan Lama is a pastor of Hebron United Methodist Church in Lalitpur. Although its membership fluctuates, the congregation is growing. And while members often leave the mostly Hindu nation in search of work elsewhere, the church gains new members when other migrants return, having come to know Christianity abroad. This is who God needs us to be.

(video of 2024 events)

Antananarivo, Madagascar. Members of the Ambodifasika United Methodist Church have taken their ministry on the road to help a remote impoverished village where many of the 1,500 residents don't have access to food and the community doesn't have schools, clinics, and roads. Climate change and other national factors have greatly reduced crop production in the region, hindering planting, producing, and harvesting. Led by lay preacher Jean Aime Ratovohery, twelve adults and several youth from the Ambodifasika United Methodist Church visited the village. Friends, this is who God needs for us to be.

South Carolina, the United States. More than a thousand youth are gathering for Revolution, a discipleship retreat led each year by congregational specialist Chris Lynch and scores of volunteers from local churches across the South Carolina Conference. Students laugh, play, reflect, hug, cry, and sing praises to God as they are challenged to grow in their faithfulness during an immersive weekend experience. In that packed theater more than seven hundred young people come forward to dedicate or rededicate their lives to Jesus Christ. Seventy percent. Imagine what the world would be like if we had that kind of response across all of our ministries. This is who God needs for us to be.

Eight years. Eight years of deflection, projection, objection, rejection, and yes, infection. Eight years without enough courage, reflection, introspection, affection, and yes, connection. And yet against the backdrop of eight years of distraction and opportunities missed, we did see faith. We did feel hope. We did see love. Who we are, who we say we are, who we want to be. Facing the difficult truths of General Conference postponement, disaffiliation, separation, and polarization in our communities, these are tensions we cannot avoid or hide from.

We have been living in the midst of a global pandemic, civil unrest, and political divisiveness. These frightening times have taken a toll on all of us, both physically and emotionally, wreaking havoc on the way life is experienced and lived. The mantra of relentless attack has crept into our conversations, teaching us to never back down. That the fight is never over, and that the only answer to any question is to destroy, even if the destruction of one means the destruction of many and an obliteration of sanity and hope.

But, what if? What if we push aside all the background noise, and reset our focus? What if we stop staring in the rearview mirror, and keep our eyes focused on the road ahead? Think of the size of the rearview mirror in a car. There's a reason that rearview mirror is so much smaller than the windshield itself. We are only meant to glance backward. We are meant to fix our gaze ahead, following where Christ leads us. In spite of the conflict and cacophony and the noise, noise, and more noise way out on the edges in churches and communities that don't always make headlines. Fear is where ministry is happening every day. These are very signs of God's reign breaking through. Every day in places like Long Lake in Minnesota, Fuerzas Unidas in Honduras, Calumpit in the Philippines, Ngundu in Zimbabwe, and Debrecen in Hungary. By people like Jeewan Lama, Susanne Nießner-Brose, and Jean Aime Ratovohery, and Chris Lynch. Who we are, who we say we are, who we want to be. God's kingdom is being built among us and yet more is to come. Still and probably always there is tension.

Theologian Oswald Chambers named the tension between certainty and uncertainty succinctly, writing, "To be certain of God means that we are uncertain all our ways, not knowing what tomorrow may bring. This is generally expressed with a sigh of sadness," he wrote, "but it should be an expression of breathless expectation." We are uncertain of the next step, but we are certain of God. As soon as we abandon ourselves to God and do the task he has placed closest to us, he begins to fill our lives with surprises. Surprises, some of which we recognize immediately as blessings and some of which take longer for us to see the opportunity—the blessing within. We have a word for that second type of surprise, don't we? *Challenge*. We call them *challenges*. Naming the challenges of this time where God has called us, in this place where God has called us, serves not only as an acknowledgement of their existence, it is the first step toward overcoming them. Naming our challenges allows us to persevere, to get back up when we get knocked down. In these moments, we long for *shalom*. While it is tempting to wish for freedom from these challenges and tensions, we must remember that this peace, this *shalom* actually exists in the midst of tension.

