

Report to Grayson UMC on the 2021 North Georgia Annual Conference

The North Georgia Annual Conference was held virtually June 4th and in Athens, GA on June 5th with Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson presiding. Attending (primarily virtually) from Grayson UMC were: Geoff Murphy, Senior Pastor; Joshua Carr, Associate Pastor; Trenton Dockery, Associate Pastor; Richard Parker, Lay Leader; Laura Rogers, Lay Delegate; Russ Tripp, Lay Delegate; and Tom Carter, Lay Delegate.

The theme of the conference was “Love is Making Room”. Bishop Sue Hauptert –Johnson’s message of encouragement was based on Acts 16:6-10.

Acts 16:6-10 NIV

⁶Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

The virtual session on Friday, June 4th was to conduct the business of the church a review of which will follow. The Service of Licensing, Commissioning and Ordination was held in person on Saturday June 5th. Three provisional deacons and 21 provisional elders were commissioned. Ordained were 5 full connection deacons and 22 full connection elders; one of which was Rev. Trenton Dockery. Grayson UMC held a watch party in the Sanctuary to celebrate as Rev. Trenton took his oath and received his stole from Rev. Joshua Carr.

Business of the Church

For a complete overview of the reports, awards and presentations please visit the North Georgia UMC website at www.ngumc.org. Below are highlights of noteworthy business.

Path to Disaffiliation

Do to the continuing conflict over human sexuality (homosexuality, same sex marriage and ordination of openly practicing homosexuals) that remains unresolved after the General Conference in 2019, a path to disaffiliation was established. This path allows for a limited right to disaffiliate from the denomination for reason of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions in the Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality. The North Georgia Conference Board of Trustees is charged with the oversight and conditions of this process.

“The Board of Trustees presented a path to disaffiliation that was established by the 2019 General Conference of The United Methodist Church. Paragraph 2553 of the *Book of Discipline* identifies and charges the Conference Trustees with oversight of terms and conditions of disaffiliation from The United Methodist Church.”

“This Process and the subsequent Disaffiliation Agreement both follow paragraph 2553 of the 2019 Book of Discipline. The steps are presented in chronological order and include the instructions that to proceed, a two-thirds majority of the professing members of the local church present and voting at the church conference approve the resolution. The resolution must then be ratified by the members of the North Georgia Annual Conference.”

“Prior to the disaffiliation date, a local church shall pay to the Annual Conference any unpaid apportionments for the 12 months immediately prior and an additional 12 months of apportionments, plus unfunded pension obligations, direct-bill obligations, and other liabilities. A

Report to Grayson UMC on the 2021 North Georgia Annual Conference

local church must be in good standing as a United Methodist Church in order to disaffiliate with The United Methodist Church.”

Two Rulings of Law were asked of the Bishop which were not answered during the Conference. However, they were answered within 30 days following the Conference.

Question 1:

“Does a local church that identifies itself as Traditional in the current understanding of that word as it applies to whether or not a church supports the current language of the *Discipline* regarding the practice of homosexuality, the marriage of same sex persons, and the ordination and appointment of LGBTQIA+ people have recourse to ¶2553 which provides a mechanism for the local church to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church?”

Ruling:

“Paragraph 2553 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (hereafter “BOD”) provides as follows:

“At least two-thirds (2/3) of the professing members present at a church conference of Local Church must vote to disaffiliate from The United Methodist Church “for reasons of conscience regarding a change in the requirements and provisions of the *Book of Discipline* related to the practice of homosexuality or the ordination or marriage of self-avowed practicing homosexuals as resolved and adopted by the 2019 General Conference, or the actions or inactions of its annual conference related to these issues which follow.”

“I find that no ruling of law is required because the North Georgia Annual Conference Board of Trustees has indicated that it will not question “the reasons of conscience” behind a church’s decision to disaffiliate. If the church sets forth this paragraph in the call for the called church conference, and the church conference is held fairly and in conformance with the BOD, and the motion contains the language of this paragraph and is duly voted upon, the Board of Trustees will not pursue any inquiry into the “reasons of conscience” behind the vote.”

Question 2:

“Joe Kilpatrick sent in the following request: “Bishop’s rule of law question. Will your ruling please include a ruling on whether an annual conference can amend the agreement about disaffiliation? Since the Annual Conference must approve the final act of disaffiliation, can the Annual Conference not therefore set some of the conditions in the agreement when they do not conflict with 2553.”

Ruling:

“The role of the Annual Conference in disaffiliation is not mentioned in 2553. The Judicial Council in Decision 1379 added that role by reading paragraph 2553 in the context of other provisions of the BOD. The Judicial Council held that “Absent specific language to the contrary, this provision can reasonably be construed as requiring ratification (*i.e.* consent after) by simple majority of the members of an annual conference.” **I, therefore, find that ratification or consent by an Annual Conference implies that the Annual Conference’s authority is limited to a simple yes or no vote approving or disapproving the disaffiliation agreement between the church and the Board of Trustees.”**

Resolutions

The North Georgia Annual Conference approved three resolutions. The full resolutions can be found in the 2021 Annual Conference Handbook, but excerpts are below:

Report to Grayson UMC on the 2021 North Georgia Annual Conference

- Resolution Recognizing Our Role in Segregation and the Central Jurisdiction –
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the North Georgia Conference shall issue a formal apology to the Black community and churches of North Georgia; and
THAT we will resolve to back up our words with action by ensuring a year of repentance and reflection by giving churches access to resources through the Commission on Religion and Race to help them pay attention to race relations in their congregation and community; and
THAT we will declare a week before Annual Conference 2022 dedicated to service in racial justice efforts in the spirit of healing the wounds of racism; and
THAT we will dedicate one Sunday before Annual Conference 2022 to racial healing and reconciliation
- Resolution Reducing Suicide Among At-Risk Native Americans
THEREFORE, be it resolved that the North Georgia Conference of the UMC support the development of culturally relevant, evidence-based strategies at the individual, interpersonal, and community levels designed to reduce suicide among AI/AN.
- Resolution in Support of the Protocol of Grace and Reconciliation Through Separation
NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the North Georgia Annual Conference hereby urges the passage of the Protocol of Grace and Reconciliation through Separation when said legislation comes before a special called general conference or a regular session of general conference.

Finance

The proposed 2022 North Georgia Conference budget totals \$17,099,834, which is a 5% decrease from 2021.

Conference employees did not receive a pay increase in 2021. The 2022 budget includes a 2.3% increase for district superintendents and a 2.2% increase for other conference staff.

North Georgia Conference received 90.0% of the apportionment payments from the local churches. Total apportionment payments were \$18,887,928. Apportionments will be 9.27% of the local church operating expenses in 2022.

Fixing of Appointments

Rev. Joshua Carr was appointed to Commerce First United Methodist Church.

Future Annual and General Conference Dates

The North Georgia Annual Conference for 2022 is scheduled June 2 – 4, 2022 in Athens, GA.

Previously announced, the Commission on the General Conference made a decision to further postpone the 2020 General Conference until August 29 – September 6, 2022 in Minneapolis, Minn. as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the safety of mass gatherings and travel.

Resources:

<https://www.ngumc.org/newsdetail/annual-conference-2021-update-15267802>

<https://www.ngumc.org/bishop-issues-ruling-of-law>

<https://www.ngumc.org/handbook-2021>

Submitted to Grayson UMC on August 24, 2021 by your Lay Delegation to the 2021 North Georgia Annual Conference: Tom Carter, Russ Tripp, and Laura Rogers