

Proceedings

Morning Proceedings for April 26

Worship

ROB MARTIN (Memphis): Please respond with the words as they are printed on the screen before us.

People of God, come to the center of wisdom.

ALL: We do not know the way.

MARTIN: People of God, come to the fountain of love.

ALL: We do not know the way.

MARTIN: People of God, trust in the Lord your God. Do not depend on your own knowledge, but trust in God who will make your paths right.

ALL: We come together to know God, trusting in God alone.

MARTIN: Let us now join our song and praise together as we sing the hymn, the spiritual penned by William Farley Smith, "I Will Trust in the Lord."

(music)

(applause)

ERICA ROBINSON-JOHNSON (New England): Let us join our hearts and voices in prayer.

(pause)

Will you join me in prayer?

ALL: Gracious God, we bring ourselves before you, knowing that we yearn to trust you more than we actually do. We can be stubborn and sure that our ideas are best, and we fail to trust that you may show us another way of thinking. Today, we acknowledge our distrust, nodding to it as a former acquaintance. Then we step away and put our trust in the knowledge that we are loved beyond measure.

ROBINSON-JOHNSON: In the silence, let us lay before God our corporate and individual sins.

(silent prayer)

Beloved of God, hear and believe the good news. Wisdom is calling to us even now, hear her beckon us back to God. Trust in God's love. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.

ALL: Glory to God. Amen!

(pause)

TIFFANY FRENCH-GOFFE (New York): God of winding roads and straightened paths, call us to open our minds and imagine possibilities only you can generate. Open our eyes to see your way before us, open our ears to hear your wisdom, open our hearts to find the trust we need, trust in you alone. Amen.

(pause)

(music)

(applause)

FRENCH-GOFFE: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight."

In the reading and understanding, may we be blessed by God's word.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

(music)

(applause)

BISHOP SHARMA D. LEWIS: Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Come on, you all can say it better than that. Hallelujah.

ALL: Hallelujah!

(applause)

BISHOP LEWIS: The psalmist David says, "I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'" So I know we're in the convention center, but can we make this our sanctuary, and let's give God some praise in the house!

(applause)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, first of all, I just want to say thank you, Lord, for waking me up this morning. Thank you, God, for our General Conference. Thank you, God, for everyone that is here, everyone that is live streaming, and God, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart will be acceptable to you, God, because God, you are my rock. God, you are my redeemer. God, you are my healer. You're my deliverer. In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, amen.

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP LEWIS: My name is Sharma Denise Lewis. I am the resident bishop of the Mississippi Annual Conference, better known as the Sip, amen?

(applause)

I am a Black clergywoman, adult.

Beloved, when I was a little girl growing up in Statesboro, Georgia. That's south Georgia. There was a spiritual that we've already sung that the adult choir at Brannen Chapel United Methodist Church would sing every revival. I don't care if it was the fall revival, the spring revival, or the summer revival; they would sing "I Will Trust in the Lord." And we could rest assured that Ms. Vivian Little Knight would always lead the song, and we've already sung it, but I need y'all to help me. She would sing, *(singing)* "I will trust in the Lord. I will trust in the Lord. I will trust in the Lord until I die. I will"—come on—"in the Lord. I will trust in the Lord. I will trust in the Lord until I die."

And then Ms. Viv would say, "I would treat everybody right." And then she would say, "I would stay on" the what?

ALL: Battlefield!

BISHOP LEWIS: "Battlefield. I'm gonna stay on the battlefield until I die." Now see honestly, growing up, I loved the song and I loved the beat, but when it came to "I'm going stay on the battlefield," it made no sense to me as a little girl. I would question my mother, "What battlefield are they singing about?" And how would I know as a little girl how to trust in the Lord? See my mother would often say, "Sharma, if you just keep living, you will understand and you will sing one day about your own battlefield."

See, interestingly, this song would become one of my favorite spirituals, and later in life, I understood that trusting in the Lord was not an easy task. And yes, there would be many battlefields in my life, battlefield of racism and sexism and battlefield of growing up in south Georgia, in Statesboro, Georgia.

But see, beloved, I stand this morning as a proven witness that I can give you many reasons why I should trust in the Lord. I can give you many reasons why you can trust in the Lord, but if I make it personal, five years ago, I was not here at the Special General Conference, and you all prayed for me because at that time, I had undergone three or four hip surgeries because of a debilitating disease of the hip. And so I know what it means to trust in the Lord. See, I stand here to share that the reason Ms. Vivian Knight could sing, "I will trust in the Lord," because as a mother of five, she raised her children alone because of the sudden death of her husband. I stand here this morning to challenge us that for the next several days, we must decide as a denomination that we are going to trust in the Lord.

(applause)

We may not trust each other, but we've got to trust in the Lord!

(applause)

Because this world is so suspicious of everything we do. Now you may say, "Bishop, why should you trust in the Lord?" You should trust in the Lord because God has the only proven track record. You should trust in the Lord because God is trustworthy. You should trust in the Lord because God is faithful. You should trust in the Lord because they told me that he went down on Friday, he stayed down on Saturday, but on Sunday morning he got up with all power in his hand. You should trust in the Lord because he died for our sins.

In our text, Proverbs 3:5-6, King Solomon tells us the main reasons why we should trust in the Lord. Proverbs 3 is divided into three parts. Verses 1-12 gives us instructions on the fear and the reverence of the Lord. Verses 13-20 give us instructions on the blessings of having wisdom. And verses twenty-one through thirty-five gives us instructions on relationship with others. See, the text begins to trust in the Lord. See, trust is the firm belief in the honesty and reliability of another. It means to have confidence or reliance in someone or something. Trust is to believe, to hope, and to expect. The text does not say to trust in the Lord when it is convenient or when things in life are going well. And interestingly, we can trust God with our eternal souls and salvation, but we can't trust the Lord to show us the future of The United Methodist Church.

Trust is a conscious dependence in God. Trust is found in our belief that God will indeed work on our behalf to bring God's perfect will for our lives. This life is constantly changing every day, but the Lord is

the one constant in our lives. Because the Bible says in Hebrews 13:8, that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Trusting is believing that God knows what's best for me beyond my intellect, beyond my degrees, beyond my talents. And the Bible says in Psalm 118:8, that it is better to trust in the Lord than to put your confidence in man and woman.

See, beloved, it wasn't Buddha that divinely inspired the word to live by. It wasn't some new age crystal that healed me from my sickness. But it was the Lord, the Jehovah Rapha, my healer. The text then says to trust in the Lord with all your heart; not some of your heart, but all your heart. And the Bible says in Deuteronomy 6:5 to trust in God with all my heart, my soul, and my strength. One of the hardest things in life is to put your trust in the Lord. Because, why? We are all control freaks. One of the hardest things to do in life is to relinquish our total control to God, and the human intellect battles constantly versus trusting in God versus trusting in self.