Once again, the good news is always delivered against the backdrop, the noisy backdrop, of history. In fact, a great deal of life is lived in the middle of challenge. Max Lucado says it this way, "Everyone is either entering, in the middle of, or just exiting a trial." It is in these trials that often in the moments before and after when we so desperately seek God. We sometimes fall into thinking that if we have God's peace then there will be no tension, no conflict, no issues to face. Friends, when we are stuck in a story that is not our own, when we are stuck in a situation not of our making, when we are stuck in a maze and can't find our way out, the truth is that God's peace is present in the midst of all of this despite the noisy backdrop of the circumstances around us. What some might see as confusion, we believers know as faith. What some might see as confounding, we believers know as faith. What some might see as a conundrum, we believers know as faith. Who we are, who we say we are, and who we want to be. God calls us to walk boldly with Christ as we live out God's call in our lives, trusting, believing, and knowing that God is with us even when we can't see the way ourselves. Trusting in what you can't see pushes you to look beyond the present circumstances recognizing that this one moment is part of the larger story of God's mighty acts of salvation. Too often, though, we revert to survival mode. In survival mode, you have a tendency to catastrophize, to assume the worst will happen. You get so stuck in a story that's just not serving you. Overestimating the potential danger and underestimating your ability to cope. Combine that with our inclination to fall into a pattern of relying only on ourselves, and we leave no room, no room for God to work. This mindset leaves us into fear, and fear is the

opposite of faith. It is that faith that leads us to participate in what God has done, is doing, and will do through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Our call is to live into God's kingdom, not to build it as our own.

In their training, pilots learn the importance of focus. They are taught to aviate, navigate, and communicate. They practice this over and over again so that in every takeoff they are ready to land, even though they can't know what circumstances they will find them and meet them in the sky. They have to fly the plane, set their bearings, and don't lose sight. Then call home afterward. There is no room for fear or doubt when the plane is in the air. Friends, we don't know what the future holds, but we know with blessed assurance who holds the future. "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord. Plans to prosper you but not to harm you. Plans to give you a hope and a future." Focusing on what we do know and entrusting our lives to the savior we do know is to set our bearings even when the flight is turbulent. Often we think the church is as fragile as piece of glass, but I believe the church is standing on a firm foundation because God's church is not defined by brick and mortar. My friend, the late Reverend Bill Self, has described it this way, "The church has withstood Roman Imperialism, the assessor of the Reformers, wars and rumors of wars, and heresies in each generation. The church can withstand anything our generation can throw at it, too. The church has been victimized by unprepared and selfish clergy, tone-deaf musicians, manipulative laity, conflicted bishops, and greedy politicians. Yet the church has survived.

(applause)

The church has survived because the Holy Spirit comes alongside to whisper spirit to death, to incline us to a social justice, to whisper and to nudge us into community involvement. When things are happening all around us, God uses the church to make a difference. So my friends, I tell you this, the church was never built for our pleasure. The church is built for God's purpose, and the church should be a sign, a foretaste, an instrument of God's present and coming reign of justice, compassion, generosity, peace, and hope. My friends, that is God's purpose. Who we are, who we say we are, who we want to be. As followers of Jesus, we are invited to participate in the transforming work that God is doing in the world. It is up to each of us to make the effort of shifting our perspective so that we recognize this opportunity to live beyond expectations in all that we say and in all that we do.

Nelson Mandela embodied the importance of this effort to make the mental shift. Naming his reality following decades of imprisonment, Mandela said, "If I walked out the door toward the gate that will lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison." If I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison. As we cross our old threshold into an unknown future, it my hope and prayer that God would enable us to truly be persons of faithfulness, courage, integrity, and dedication; and that God would help us to leave behind whatever burdens we have taken on during our season of anxiety and uncertainty. This moment in the life of our church is not about how we restore who we are, or who we were, or who we say we are, or who we want to be. It is about this and only this: How do we become who God needs us to be? How do we faithfully embody God's vision for the world?

