

## **Stokesdale UMC News in Brief**

We are not having a church newsletter in July, so here is some news in brief regarding Vacation Bible School, annual conference, and new opportunities for our congregation and Pastor Ed.

### **VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL**

Register your child for Vacation Bible School. Camp Firelight, July 14-18 6-8:30pm. Go to [www.stokesdaleumc.org/vbs](http://www.stokesdaleumc.org/vbs) to register your child, grandchild, friend, or relative.

### **Everything You Need to Know About Annual Conference 2024**

The Western North Carolina Annual Conference gathered at Lake Junaluska from June 20-23, 2024. The following information provides a snapshot of the Conference and the work done during the three days of business. We hope this list of highlights can be a resource to you and your churches as you share reports and hold conversations with your congregations in the coming weeks.

We are 643 churches across the 44 western counties of North Carolina, 16 emerging faith communities, 10 new church plants, 200+ fresh expressions of church, and 130 Lighthouse Churches. We are blessed with 173,159 members and an average weekly worship attendance of 53,818, not counting online, which we need to count! Our ministries are led by 1,165 clergy.

Over 1500 delegates attended the Western North Carolina Annual Conference; approximately 800+ were laity, and 700+ were clergy.

At the time of writing, the conference offering is over \$20,000 for youth and young adult scholarships to the Junaluska Peace Conference and toward Sowers of Hope, an endowment for our campus ministries.

We established a Rural Life Sunday to be observed in each local church.

Our retiring clergy have served a total of 880 years in the ministry of the gospel.

We prayed for our five appointed military chaplains, with three present, and their families. The conference also included a recurring rhythm of spiritual exercises.

We held conversations and listened to messages about creation care, racism, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion. We named progress, confessed failure and harm, and acknowledged a deep need for continuing personal, local, and conference engagement.

We learned that over 1,000 laity and clergy served at the UMC General Conference in Charlotte.

We approved a budget of almost \$13 million, and our apportionment to the general church is the third largest in the connection. Over \$800,000 was invested in salary support for

clergy of color last year, and over 97% of tithes and offerings remain in the local churches for vital ministry there.

5000 youth will attend ministries at Lake Junaluska this summer, and several hundred will attend our conference camps. Over \$6,000 was given to the Youth Service Fund, which supported scholarships this year for Harambee, sponsored by Black Methodists for Church Renewal. We also celebrated the 75th Anniversary of Camp Tekoa.

We welcomed 14 new candidates for ministry, approved 7 persons for their first pastoral licenses, recognized the orders of two elders, welcomed three elders from other annual conferences into full connection, commissioned 12, and ordained 11.

We also commissioned 27 presiding elders to serve alongside the superintendents in encouragement, mentoring, and supervision ministries.

We heard reports about new and chartered churches, Fresh Expressions of Church, new models of evangelism, and innovation. We also learned of three initiatives in the coming year: The Purple Church, which will resource churches during the fall political elections; The Healing Centered Churches Summit in February, which will offer training in response to trauma; and the Junaluska Peace Conference in April.

We approved changes in our organization and rules to include youth participation fully. We surprised our Conference Director of Communications, Aimee Yeager, with a special presentation from United Methodist Communication, during which Aimee was named a 2024 recipient of the Epikoinonia Award for Excellence in Communications Ministry. Five recipients are selected for this award annually, as recommended by staff within United Methodist Communications, based on proven commitment to the work of communication ministry throughout The United Methodist Church. We announced a meeting of the Order of Deacons on September 16 to learn about sacramental theology, fellowship, worship, and early authorization for sacramental leadership.

We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Reynolds Leadership Program, sponsored by the United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina.

Our conference, for the first time, was translated into Spanish.

Our conference began for the first time with a Land Acknowledgement led by Gerri Wolfe Grady, a member of Cherokee United Methodist Church.

The music was led by Dr. Melodie Galloway, professor of music at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, Tate Addis, and the following: The Place, the Modern Worship Collective and Vocal Space.

Our spiritual focus was on John 15, and preachers included Magrey DeVega, Ann Haywood-Baxter, Lynda Ferguson, and Bishop Carter.