Ralph Emerson's classic essay entitled "Self-Reliance" establishes the concept of self-reliance. Self-reliance is a basic American virtue, and unfortunately, our confidence is tied up in self. And we have the audacity to think that we accomplish great task by ourselves. And some of us even think that we will spend the next week or so making decisions for the future of The United Methodist Church and try to factor God out of the equation. Interestingly, I believe that the more one relies on God, the more independent one becomes. And the most God-dependent person are the most independent of external controls of life. See, trusting in the Lord with all your heart is a total reliance on God. When I cannot see, God can see for me. That's why Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:2 that we walk by faith and not by sight. The Bible gives us many indications of trusting in the Lord with all of my heart.

I think y'all have heard about King Hezekiah. He trusted that the Lord would spare his life and give him fifteen more years. The woman with the issue of blood trusted that if she could just touch the hem of his garment, she would be made healed. The woman, the bent-over woman of eighteen years, trusted that if she could just go to the synagogue and see her Jesus. The three Hebrews boys trusted that God would save them from the fiery furnace. Daniel trusted that the mouth of the lion would be shut up.

Thirdly, the text says to lean not to your own understanding. Lean not to your own understanding. See, this statement can be baffling because, is God the creator telling us not to have a mind? No, that is not what God is saying. But, what we must recognize as human beings is that life is beyond us, but life is never beyond God. We have a marvelous capacity to understand and live meaningful in the world, but we know that life is plagued with evil, mysteries, tragic deaths, and troubles beyond grasping or fixing.

See, I believe the author of Proverbs is assuring the reader to trust in God even when we don't understand. Even when I didn't understand when my sister, Wanda, at the age of fifty-eight, died after complications of a surgery that women have all the time called a hysterectomy. Trust in God even when we don't understand that one of our administrative assistants in Mississippi died after a fourteen-day diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. Trust in God even when we don't understand when a dear friend of mine died in a freak car accident. See, beloved, don't lean on what we think is best. Just trust and obey the Lord as the word commands.

God's desire for us is to come to a place of total surrender and allow God to rule in our lives. As good ole Methodists, we sing a song, "I Surrender All", but do we really mean it? The song says, "All to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him; in his presence daily live."

The text finally says that in your ways acknowledge God, and he will make straight your paths. See, when we trust God, God will guide us. And as believers our part is to do the trusting, and God's part is to do the guiding. "In all your ways" can be loosely translated, "In everything you do, you must trust in God". To acknowledge him in the Hebrew translation means to see God and to recognize God for God's sovereignty, for God's trustworthiness, and for God's existence.

See, as Christians we must come to understand that verse 6b is a promise from God; that as we walk in the knowledge of God, we are promised that God will make our paths straight. It does not necessarily mean a life free from difficulties and pain. However, it does mean that one's life has a clear direction that can be attained.

Now, beloved, I started sharing this sermon that I will trust in the Lord. But better yet, do *you* trust in the Lord? I don't think you heard me, do *you* trust in the Lord? Do you trust that after you go through the legislative committees and we come here on the plenary floor that we are going to trust in the Lord whatever the outcome may be?

See, beloved, do you trust in the Lord that is a friend to the friendless? Do you trust in the one that will dignify the dirty and transform the trash? Do you trust in the Lord that sits high and looks low? Do you trust in the Lord that is the healer of all healers.

See, beloved, this song became a signature song. Because when I was out for six months on medical leave, the best stanza in the song is a recipe for us for the next seven days. And you may ask me, "Bishop, what is the recipe for the next seven days?" The song ends by saying, "I'm gonna stay on my bended knee. I'm gonna stay on my bended knee." I don't think y'all hear me, I'm gonna stay on my bended knee; which means that I'm gonna get down before the Lord, and I'm gonna pray, "Lord, come on in here," and, "Lord, help us figure out what you are trying to say". The songs says, "I'm gonna stay on bended knee until I die."

How many of you all know the power of prayer? How many of you all know that prayer is one of our underutilized disciplines? But if we want to see the Lord change something here in the Methodist Church, we gotta stay on bended knee.

Trust in the Lord. And lean not to our own understanding. In all our ways acknowledge God, and God will direct our path. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The people of God said, Amen, Amen, and Amen.

(applause)

(music)

MARJORIE WALKER (Mississippi): Trust and obey, for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

CECIL BUCUD-ARCEO (California-Pacific): We trust in you, Jesus. We know your Spirit moves among our leaders, nudging and guiding them. God, we ask you to speak clearly to our world leaders. We ask you to

open their eyes to see the reality around them. Open their hearts to the pain of their people. Give them the strength to act with justice. We bring to your presence our national leaders, our town elders, community leaders, bishops, pastors, deaconesses, and lay leaders. Lord, give them your light.

WALKER: Sing with us, church.

(music)

IVAN MILOSI (Great Plains): *(speaking in French)*

WALKER: Most gracious and loving God, we are grateful for your beautiful creation, for all the ways we can experience you in nature, for the opportunity to be stewards of your world. Forgive us, Lord, for not taking our responsibility seriously. Forgive us for exploiting creation for our benefits. Forgive us, Lord, for not securing a better world for future generations. Help us, help us to see the world as you see it.

(music)

PAIXAO BAPTISTA (Great Plains): *(speaking in Portuguese)*

BUCUD-ARCEO: We live in a broken world. Diseases, addictions, mental illness, broken relationships have taken over families and communities. Social injustices have aggravated the problem. Children die from hunger and dirty water. Gun violence has destroyed neighborhoods.

WALKER: Jesus.

BUCUD-ARCEO: We need your healing.

WALKER: Yes, Lord.

BUCUD-ARCEO: Send your Holy Spirit to us.

WALKER: Yes, Lord.

BUCUD-ARCEO: Send your Holy Spirit to us. Help us to become healers and preachers in the world. Help us to become healers and peacemakers in the world.

(music)

SILAS M'MWORIA (Florida): *(simultaneous interpretation from Swahili)* We are happy, Jesus, if we dwell in the faith and obey.

WALKER: We trust you, Lord. We praise you for who you are and give thanks for all the ways you have revealed to us. We want to be happy in you!

Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy, to be happy in Jesus. My brothers and sisters, we must trust and obey.

(music)

BISHOP LEWIS: Beloved, as you begin the work of holy conferencing, receive this blessing:

Beloved, cease your striving. Trust and know that the creative power, redeeming love, and sustaining grace of God go before you to make straight your path, both now and forevermore. Share a blessing of peace with one another as we continue our work together. Amen.

Plenary

BISHOP HÉCTOR ANTONIO BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Friends, we ask all delegates to remain in your seats as we transition here on the stage to the beginning of the plenary session. Thanks in advance for your cooperation.

(pause)

Siblings in Christ, I invite us all now to return to our seats so that we can begin with the plenary session. We have a full agenda in front of us, so we want to get started.

The fourth plenary session of the postponed 2020 General Conference is now in order.

Friends, let us join our hearts in prayer.

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of a new day. A day to love you. A day that is filled with opportunities to embody your love to all who come our way. A new day when you gather us as the people called United Methodist. Many cultures, many ethnicities, different languages, people from around the globe, different walks of life; yet one in mission, united in the healing love of Christ. As we enjoy the privilege of this safe space, we are mindful we are called to serve a world filled with hurt, division, violence, hatred, injustice. So through your Spirit grant us the courage to live the gospel and to be your love to the world. As we continue to be in Christian conference, fill us with your love, with humility, and grant us courage for the task at hand. Here we are God, willing and ready to partner with you in your mission of love. In Christ we pray, Amen.