As people of faith who profess to follow Jesus Christ, we know that our call is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. To obey the command Jesus left with his disciples, "Love one another as I have loved you." With ears opened to how God is calling and hearts open to responding to that call, we embrace this opportunity to be a beacon of hope in a hurting world. We embrace disciple making. We embrace peace making. We

embrace anti-racism. We embrace building up, not tearing down. We embrace our communities and all the joys and heartbreaks that come with them. We embrace the radical world-transforming love given so freely by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And in moments when we find ourselves distracted by the background noise drifting from what matters most, may this question snap us back to the time and space at which God has placed us: When was the last time you led someone to Christ? When was the last time you made a witness with your life and your word that led someone into a relationship with Jesus Christ? Friends, if we are not doing that, then we are not the church. That is God's purpose. This is what we are called to do to embody and bear witness to the power of God's love in Jesus Christ. To transform human hearts and communities and nations and the entire world with joy, courage, and hope.

So let me tell you about a woman named Civilla Martin. Back in the early 1900s, Civilla Martin and her husband came to live in a boarding house in Elmira, New York, with a family by the name of Doolittle. Mrs. Doolittle was bedridden much of the time. Mr. Doolittle had a handicapping condition, but every morning he would get up, get himself ready, pull himself up into his wheelchair, and propel himself down the street to go to work. Civilla and her husband watched the Doolittles day in and day out, and they were astounded. One day Civilla finally asked, "Why do you do what you do? Why do you wake up every morning? Why are you not despondent? Why are you not angry with the world even angry with God for your condition? Why do you keep doing what you are doing?" Now people say that if you know your *why*, the *what* would make a difference. Yes, if you know *why* do what you do, if you know *why* you get up in the morning, if you know *why* you make the decisions that you make, if you know *why* you go where you go; if you know your *why*, then your *what* will make a difference. So Civilla was simply asking Mrs. Doolittle, "Why do you do what you do?" Mrs. Doolittle simply pointed out the window toward a bird perched on the branch of a tree. She said, "Because his eye is on the sparrow, you see, and I know he watches me." Civilla Martin took Mrs. Doolittle's words with her up to room where she sat down and wove these words around:

Why should I feel discouraged?
Why should the shadows come?
Why should my heart be lonely
and long for heaven and home?
When Jesus is my portion?
My constant friend is he;
His eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me.

And then she had the audacity to pen this chorus:

(applause)

I sing because I'm happy,
I sing because I'm free,
for his eye is on the sparrow,
and I know he watches me.

Friends, we may not have always been an obedient church. We may not have always loved our neighbors. We might not have always done the right things. But my God can free us for joyful obedience, and when God frees you up, we can become happy. When God frees you up, we can become the people who know exactly why we are doing what we do. When God frees us up, we can be the people God called us to be. Are you ready to live in a light of God's victory already won in Christ? Let's go! Are you ready to love your neighbor? Let's go! Are you ready for joyful obedience? Let's go! Are you ready to be freed up? Let's go! Are you ready to be the people that God needs for us to be? Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! Let's go! To God be the glory. To Christ be the glory. And may the Holy Spirit dwell in us now and forevermore. Amen.

(applause)

Bishop, this is the Episcopal Address.

BISHOP MERRILL: Thank you, thank you! Thank you, Bishop Holston, for starting us right this morning. Uncertain of the next step we may be, but we are certain of God and God's purpose. Thank you so much for this word.

It's time now for us to move to some administrative committee reports. The first committee report we will receive will be presented by the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. The chair recognizes the chair of that committee, Agenda and Calendar, Emily Allen, and the coordinator of the calendar, Susan Brumbaugh, to present their report.

EMILY ALLEN (California-Nevada): Good morning, again, General Conference. I am Emily Allen, chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. Last night in plenary, we reviewed today's schedule. The schedule is now printed on p. 1981 in today's DCA. That's p. 1981 in all four official printed languages of General Conference.

The Committee on Agenda and Calendar has made further adjustments and recommends the following changes for the remainder of today: Following my report, we will hear reports from two other administrative committees, Credentials and Presiding Officers. After the monitoring report and report on the Social Principles revision, we will hear from the Rules Committee. In our second plenary this morning, the only change of note is that the financial state of the church report will follow the pathway to our next expression presentation. Bishop, I move the adoption of today's agenda with the changes I have described.