Bishop Carter articulated our four strategic priorities: vital local churches and fresh expressions of the church; anti-racism as discipleship and sanctification; the well-being of spiritual leaders (laity and clergy); and our United Methodist identity—grace, connection, and holiness.

The annual conference began with the song “And Are We Yet Alive?” and concluded with the making and fixing of clergy appointments and the singing of the “Hallelujah Chorus.”

You can find wrap-up newsletters from Annual Conference:

<https://www.wnccumc.org/newsdetail/18402967>

<https://www.wnccumc.org/newsdetail/18408070>

### **Bishop Carter invites Stokesdale UMC to be part of “First Church Cohort”**

Greetings! I am writing to extend an invitation to you and your congregation to be part of the second cohort forming around the unique role of “First Churches” in our communities. In the 10+ years I have been serving as an episcopal leader, I continue to identify “First Churches” as vital to the presence of The United Methodist Church in a community and instrumental for furthering the Kingdom. Through the First Church Initiative, we are focusing on the role “First Churches” can have in Western North Carolina communities. These churches may be called “First,” “Central,” “Trinity” or the like, or they may have similar characteristics to a first church in their specific community.

Some identifying characteristics include:

- Located in the center of town or community
- Are in an historic area and have chosen to stay
- Some members feel the best days are in the past – “glory days”
- Surrounded by potential and budding revitalization
- May be landlocked
- Has the ability to be prophetic or influential, partly due to the civic/professional leaders within the congregation

This initiative is designed to give leaders space, time, and connection to consider the unique circumstances facing your church and to determine a direction into the future. This cohort of up to 10 churches will gather over the next 12 months with implementation continuing beyond that.

Throughout the process, congregations will develop a plan to include:

- A clear picture of the current reality of both the church and neighborhood
- A clear and compelling vision
- Key strategy areas and a system/structure for implementation
- A process for transformation and continual learning

We expect participants to commit to spiritual discernment and lead with an outward mindset and a heart of peace. Together and individually, we will spend time in deep listening: to God, to the congregation, and to the community. We will approach discernment through an asset-based lens and expect to create an environment of innovation, experimentation, and learning.

### **Pastor Ed McKinney to serve as “Presiding Elder”**

I have accepted the position of being one of four Presiding Elders in the Northern Piedmont District. Rev. Bev Copley, our District Superintendent, has asked that I participate in this experiment in shared leadership. In addition to my responsibilities to Stokesdale UMC, I will work cooperatively with the District Superintendent to

1. Identify new leadership, laity and clergy;
2. Create pathways to mentoring in order to decrease isolation;
3. Form and strengthen missional networks;
4. Create and multiply cooperative parishes;
5. Resource anchor churches;
6. Identify areas of growth for pastors and signs of burnout;
7. Be a conversation partner in setting goals with clergy;
8. Strengthen the church’s teaching office through common readings.

This will require some lunch meetings and an occasional day away for continuing education or spiritual renewal. This is a two-year commitment through June 30, 2026. Attached is a covenant signed by Mark Richardson, Todd Thomas, and I outlining responsibilities of the local church, Presiding Elder, and the District Superintendent in this new role. I’m honored to be asked to serve in this capacity. This reflects the leadership and faithful witness of this congregation. I believe the annual conference wants to duplicate the success we’ve had here at Stokesdale UMC.

Also, I have accepted the position on the Board of Ordained Ministry for the next few years. Boards of Ordained Ministry are tasked with recruiting and credentialing candidates and clergy, as well as recommending them for licensing and ordination and developing standards for continuing formation and regular evaluation. Again, this is a high honor, and I’m grateful for the opportunity.

To make room in my schedule, I have resigned from other boards and agencies within the conference. I’m thankful for opportunities to serve in those capacities, and I wish them continued success.

### **Church Directory**

The new phone book is here! Those of us who had our pictures taken or submitted, please come by the church to pick yours up during office hours of 9:00am to 1:00 pm. We do have a limited supply of extra copies. Stay tuned for information about the Church Directory “App.”