Church, I am Héctor Antonio Burgos-Núñez, male Hispanic Latino, a son of the beautiful island of Puerto Rico. *(simultaneous interpretation from Spanish)* Members gathered here at the assembly, I thank you for your lives, for your ministry, for our United Methodist connection. And let us remember that, yes we can! With the help of God, yes we can!

Serving this morning alongside of me are Bishop David Bard from the Michigan Episcopal Area and Bishop Robin Dease from the North Georgia Area. And also here with me is pocket-size Jesus, so friends, it's all good. So as we do our business, remember that Jesus is watching us. As I said before, we have a full agenda for today, so I will do my best to guide us through part of it.

Monitoring Report

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So we begin our work this morning by inviting Ms. Dawn Wiggins Hare, General Secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, and Rev. Giovanni Arroyo, General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race, to provide a Monitoring Report.

GIOVANNI ARROYO (Baltimore-Washington, General Secretary of the Commission on Religion and Race): *Salamat.*

DAWN WIGGINS HARE (Alabama-West Florida, General Secretary of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women): Good morning! General Secretary Dawn Wiggins Hare, Alabama-West Florida Conference. A laywoman who is an older White adult.

ARROYO: General Secretary Giovanni Arroyo, Baltimore-Washington Conference. A Latinx clergyman who is an adult. Friends, we acknowledge that our preliminary not-reported numbers of the breakdown of leadership across the legislative committees needed to be more detailed to highlight elections of delegates from the central conferences. Again, we are verifying the data we reported and will come forthcoming. We also recognize that our expressive language can affect how we and others perceive the world. Even phrases can unknowingly influence us. We want to provide some observations.

WIGGINS HARE: We have noticed that non-English speaking delegates have taken it upon themselves, they have taken on the responsibility of apologizing for not speaking English when addressing the body. Our language diversity is our Pentecost experience, and the beauty of a worldwide church. We want every delegate to fully participate and not center English as the language of the General Conference.

(applause)

We celebrate that plenary chairs who are bilingual or multilingual have expressed themselves in their native tongues. God's linguistic diversity is a gift to us.

ARROYO: We recognize that at times we joke regarding one's age when self-identifying. We want to avoid the language of ageism, which is damaging to the overall health and wholeness of the body. To help us to honor where we are in life and for data collection if you feel comfortable, we want to provide you some categories. And we understand that there's different categorizations between central conferences and the U.S., so a way to help us all operate from the same place, you can then identify yourself as a youth if you are 18 years of age or younger, you can identify yourself as a young adult if you're between the ages of 19 to 35 years, you can identify yourself as an adult if you are 36 years to 64 years of age, older adult if you are 65 years of age or older. Using some of these categories ensures that we celebrate the different life development stages.

WIGGINS HARE: Thank you, Gio. So friends, we talked about opportunities for you as delegates. We talked about the opportunity to elect officers—well, here is your opportunity of the day. As you are—and we noticed that the committee rooms got a little tight, and the subcommittee rooms, people started moving around and that got a little tight. So here is your opportunity: As you are rearranging yourselves in committees and other spaces, please take a moment to ensure that the space is accessible for every person. With one in five or six people having a hearing loss, let us consistently use the microphone. Ensuring our space is also accessible for persons who use wheelchairs to navigate the spaces. Be mindful of your language. Inclusive language such as “persons with disabilities or differing abilities” and using the terms “deaf and hard of hearing” instead of “hearing-impaired” and “handicapped”. Please do not use that terminology at all. Let us intentionally invite people—excuse me—let us intentionally invite input from people with disabilities or differing abilities of what makes that space accessible for them.

ARROYO: Let us continue to celebrate the work that we are doing with our diversity, and let us continue to create a space a place at the table for all.

WIGGINS HARE: Blessing on you, my friends.

ARROYO: (*repeats in Spanish*)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Dawn and Giovanni, for such wonderful reminders for all of us to take to heart, and I would like to encourage us all to keep our translation devices close to us to honor our language diversity among us.

Committee on Agenda and Calendar

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: The next item of business is some of our administrative committee reports. The first committee report will be presented by the Committee on Agenda and Calendar. At this time the chair recognizes Chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar Emily Allen and the Coordinator of Calendar Susan Brumbaugh to present their report.

EMILY ALLEN (California-Nevada, Chair of the Committee on Agenda and Calendar): My name is Emily Allen, I am a White laywoman. I really am no longer a young adult. I am a regular adult.

The schedule for today is printed on p. 2015 in today's *DCA*. That's p. 2015. The Committee on Agenda and Calendar recommends the following changes for the remainder of today:

Following my report, we will hear reports from four other administrative committees: Credentials, Journal, Courtesies and Privileges, and Presiding Officers. After the Connectional Table report, we will hear the Jurisdictional Study Committee report, and then we will continue to work through calendar items as time allows. In tomorrow morning's plenary, the administrative committee reports will be presented immediately following the monitoring report.

Bishop, I move the adoption of today and tomorrow's agenda with the changes I have described.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Friends, it is moved to adopt the agenda with the changes as described to you. In a moment we will open the pool so that if you wish to speak, you may register.

So the question is on the adoption on the motion to adopt the agenda with the changes that were described to us.

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

(*pause*)

OK, seeing none in the queue we will now proceed to vote.

Friends, this motion requires a majority vote so the question—oh, I see some flags, checkered flags of some folks might be experiencing some technical difficulties with their voting devices. We are glad that they are being tended to. So we will proceed with the vote. The motion requires a majority vote.

So the question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the agenda with the changes as described.

Those in favor will press *one* (1). Those oppose will press *two* (2). You may vote now.

(*pause*)

There are some checkered flags close to mic. 6. And also close to mic. 2. We'll keep the vote open until those are resolved. Seeing no other checkered flags.

Have all voted who wished to do? So we have some checkered flags in section A. We'll keep voting open until everyone has an opportunity.

(pause)

Excellent.

OK, friends. So voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote?

So there are 718 in the affirmative and 10 in the negative.

[Yes, 718; No, 10]

The affirmative has it and the motion is adopted and the agenda for today is adopted.

Susan Brumbaugh (New Mexico, Coordinator of the Calendar): Good morning, I'm Susan Brumbaugh, coordinator of the Calendar and I don't know who else needs to hear this, but today is Friday.

(cheers)

So I want to draw your attention to Consent Calendar A02 that is printed at the end of today's *DCA*. For the English translation, it is on p. 2061 and the other three of our lovely languages are on p. 2063. Again, 2061 for English, 2063 for French, Portuguese, and Kiswahili. The Consent Calendar in today's *DCA* does contain items from multiple legislative committees. Good job. We are starting to get some things. We have one regular calendar item and you did send more but not before five o'clock. So we'll have lots of things printed tomorrow.