BISHOP MERRILL: All right. The committee has moved to adopt this agenda as presented to us so that in addition to the—as you see printed on p. 1981—adds those administrative reports now and the Rules Committee report at the end of this time. In a moment, we will open the pool so that if you'd like to speak, you may register to do so. The question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda.

You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

(pause)

And I don't see any, so we'll precede to the vote. The motion requires a majority vote. The questions is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda as printed.

(pause)

All right. If you are ready to vote, those in favor would press *one (1)*. And those opposed press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

All right. We're going to close the vote now. If we could have those results. We've had 680 of you in the affirmative and 10 against, and that motion is adopted, so the agenda as presented is adopted. Thank you so much.

[Yes, 680; No, 10]

ALLEN: Thank you.

BISHOP MERRILL: Susan?

SUSAN BRUMBAUGH (New Mexico): Good morning. My name is Susan Brumbaugh, she/her pronouns. I'm the coordinator of the calendar. I want to draw your attention to the consent calendars that are printed at the end of today's *DCA*. They appear on p. 1991. And that's 1991 in today's *DCA*. At the top of the page, you can review the rules about what types of items can be placed on the consent calendar. Consent calendars contain items supported by legislative committee members with a large amount of support—less than ten votes against—and that do not have financial implications and don't pertain to constitutional amendments. There are three types of consent calendars that can appear each day: disciplinary items, non-disciplinary items, and motions to refer to another body. The consent calendars in today's *DCA* contain items coming from the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, which met earlier this week. There are two consent calendars. A01 contains disciplinary items, and B01 contains non-disciplinary items. The body will vote on these items in tomorrow morning's plenary session. If you wish to remove an item from the consent calendar, so that it can then be scheduled for full discussion on the plenary floor, you can get a consent calendar removal form from room 103. That's room 103. When you pick up the form, you will be asked which item you are seeking to remove, so that it can be written on the form. The form must contain valid signatures from at least twenty delegates—they do not need to be members of that legislative committee—and returned to room 103 by 3:00 the next day—that day. On the day the item is printed. Items not removed from the consent calendar will then be voted by the plenary as a group without discussion the following day. I think that's all I have. Yes. Thank you.

BISHOP MERRILL: All right. Thank you, Susan. So I hope that's clear. Those instructions on how to remove items from the consent calendar, and these calendar items will be voted on tomorrow.

The next committee report is the Committee on Credentials. The chair recognizes the chair of that committee, Diane Brown, to present their report.

Just taking a minute here for conferral. Thank you.

(pause)

DIANE BROWN (Michigan): Good Morning, church. Yesterday, I stood before you and provided our initial committee report. We also addressed a motion that deals with credentialing of people who were elected after our initial elections. We will be bringing that motion to you. It will be printed in tomorrow's *DCA* for your consideration. That's all we have at this time, Bishop.

BISHOP MERRILL: OK. Thank you. Thank you, thank you. I did want to say I'm sorry I meant to mention this earlier, just a reminder that if you are having any kind of technical difficulties with your voting device, that if you'll raise the checkered flag, and we will try to all keep watching and seeing you. If you're having trouble with any other element of our preceding, you can raise your yellow or green flag, your card. Just a reminder. We'll try to communicate with each other in that way.

The next report comes from the Committee on Presiding Officers. The chair recognizes the chair of that committee, Rev. Jasmine Smothers, and vice chair, Mr. Audun Westad, to present their report.

JASMINE SMOTHERS (North Georgia): Good Morning! Oh, you can do better than that. I haven't had any caffeine yet, and you guys probably have. So, good morning!

(crowd response)

SMOTHERS: I'm Jasmine Smothers, I serve as the Chair of the Presiding Officers Committee, and I am an African American Female adult whose pronouns are she/her.

AUDUN WESTAD (Norway): Good Morning, my name is Audun Westad, and I'm the lay delegate from Norway Annual Conference, and in the spirit of language inclusion, *(speaking in Norwegian)*. Yay!