As a reminder if you wish to remove an item from a consent calendar, you can get a consent calendar removal form from room 103. The form must contain twenty valid signatures and returned to room 103 by 3 p.m. on the day the item is printed. Items not removed from the consent calendar will be voted by the plenary as a group without discussion tomorrow. Thank you, Bishop.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you. Delegates, before you go to our next item of business, the chair has an announcement to make regarding how we will conduct our business. We appreciate the reminder yesterday regarding Rule 6, regarding directions for securing the plenary floor, so the chair announces that we have updated the speaker recognition system to help us identify the location of the delegates in order to fulfill the ability of the chair to recognize delegates in various sections of the room in rotation. So being the first one who will play with this, I ask for your grace as I learn this new feature in the system.

The chair now recognizes Matthew Laferty for a point of information or inquiry.

Matthew Laferty (East Ohio): Good morning. I'm at mic. 5.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Yep, you may speak.

LAFERTY: Matthew Laferty, clergy, East Ohio Conference. I'm—

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: If you could speak closer to the microphone?

(laughter as speaker raises the microphone)

LAFERTY: Sorry, I'm two meters tall.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Well, we were asked to be on our knees today.

LAFERTY: (*playfully covering head from overhead camera angle*) No, don't do that either, thank you.

(*laughter*)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So, Matthew, what is your point of information, your question?

LAFERTY: My question is, Do legislative committee chairs vote in the proceedings of legislative committees? And if you, Bishop, would give me a moment to explain broader my question. In the orientation for legislative committee chairs on p. no. 17, it says chairs do not vote unless there is a tie. Our standing rules do not dictate that, and according to Rule No. 42, Robert's Rule of Order therefore apply. According to Robert's Rules of Order, the twelfth edition, in section 44, subsection 12, "If the presiding officer is a member of the assembly, they can vote as any other member when the vote is by ballot, and if there is a tie, according to the rules, it does not prevail."

(*pause*)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you for your question. You are correct. Delegates serving as chairs in legislative committees are able to vote. However, they were instructed not to do so during the training. Having said that, if any chair who is a delegate voted, that is a valid vote.

LAFERTY: So, they may vote?

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: If they are a delegate, chairs can vote.

LAFERTY: So, we can't disenfranchise them. They may choose not to vote if they choose so.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: That is correct, and we will clarify that to them.

LAFERTY: OK. Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you.

(*pause*)

So, we recognize Martha Banks from East Ohio for point of information or inquiry. Mic. no. 5.

(*pause*)

Martha, what is your question?

MARTHA BANKS (East Ohio): Good Morning, Bishop, and siblings in Christ. I would like to ask if I can follow up on the Monitoring Report.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Do you have a question of the Monitoring Report?

BANKS: I have a comment about inclusion as mentioned in today's Monitoring Report.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Martha, the Monitoring Report is currently not in front of the body, so speaking to it would not be in order at this time. Thank you.

BANKS: Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So, the next committee report is the Committee on Credentials. The chair recognizes the Chair of the Committee on Credentials, Diane Brown.

OK. Before we go into the report, there is William Westbrook with a point of order. William, you can go to mic. no. 6.

Mic. no. 6

WILLIAM WESTBROOK (Peninsula-Delaware): William Westbrook, lay delegate from Peninsula-Delaware Conference, White older adult. On the Consent Calendar A02, I noticed there's a couple of petitions that may cause conflict in future decisions later on in the week with language. How will that be—

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Brother, what is the rule you suggest that we're not following?

WESTBROOK: Well, it's a point of inquiry.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: No, you signed up for a point of order, so we will not be able to take the inquiry right now.

WESTBROOK: OK.

Committee on Credentials

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you. We're going to go back to the report coming from the Committee on Credentials. So, we welcome Diane Brown.

DIANE BROWN (Michigan, Chair of the Committee on Credentials): Thank you, Bishop. Good morning, church! I am Diane Brown, a White female lay delegate from Michigan and chair of the Committee on Credentials.

Today I bring you a report from the committee with two topics: One is an update on credentialing, and the second is a motion for your consideration.

Regarding credentialed delegates, we offer these updates for this very complex situation. We know of some credentialed delegates who are yet traveling to Charlotte and should arrive today or tomorrow; for this we are thankful. Due to inconsistent, documented, accurate reporting from annual conference secretaries after elections were held, in some cases it has been very difficult for the Office of the Secretary of the General Conference to issue letters of invitation. One challenge continues to be some elections that do not follow the requirements in *The Book of Discipline*. For instance, electing persons to a fourth category that simply doesn't exist. Granting visas at consulates also can be very arbitrary. Also, the visa process can't begin too early because some visas may have very short expiration dates, and we wouldn't want them to expire before they need to be here. We also know that we have been unable to authorize credentials of some persons because they were elected provisionally. That is the subject of the motion that I will be bringing shortly.

All of that being said, we celebrate that for the first time in several general conferences, we have delegates here in Charlotte from one country who had not been represented for many years due to visa issues. The specific numbers of credentialed delegates and issued badges continue to change. We are

analyzing those, and we anticipate official numbers to be released very soon. Any reports of numbers that may circulate prior to this release are not official.

The second item to share today is the motion from our committee that was presented in the *Daily Christian Advocate* yesterday, or Thursday—I am struggling to remember what day we are on; maybe you are, too. It was in yesterday's *DCA* on p. 2008. This is a motion from our committee.

Bishop, the Committee—

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Diane, before you make your motion, I'm going to ask the tech team to clear the queue—the pool, I'm sorry. Thank you. Delegates are reminded that they are not to register until the chair announces that it's good to do that. So, we're going to clear the pool, and we're going to hear a motion.

BROWN: Thank you. The Committee on Credentials moves that, pursuant to Judicial Council Memorandum No. 1485, the proposed 2020 General Conference—I'm sorry, forgive me—the *postponed* 2020 General Conference authorize a one-time exception to our quadrennial election cycle in order to authorize the credentialing of persons who were provisionally elected in 2023 as delegates or reserve delegates to the jurisdictional/central conferences.

The credentialing process for these provisionally elected Jurisdictional/Central Conference delegates will begin forty-eight hours after this motion is hopefully approved by the body. An announcement will be made as soon as the process is open and ready to begin.

The annual conferences that have not yet held elections to fill delegation vacancies for the 2024 Jurisdictional or 2025 central conferences may do so at their next conference session.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Friends, the speaker's pool is not open yet. But, it is moved to adopt a motion from the Credentials Committee that states: "Pursuant to Judicial Council Memorandum No. 1485, the postponed 2020 General Conference authorizes a one-time exception to our quadrennial election cycle in order to authorize the credentialing of persons who were provisionally elected in 2023 as delegates or reserve delegates to the Jurisdictional/Central Conference. The credentialing process for these provisionally elected Jurisdictional/Central Conference delegates will begin 48 hours after the motion is approved by the body. An announcement will be made as soon as the process is open and ready to begin. The annual conferences that have not yet held elections to fill delegation vacancies for the 2024 Jurisdictional or 2025 central conferences may do so at their next conference session."

The question is on the motion to adopt what I just read to you. You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

(*pause*)

So I recognize Lindsay Drake from Iowa for a point of information. Mic. no. 5.

LINDSAY DRAKE (Iowa): Good morning, Bishop. Lindsay Drake, laity, Iowa, adult, White. I have a question about the number of hours that it will take to certify these provisional delegates. Can you explain why it is 48 hours?

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So I will pass to the general secretary on the Commission of General Conference to answer that question.

GARY GRAVES (Kentucky, General Secretary on the Commission of General Conference): Thank you, Bishop, I'll be happy to do that. At the time that this motion was being crafted it was early in our process, and at that time the technical team that is involved in working through the credentialing software and hardware to print the badges were trying to build the Wi-Fi networks and trying to get all the infrastructure in place. We did not know how long that would be taking at that point, and so we needed to give you a reasonable expectation of time that we could estimate five days into the future and figure out how much time we would have from them at the time that this process would be initiated.

At the exact same time, we were trying to calculate how many of you would be able to go through registration, every two minutes, every four minutes, every seven minutes, and trying to work through the details of that. Since that time, we have been able to identify that eleven seats, that eleven is the number that we are currently anticipating needing to be seated to actually fill vacant seats on the floor of the plenary. Eleven. A second priority for us would then be to move to the provisional reserve delegates who would be listed as first clergy or first laity, and so we do not anticipate that forty-eight hours will be required to begin. At this point, we will be able to move much quicker than that. We just could not promise that to you at the day that they were making the motion. We were slated to present this yesterday, but because of your suspension of the rules, it got moved another day forward. So we feel we have a much better handle on the amount of time for turnaround, and we do not anticipate that it will require forty-eight hours.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Gary. I recognize Gary Weaver from the Susquehanna Conference. Come to mic. no. 1.

GARY WEAVER (Susquehanna): Good morning, Bishop. Gary Weaver, White, male, Susquehanna Conference, adult. I'd like to offer an amendment.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: In order.

WEAVER: Second paragraph, first sentence, delete the words "begin 48 hours" and insert the words "be complete by the end of this day", and if I'm given a second I'll speak to this.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKERS: Second.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: You may speak to it.

WEAVER: I am a member of the Susquehanna conference delegation of twelve, who for the past three days has only been permitted to have eleven delegates within the bar. Due to the unique circumstances of these past years and these delays, we understand. I would like the room's attention on the floor to look to the far right. Strain your necks and look at the individuals who have waited to get in. With respect to Gary Graves and all the work that you have done, this needs to happen today, and these people need to be let in today. They have traveled far and wide and I hope we respect them. Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So I would like to ask the tech team to provide me with a new speaker's pool. Is there anyone who wishes to speak against the amendment? OK, so I would like to recognize David Livingston for a point of information. Mic. no. 4. It disappeared on my screen so I'm not sure. David?

DAVID LIVINGSTON (Great Plains): Yeah, Bishop, I do have an inquiry but it's not related to this, so I tried to pull out.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: OK, thank you. I recognize David Stotts for a point of information. Mic. no. 6.

DAVID STOTTS (Mississippi): David Stotts, Mississippi Conference, older adult. Does this include reserves for the Jurisdictional Conference?

(pause)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So friend, we'll pull you back into the pool. Your question is not related to the motion that is in front of us, so we'll come back to you.

STOTTS: Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So friends, as seeing no one wanted to speak against, we will now proceed to vote. The question is on the adoption of the motion to amend by striking out "begin 48 hours" and inserting "to complete by the end of this day". Those in favor of adopting the amendment, press *one (1)*, those opposed to the amendment, press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: There's a couple of checker flags on Section A. We will keep the vote open until everyone—there's one here in Section B.

(pause)

OK. Have all voted who wish to do so? So voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote? There are 660 in the affirmative and 65 in the negative. The affirmative has it, and the amendment is adopted.

[Yes, 660; No, 65]

So we will go back to the original motion as amended, and I would like the Secretary of General Conference to read the motion so that everybody knows what we are working on.

GRAVES: The motion is the main motion coming from the Committee on Credentials as amended. "The Committee on Credentials moves that pursuant to Judicial Council Memorandum No. 1485, the postponed 2020 General Conference authorize a one-time exception to our quadrennial election cycle in order to authorize the credentialing of persons who were provisionally elected in 2023 as delegates or reserved delegates to the Jurisdictional/Central Conference. The credentialing process for these provisionally elected Jurisdictional/Central Conference delegates will be completed by the end of this day. An announcement will be made as soon as the process is open and ready to begin. The annual conferences that have not yet held elections to fill delegation vacancies for the 2024 Jurisdictional or 2025 Central Conference may do so at their next conference session."

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Gary. I would like to ask the tech team, now that the motion has been amended, that they clear the pool so that we can go back into the motions.

(pause)

Thank you. Friends, is there any discussion on the motion? You may now register to speak. So the chair recognizes David Livingston for a point of information. Mic. no. 4.

LIVINGSTON: Thank you, Bishop. David Livingston, clergy, Great Plains, White male. I think it is a point of inquiry, perhaps—if there is a difference between those—related to the credentialing. We had a request that the body made formally for a written report from DCA back on the first day, and it's Friday now and we still haven't seen that. I am wondering when can we expect to receive that written report that relates to the overall question of the credentialing of the body?

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: David, your question is not related to what is in front of us. So we will not pursue it at this time. I would like to invite David Stotts, Mic. no. 6 to the microphone.

STOTTS: David Stotts, Mississippi Conference, older adult. Does this resolution allow us to elect reserves for the Jurisdictional Conference, as many conferences always elect them? That would be helpful to know. Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: I will pass to the secretary.

GRAVES: As we were reading Memorandum 1485 to give clarity to the process, as we understand it, the first set of elections that were allowed by 1485 would be only those that were necessary to fill vacant seats at the General Conference without any reserve delegates being available. That is the election that was allowed by Memorandum 1485. This motion coming to you from the Committee on Credentials would authorize that extension to those who are provisionally elected as delegates or reserve delegates to the Jurisdictional or Central Conference. That is the extension you are asking about, and so it is covered in the motion.

STOTTS: Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Gary. Friends, there is no one in the speaking pool so we will proceed to vote. So I invite you to get your voting devices ready. The question is on the adoption of the motion presented by the Credentials Committee as amended. Those in favor will press *one (1)*. Those opposed will press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

(pause)

Have all voted who wish to do so? So voting—No, I see a checker flag here on Section A. Thank you.

(pause)

We good? Excellent. Seeing no other checker flag, friends, the voting is now closed. May we have the results of the vote, please? There are 702 in the affirmative and 20 in the negative. The affirmative has it, and the motion is adopted as amended.

[Yes, 702; No, 20]

BROWN: Bishop, this concludes the report of the Committee on Credentials. Thank you.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Diane. We appreciate the work of your team.

(applause)

Committee on Journal

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: The next administrative committee report is the Committee on Journal report. Now the chair recognizes the chair of the Committee on Journal, Rachel Bootes Miller.