SMOTHERS: I told you yesterday that we have an incredible team that works together, and while Audun is our vice president, he is the longest tenured on our committee and has really helped drive our work and help us to imagine our work in a faithful way, so I wanted you to see him this morning.

Tomorrow's presiding officers are as follows: We will celebrate and welcome our first Native American bishop, Bishop David Wilson. Yes!

(applause)

And we will also welcome Bishop Tracy Smith Malone, our incoming Council of Bishops president.

(applause)

We are so excited to have them for the plenary tomorrow morning. Have a blessed day.

BISHOP MERRILL: Thank you so much, Jasmine and Audun for that report.

This time, the chair invites Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, the General Secretary on the Commission on Religion and Race to provide a monitoring report, along with Dawn Wiggins Hare, the General Secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Thank you.

DAWN WIGGINS HARE (Alabama-West Florida): So, good morning, people of God!

GIOVANNI ARROYO (Baltimore-Washington): *(repeats greeting in Spanish)*

WIGGINS HARE: I am General Secretary Dawn Wiggins Hare. Alabama-West Florida. A lay, White, still older adult woman.

ARROYO: My name is General Secretary Giovanni Arroyo, Baltimore-Washington Conference, Latinx clergyman who is an adult. My pronouns are he/him/his.

We rejoice in the vitality of this sacred space as we convene as a worldwide church. The General Conference is currently being interpreted into ten languages. Underscoring the importance of linguistic inclusivity in our collaborative efforts. So, let's be mindful of allowing ample time for interpreters to accurately convey the thoughts of all participants.

WIGGINS HARE: The interpreters that you will see over here in the booth, they have shared with us that if you just pause between sentences, it gives them the time to make the necessary, in-time interpretations happen for this event. Let us adopt a practice, also, of utilizing interpretation devices. Honoring all of our delegates, keep an ear piece close by or in your ear at all times to honor every voice in this room.

ARROYO: Moreover, language accessibility entails providing materials and translation equitable to all of our delegates. Access to information is power and empowering. And a church that is committed to equity and justice must ensure that the decision making within this body is facilitated with all materials available in the official languages of the General Conference. So, let us uphold this standard of accountability.

WIGGINS HARE: And now, as is our practice, we want to give some shout outs for celebrations. We want to give a huge shout out to the leadership and presiders who have modeled conduct of stating name, annual conference, and demographic information to help us do our good work, the business of the General Conference. So, thank you and to thank the delegates who have spoken at microphones and have modeled that conduct. Thank you so very much.

ARROYO: As we shared yesterday, our monitoring team has also provided information that has been placed in the *Daily Christian Advocate* in our monitoring reports. So, we invite you look at those reports as they further detail the works and celebrations of this General Conference.

WIGGINS HARE: May our work throughout this General Conference embody the spirit of Pentecost, celebrating the diversity of languages within this community.

ARROYO: Called to be co-laborers as agents of God's kingdom. Amen.

BOTH: And amen!

(applause)

BISHOP MERRILL: Thanks to you both. The next item of business for us this morning is the report on the Social Principles revision. The chair recognizes the following individuals to give their report: John Hill, Dr. Randall Miller, Dr. Mary Elizabeth, and Rev. Ande Emmanuel.

JOHN HILL (Baltimore-Washington, Interim General Secretary of the Board of Church and Society): Thank you, Bishop. Good morning, church. My name is John Hill. I am a White layman from the Baltimore-Washington Conference, and I have the honor of serving as the interim General Secretary with the Board of Church and Society. What began as a petition from the European Central Conferences in 2012 has set up an amazing journey to revise our Social Principles, so that our statements on urgent matters of peace and justice and the integrity of God's good creation are clearer, are more concise, are more deeply theological, and reflect and speak to the realities across our worldwide denomination.

We are so excited that you as delegates will now have the chance to consider these revised Social Principles. This twelve-year journey would not have been possible without the people you see on stage and countless others, including the Rev. Neal Christie and the Rev. Dr. Susan Henry-Crowe, who devoted so much of their time and their energy, prayers and faithful work throughout this process.