RACHEL MILLER (West Ohio, Chair of the Committee on Journal): Thank you, Bishop. I'm Rachel Miller from West Ohio, living into my call as an ordained deacon in The United Methodist Church. This morning I bring the report from the Committee on the Journal. I would like to call your attention to the *errata*, which can be found on p. 2018 of the April 26 *DCA*. In the *ADCA*, volume 3, p. 1598, the rationale for Petition 21073, and that's Petition 21073, is incorrect. The printed rationale contains text from a different petition that does not pertain to heritage landmarks and should be disregarded when considering this petition.

P. 1659, Petition 20938 is incorrectly listed as coming from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. It is from Ashley Davis from Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.

Now moving to the *DCA*, volume 5 no. 3, p. 2002, the date of the Rules Committee Report is incorrectly listed as April 25. The correct date is April 23.

On p. 2006, you will find the listing of our legislative committee and sub-committee officers, and we have a few corrections there. The name of subcommittee chair four in Conferences Committee is incorrectly listed as Jason Nelson; the correct name is Jan Nelson. On p. 2007, the vice-chair of the Local Church Committee is incorrectly listed as Jennifer Choi, the corrected last name is Cho, Cho instead of Choi. The last name of the secretary of the Local Church Committee is completely missing. The corrected name is Alvin Makunike. Bishop, I move the adoption of the schedule as corrected.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: So it is moved to adopt the schedule as corrected. In a moment, we will open the pool so that if you wish to speak, you may register. The question is on the adoption of the motion to adopt the schedule as corrected. You may now register to speak. Is there any discussion?

Seeing no one coming in the pool, we will now proceed to vote. This motion requires a majority vote. The question is on adopting the schedule that has been corrected. Those in favor will press *one (1)*. Those opposed will press *two (2)*. You may vote now.

There's a checkered flag on section C.

(*pause*)

Have all voted who wish to do so?

So now, voting is now closed.

May we have the results of the vote?

So there are 685 in the affirmative and 12 in the negative. The affirmative has it and the motion is adopted as for the corrections.

[*Yes, 685; No, 12*]

Thank you so much, Rachel, for your leadership among us.

RACHEL MILLER (West Ohio): Thank you, Bishop.

Committee on Courtesies and Privileges

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: The next administrative committee report is the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges. The chair recognizes the chair of the committee, Raquel Feagins.

RAQUEL FEAGINS (Rio Texas, Chair of the Committee on Courtesies and Privileges): *Buenos días*. My name is Raquel Feagins. I am a clergywoman from the Rio Texas Conference, and I am also a Latina. And I was actually born in Bolivia in South America and grew up speaking Spanish. So, I am bilingual, and it is really wonderful to see the beautiful diversity of our connection and to make new friends every day. So happy to be among you.

The Committee on Courtesies and Privileges have two brief announcements. The first one is to remind you that if you have a request of privilege or courtesy you can email us at gccourtesies@gmail.com. We know that email is not always reliable, so you can always find me at section A, row 2.

The second announcement is a courtesy brought to our attention by Rev. David Martinez of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. He was sitting yesterday during lunch with a group of people from Central and South America. And I had already put my plate down, so I could not join them, but I saw it was a large group and I was very excited to greet them because I could speak Spanish to them. So, David, I don't know where you are, but I'm expecting a lunch invitation with the group.

(laughter)

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry along with the General Board of Global Ministries really do a wonderful job in our denomination and also they build bridges around the world with Concordat churches as well as affiliated and other churches. Through relationship building, mutuality, and partnership, they work to resource and equip in theological education and through missions.

Rev. David Martinez invites us to get to know the delegates from around the world and invites us to know the delegates from Latin American and the Caribbean. There are also observers and visitors from these churches. I'm going to name the churches and then at the end of the list I will ask those delegates, visitors, and observers to stand so that we might see who they are and get to know them.

So, with us in this General Conference are the *(simultaneous interpretation from Spanish)* Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas,
Methodist Church of Mexico,
Methodist Church of Puerto Rico,
Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina
Evangelical Methodist Church of Bolivia,
Evangelical Methodist Church of Costa Rica,
Evangelical Church of El Salvador,
Evangelical Methodist Church of Brazil,
Evangelical Methodist Church from Chile,
Evangelical Methodist Church from Peru,
Evangelical Methodist Church from Uruguay,
Evangelical Dominican Church,
Evangelical Methodist Church from Ecuador and the center *(indecipherable)*.

The delegate representatives from these churches, if you could please stand up, please stand up.

Let's give them a warm welcome.

(applause)

(speaking in Spanish)

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: *(simultaneous interpretation from Spanish)* And this is a Latin American who did it, imagine. Thanks to God for the grace that allow us to continue growing together.

Committee on Presiding Officers

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Friends, the next report is coming from the Committee on Presiding Officers. So the chair now recognizes the chairs of the committee, Jasmine Rose Smothers and Vice-Chair Audun Westad, to present the report.

JASMINE SMOTHERS (North Georgia, Chair of the Committee on Presiding Officers): Good morning, General Conference. I'm Jasmine Rose Smothers, clergy, female, African American delegate from the North Georgia Conference in the United States and my pronouns are she and her.

AUDUN WESTAD (Norway, Vice-Chair of the Committee on Presiding Officers): *(simultaneous interpretation from Swahili)* Good morning, Charlotte. I think you guys are ready for us to be together.

Let's thank Bishops Wilson and Bishop Malone for guiding us so well. Yeah!

(applause)

The committee continues to work diligently to represent the central conferences and the U.S. jurisdictions as well as we can. As of tomorrow, every jurisdiction and our central conferences will be represented through the presiding officer lineup. Next week you'll see even more of our worldwide church through our bishops.

SMOTHERS: Remember Audun leading us so well in his third language, German, yesterday? For English speakers, the translation caused some of us pause, and we were a bit behind all those who speak German. Please remember that today as we move forward. Please speak clearly, concisely, and without, you know, those U.S.-centered sayings like, "That dog will hunt". That's a good southern one. As we speak during the plenary today.

Tomorrow morning, we are excited that Bishop Tom Berlin from the Southeast Jurisdiction of the United States will preside.

WESTAD: Bishop Berlin will be followed by Bishop Christian Alsted of the Northern Europe Central Conference.

(applause)

Thank you for your time and your cooperation with our presiding officers, and I'll see you all tomorrow.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: Thank you, Jasmine and Audun. Friends, thank you for this honor that you have provided me to serve as a presiding officer for a portion of this morning's plenary. It has been truly my honor, and I appreciate the confidence that the Committee on Presiding Officers have given me, and, most importantly, your trust as we have done this work together. Pocket-size Jesus is going to stay here in the dais, so Jesus is still watching us. So we have reached a point that we will bring forward Bishop Gregory Palmer to preside for the remainder of this session, so we ask the delegates to please remain in your seats during this brief transition. This is not a break, so let's stay in our seats. Peace of God be with you. *(repeats in Spanish)*.

(applause)

(pause)

BISHOP GREGORY V. PALMER: Dear friends, thank you for being continuing to be in order and let's thank God for Bishop Hector Burgos-Núñez and the team that supported him.

(applause)

I'm Gregory Vaughn Palmer, and I am pleased to serve The United Methodist Church. My current assignment is as the resident Bishop of the Ohio West Episcopal Area of the West Ohio Conference. I'm glad I have a few fans anywhere, thank you. *(laughs)* Before we pick up a few things that are in the pool, I'd like to invite us to a time of prayer just in this season of transition.

And we've been especially asked this morning for multiple sectors to remember the protests that are going on particularly on college and university campuses that are seeking to come alongside those who are suffering in the war between Israel and Gaza. And so we ask that you would join me and join one another in praying for the situation in that context of war and also for those who are finding their voice and their capacity to say, "Let us study war no more".

The Lord be with you.

ALL: And also with you.

BISHOP PALMER: Gracious and eternal God, we give you our thanks and praise for life and health and strength. We recognize as has been stated so frequently in our worship and in our liturgy that we live in many contexts where there is so much vulnerability, fragileness, pain, hunger, enmity, strife, alienation, rage, and war. Our hearts and minds have been sensitized in these recent months about the war between Israel and Gaza, and we pray as a human family and as the church that you would forgive our warring ways. That you would breathe upon us your peace, and that you would mold us in every place in every nation in every family in every community to find alternatives to violence in managing our conflicts and our disputes. Especially where we have seen heinous crimes in war time and disproportionate responses, we pray that you would breathe upon us and whisper to all humanity that there is a more excellent way. We do not pray especially to live in contexts where we never disagree, we pray for the means to manage our disagreements in ways that honors a common humanity and your stamp upon each one of our lives. We pray that you would bring healing and hope, and for those that are finding their voices and making protests against war—especially the one we have referenced—that you would deliver them from using from the very tactics that they claim they oppose. Let all witnesses and protests be a marker of non-violence in a deeply violent world. Now as we continue to do our work in this General Conference of The United Methodist Church, make us to be instruments of your peace with all of our neighbors in this room and in all of the places where we will move and speak and engage this day. We ask all of this in the strong of name of Jesus. Prince of peace. Light of the world. Let every believing heart say,

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP PALMER: I want to turn to the pool, and there is a request to make a point of order, and it appears Gomer Chamusa—and I hope that I've said that properly—if you would come to a microphone.

Mic. 2. Thank you. And after you introduce yourself, please immediately indicate what rule you believe is in question. No. 2 is over here.

GOMER CHAMUSA (South Congo): Gomer Chamusa, (*simultaneous interpretation from French*) lay delegate, South Congo Annual Conference. I am Black and a young adult. Chair, I am referring to the report that was just discussed where we congratulated the officers of the Central Conference as well as the bishop. We are a liturgical church. I would ask when you preside at a session like this, I would like you to be dressed in clerical garb.

BISHOP PALMER: You got into the pool to identify a point about order. You need to reference a rule that you believe has been violated or that we failed to observe. If you have a different concern, you are welcome to get it in the pool at a different time, and we'll make every good faith effort to come back to you. But do you have a rule from our Rules of Order that is concerning you?

CHAMUSA: No, it is not a rule that is broken. It is a suggestion.

BISHOP PALMER: All right. Thank you. If you will try to get in the pool at another time, we'll try to make space for you. OK? Thank you so much.

CHAMUSA: *Merci.*

BISHOP PALMER: *Merci beaucoup.*

Connectional Table Report

BISHOP PALMER: I believe we're ready to hear according to the agenda that you adopted the Connectional Table report, and we are recognizing Bishop Mande Muyombo, the chair of the Connectional Table and Ms. Judi Kenaston, the chief connectional ministries officer of the Connectional Table. Won't you welcome them?

(applause)

(bird sounds)

JUDITH KENASTON (West Virginia, Chief Connectional Ministries Officer of the Connectional Table): In the stillness—

BISHOP MANDE MUYOMBO: —is activity.

KENASTON: God is with us.

Greetings, church. I am Judi Kenaston, a White laywoman and also the chief connectional ministries officer of the Connectional Table.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Good morning, I am Bishop Mande, not Bishop Tuesday.

(laughter)

And I'm the chair of the Connectional Table.

Psalm 46:10 is a call to know God more deeply.

KENASTON: To know God in mission and ministry.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: To know God in our moment of struggle and celebration.

KENASTON: To know that God is at work in the midst of a pandemic.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: And that God is with us when some of our brothers and sisters make the choice to leave.

KENASTON: We are still called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

(The following portion of the report was delivered via video.)

(music)

BISHOP THOMAS J. BICKERTON: *(via video)* The essence of The United Methodist Church is crafted not from a singular narrative but from the vibrant and collective stories of every member of every local congregation in our global connection, each contributing to a dynamic journey of faith, community, and action.

BISHOP TRACY S. MALONE: *(via video)* Despite our differences in language, culture, and context, we are united by our faith in Jesus Christ, who transforms us by his grace and calls us to love and serve our neighbors near and far. Together we worship, respond, invite, feed, teach, learn, advocate, share, and express our love for God and our neighbor in countless ways.

BISHOP BICKERTON: *(via video)* This is our story. This is our mission.

BISHOP MALONE: *(via video)* We are the people of The United Methodist Church.

(music)

BISHOP HÉCTOR ANTONIO BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: *(via video)* Reflecting on our ministry in 2023, we celebrate God's work in and through us. We confess the places where we have failed to be an obedient church, and we seek to discern how the Holy Spirit is guiding us to be for the world the body of Christ in 2024 and beyond.

BISHOP CYNTHIA MOORE-KOIKOI: *(via video)* During the past several years, the Connectional Table has invited United Methodists all around the world to gather to neighbors and colleagues to envision the future of The United Methodist Church together. These "Imagining the Future" conversations were held with sixty-five groups across the four continents where The United Methodist Church has a presence.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: *(via video)* Together we explore our identity, vision, connectionalism, and mission. As you explore this year's State of the Church Report, you will discover how we have lived into our identity and mission as the people called United Methodist. In 2023 United Methodists created innovative in-person and digital opportunities to invite people into an active life of discipleship and help one another grow as followers of Jesus Christ. Resources, expertise, and training provided by Discipleship Ministries, United Methodist Communication, United Methodist Publishing House, annual conference leaders, and innovate ministry leaders help local churches find new places and methods for connecting people with God and one another.

BISHOP MOORE-KOIKOI: *(via video)* In 2023 we advocated for justice for the most vulnerable and the planet. The General Commission on Religion and Race, Church and Society, the General Commission on

the Status and Role of Women, Global Ministries, and United Women in Faith continued to uplift our Social Principles and advocate for the rights of women, children, indigenous peoples, and the oppressed.

BISHOP BURGOS-NÚÑEZ: *(via video)* The United Methodist Committee on Relief continues to unite us in service as together we responded with love and tangible resources to meet the needs created by wars, diseases, and natural disasters around the world.

BISHOP MOORE-KOIKOI: *(via video)* And as United Methodists, we continued to welcome all people into the community of faith, believing that the grace of God is available to people of all races, ethnicities, languages, sexual orientations, gender identities, and abilities.