In the short time we have this morning, you'll hear from a few leaders whose vision and faithfulness have carried this project forward, including Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore, who served as chair of our Editorial Revision Team; Dr. Randall Miller, our Church and Society Vice-President and chair of Social Principles Revision Task Force, and Rev. Ande Emmanuel from our Editorial Revision Team. Dr. Moore?

MARY ELIZABETH MOORE (California-Pacific, Chair of Editorial Revision Team): Thank you. And you are the people who hold this in your hands. I'm Mary Elizabeth Moore, deacon, White, woman, California-Pacific Annual Conference.

Our Social Principles reveal the depth and power of United Methodist commitment to social witness as a central centerpiece for Christian living, both individually and as a church. They reveal our passion to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to build compassion, justice, and peace in God's creation and in all relationships within that creation: ecological, economic, social, and political.

The Social Principles are part of our long legacy of social witness as Methodists. Consider first the biblical witness: Jesus himself declared a social principle when a lawyer asked him, "What is the greatest commandment?" Jesus' response, based in Hebrew Scriptures, was, "To love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself." With these words, Jesus was offering a principle, pronouncing a principle, to guide individual and community life. Such teachings have guided the Christian church and our ministries ever since. Our ministries of healing, mercy, and justice.

The Methodist movement has continued this bold social witness. Consider John Wesley's concerns for all people: In his writing and daily work, Wesley responded to the needs of the people of his time. For education, health, security, for workers, and prison reform, just to name a few. Continuing this legacy, we have been living out our Social Principles since the groundbreaking adoption in 1908 of the Social Creed of the Methodist Episcopal Church, North. This creed gave a lot of attention to equal rights and complete justice for all persons in all stations of life. Soon, other Christians in Methodist tradition and beyond adopted similar statements, and peoples in the Philippines, Africa, Eurasia, and the United States lived out Social Principles, social witness in their daily lives.

Our 1968 united conference both established the United Methodist Church and a study commission that developed Social Principles, which were adopted by the 1972 General Conference. While each succeeding General Conference has considered amendments, adopted amendments to the Social Principles, their core United States context was based in language that often strained to apply across the diverse context of our increasingly global church.

RANDALL MILLER (California-Nevada): Thank you, Mary Elizabeth. Randall Miller, layperson from California-Nevada Annual Conference, living on unceded Ohlone lands. African American, male, and joyfully inching towards the Golden Girls' stage of life.

(laughter)

As Church and Society reported to the 2016 General Conference, the first phase of our process, in partnership with the Connectional Table, was centered on listening to all parts of the church; gathering United Methodist in listening sessions in Europe, Africa, the Philippines, and the United States to hear the amazing ways the Social Principles have empowered United Methodist communities to bear witness to the transforming Gospel of Christ in their communities; and to reflect on how these vital statements on peace, justice, and the integrity of God's creation might better reflect the realities of our experience.

In keeping with our charge from the 2012 General Conference, Church and Society then developed a process to revise our Social Principles, the first wholesale revision of the Social Principles since 1972, and an opportunity to begin with a fresh page informed by our Wesleyan theology and our long legacy of social witness, but with statements crafted by multiple writing teams reflective of our worldwide connection. These writing teams included theologians and practitioners, young voices and those of us with a little more experience. Like quilting circles that developed wonderfully colored squares of a quilt, each writing team put hours and hours and hours of prayerful thought and effort into their particular piece of the revised Social Principles. And it was then the responsibility of the editorial team to stitch together all of these different pieces into a first draft.

This first draft, then, was made available in the four official languages of the General Conference, and the editorial team actively began soliciting feedback, both online and through convenings, all across the connection. Thousands of United Methodists shared their thoughts and comments. Whether from an individual prayerfully studying the first draft of the Social Principles in their home or the reflections of small groups assembled, for example, at the Global Young People's Convocation, Church and Society received and reviewed thousands upon thousands of online and in-person comments. And as my friend Ande will share, carefully synthesizing these reflections, feedback, and suggestions was the heart of the work of the Editorial Revision Team. This church-wide conversation was a gift to all of us who participated in the process of revising the Social Principles and a gift to our beloved church.

In the four years that have passed since we completed the draft the of the Social Principles, I have taken to calling our final document a love letter from United Methodists to other United Methodists. A love letter to our church. A love letter from the many, many people throughout the United Methodist Church to encourage all of us, to inspire us, and to conspire with us to be the beautiful beloved community of God.

ANDE EMMANUEL (Southern Nigeria): Good Morning, General Conference. My name is Rev. Ande Emmanuel. I am a clergy delegate from the Southern Conference of the Nigerian Episcopal Area. As Randall has shared, synthesizing comments and feedback from thousands of United Methodist church was the task of the editorial team with support of Church and Society staff.

What we have heard in the feedback, were called for clarity, to eliminate the redundancy of cross sections, to integrate a broader range of the biblical references, and to include not just naming challenges facing communities, but also to be clear on action we are called to lead as disciples of Jesus Christ. In the end, the revision include a preface and preamble and four, rather than six, current sections. You will see across the document a clearer Wesleyan biblical language, succinct statements, and a call to action in a language that is meant to empower mission and ministry across diverse contexts where United Methodists live and worship. We understand that all of us might not agree on every statement, every word that is in the revision, but our goal was to find language that would reach across our diverse contexts, recognizing that the Social Principles have always been intended to encourage

conversation and a prayer for dialogue of faith and action. As noted in the preamble, we must as the church seek together to discern God's will and to embrace with courage, trust, and hope those controversies that arises among us. I set them as evidence that God is not yet finished (*indecipherable*) us to God's people. As we gather at this General Conference to hear how God is calling us to our next expression of United Methodism, may we, may these revised Social Principles provide a framework and a vision for our future together. Amen.

HILL: Thank you, Rev. Emmanuel. Now it is your turn, General Conference delegates, to prayerfully consider these revised Social Principles. It's our fervent prayer that you will see in them the voices and experiences and hopes of so many who have contributed along this amazing twelve-year journey, and that you affirm them as a powerful expression of social witness for our whole church as we begin this next chapter of our beloved United Methodist Church. Thank you.

BISHOP MERRILL: Thank you so much. Will you thank these members, John Randall, Mary Elizabeth, and Ande. We thank you for your work. So just for clarity, these proposed revisions will be part of the work of our legislative committee this week. So this was an overview report for you and your consideration.

Yesterday we referred three amendments to the Plan of Organization and the Rules of Order. We referred to these to the Rules Committee. The committee is prepared to share a brief report on their conversation, so the chair recognizes Stephanie Henry, chair of the Committee on Plan and Organization and Rules to present her report.

STEPHANIE HENRY (Pacific Northwest, Chair of Rules Committee): Good morning. Thank you, Bishop. I am Stephanie Henry, a laywoman from the Pacific Northwest Annual Conference of the Western Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church, obviously, in the United States. The Rules Committee met last night and, as I am sure will be a surprise, our rules are contradictory. You all passed our rules and proposed amendments after 5:00 last night, which is our *DCA* deadline. So you do not have copies of those amendments in front of you. So my report this morning is that the Rules Committee met, and we have recommendations, and you will receive those recommendations along with the printed proposals tomorrow, and we'll have our conversation tomorrow. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP MERRILL: Thank you. Just for clarity you need to be able to have those in print in the different languages before they can be voted on. So thank you for doing your work, and we will come back tomorrow to complete that work. Thanks so much.

Folks, you are a highly gifted and talented body, and we are ahead of schedule. Yes. We are going to take our break early. We will return early. Before we do that—sorry I'm missing something very important—I would like to take time to introduce my backup team of bishops who are seated behind me this morning, Bishop Gregory Palmer and Bishop Leonard Fairley. We don't ever do any of this work alone, and I am so grateful. Will y'all thank them?

(*applause*)

And our parliamentarian—what a gift this man is right here. We all need to thank the Lord, us in particular but all of you as well, for Maurice this morning. And just truly, I can't overemphasize the importance of having a wise mind and a skillful hand in the midst of our proceedings and our business. So now it is time to take a recess. We will recess now and gather again at ten after ten [10:10], twenty-

one minutes from now. So please return to your seats promptly, and we will begin at 10:10. We are now on a break.