(music)

BISHOP CIRIACO FRANCISCO: *(via video)* While 2023 was in many ways a painful year for the church, as more than five thousand churches voted to leave our denomination, we also saw God at work through our connection.

BISHOP CYNTHIA FIERRO HARVEY: *(via video)* Pastors unretired to lead United Methodists who no longer had a church home after disaffiliation vote, and congregations went the extra mile to create welcoming spaces for hurting neighbors looking for a United Methodist community of faith, and annual conferences found creative ways to bring people together to worship, to serve, and watch over one another in love.

BISHOP FRANCISCO: *(via video)* Discipleship Ministries spoke into this work by offering a service of lament and a series of webinars to help congregations deal with the division within their congregations and the denomination as a whole.

(music)

BISHOP MUYOMBO: *(via video)* As you delve into this report, we pray that it serves not just as a scrapbook of our '23 journey but also as a compass guiding us toward our future. May you begin a process of discerning God's will for The United Methodist Church by looking closely at the places where we're experiencing God most profoundly in our ministries today. See how your story and the ministry and mission of your congregation are integral to our connection. This is our story.

BISHOPS BURGOS-NÚÑEZ AND HARVEY: *(via video)* This is our story.

BISHOPS FRANCISCO AND BICKERTON: *(via video)* This is our mission.

BISHOP MALONE: *(via video)* We are the people.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: *(via video)* We are the people.

BISHOP MOORE-KOIKOI: *(via video)* We are the people of The United Methodist Church.

(music)

(applause)

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Friends, God continues to call the Connectional Table in The United Methodist Church into ministry. God is worldwide and connectional.

KENASTON: The Connectional Table introduced legislation to allow for the U.S. to become a regional conference. This legislation has been expanded to provide regional governance for our central conferences, and we are delighted in that acceptance of that concept.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: In the central conferences we know the value of being able to adapt and supplement *The Book of Discipline*. We believe this privilege enables effective ministry and regional autonomy and should be extended to the entire church and it has been now extended.

KENASTON: The Connectional Table has committed to decentering the U.S. in our conversations. To this end we have submitted legislation to increase the percentage of Connectional Table's membership from outside of the United States.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: While many activities stopped during the worldwide pandemic, the Connectional Table held conversation around the church about what it means to be United Methodist.

KENASTON: On our website we invite you to view the Tuesdays at the Table series of interviews with diverse United Methodist scholars of Wesleyan and United Methodist theology.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: We also held a series of regional conversations around the world to help the church collaboratively articulate and identify based on foundational documents and Wesleyan ecclesiology.

KENASTON: These conversations developed by each region invited United Methodists to discern the vision and identity of our church worldwide and in their specific region and to imagine how our vision and mission could be lived out contextually.

(video playing)

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Keyword that emerge related to the identity of The United Methodist Church include Wesleyan, grace, and mission-oriented, but also anxiety and disunity. The role of ecumenism in the United Methodist identity came up repeatedly. Participants from all areas felt that collaboration with other denominations is essential.

KENASTON: Across the regions, United Methodists envision a church that is biblically based, engaged in service, and inclusive, although inclusivity means different things in different places. Others envision a denominational polity that is more adaptive. Many shared visions of a regionalized polity that allowed for greater contextualization. This means a denomination that is less centered on the U.S. and more regional autonomy and authority.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: The overreaching view of a worldwide connection is that it blesses us with a structure for partnership in mission. Keep us outwardly focused and bind us together in ways that reflects the kingdom of God.

KENASTON: Across the regions, people expressed that The United Methodist Church is called to journey alongside, advocate with, and respond to the needs of the marginalized. To fight poverty, reject racism, reject nationalism, empower women, address food insecurity and health, and offer welcome to immigrants and refugees.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Throughout the connection participants recognize discipleship as central to the mission of The United Methodist Church. Participants in both the U.S. and Europe expressed an interest in reviving the small group and class structure of holy Methodism.

KENASTON: The good news is that throughout the connection, participants experienced The United Methodist Church as a place of transformation, grace, and love. These conversations with United Methodists around the globe have renewed the commitment of the CT to ensure that connectionalism remains central to how our worldwide church evolves and grows.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: The Connectional Table adopted a value-based process to allocate the denomination's budget and better focus our work as a worldwide church and help each agency maintain its core mission and address emerging missional priorities.

KENASTON: Budget cuts to the agencies have required critical sacrifices and while we have worked to offset cuts and strategically use our resources, these cuts have created missional challenges.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: And yet, God calls us to be still and depend on God to speak.

KENASTON: God has let us know that we are not in control, but we are called to be the church, engaged in God's mission.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: The world will always be in need of the serving love of Jesus Christ, and The United Methodist Church has always been an effective witness of Christ's redeeming love. It is vitally important that we continue to be so now.

KENASTON: God is with us.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Be still and know.

(video playing)

BISHOP MUYOMBO: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

KENASTON: Amen.

BISHOP MUYOMBO: Amen.

(applause)

BISHOP PALMER: We're grateful to Judi and Bishop Muyombo for their leadership in the Connectional Table and to all of the members of the Connectional Table. Friends, I want to offer a little guidance here as we move forward. You have been in your places faithfully and generously since 8 A.M. Obviously I'm making an assumption that everybody made it to worship on time and that would put us at two and a half hours and so at a minimum you are due a break. I would—my guidance to the house is, in exercising some of the discretion that's given to the chair, is that we would take our break now. You can say amen

ALL: Amen.

BISHOP PALMER: And when you do that we would adjourn to our legislative committees so you can continue that good work, and we will reconvene tomorrow morning at 8 A.M. as a worshipping

community. I'd like thank Bishops Merrill and Fairley, respectively of the Little Rock area and the Louisville area, for their support and encouragement of me—

(applause)

—and please know that God goes with you as you go into the rest of the day. We are adjourned. Oh, hold on, hold on. We need to turn to the secretary for some announcements. Please forgive me Brother Graves.

GRAVES: No worries, Bishop. We will not take long. We do want to remind you of the services of Holy Communion that are offered just outside the prayer room today during the noontime hour that will be led by Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth with assistance from Rev. Kathleen Weber. I have been asked to make sure that we are aware of the ending times of the building so to clear up some confusion. A reminder that our rules declare that we adjourn at 6:30 and then we go into our mealtime that lasts from 6:00 to 8:30. We need to honor the work and the hours of the building staff as they secure and reset the facility so the doors are secured at 7 P.M. You are allowed to exit from the facility but not to reenter after 7:00. So please don't think that you can have everybody just come meet you at 7:30 or 7:45. If you need to schedule any after-hours meetings that needs to be done through Sara Hotchkiss. That can be done through Room 103. An additional reminder over and over and over again: If you are somewhere and your name badge is somewhere, your voting card should be in that same place. If you are there and you have a voting device that's not what you are supposed to do. Leave your device on the table but take your voting card with you. Thank you.

BISHOP PALMER: Thank you, Brother Graves, and forgive me for running past the announcements.

GRAVES: No worries.

BISHOP PALMER: Friends, the fourth plenary session is adjourned.