



6.15.25...One in Christ, Many in Missions, Created to Love Boldly

You may have heard this story:

A determined little girl was busy drawing when her mom asked, “What are you drawing, honey?” Without looking up, she answered, “God.”

Her mother chuckled gently. “But no one knows what God looks like.” The girl replied with the confidence only a child can muster: “They will now!”

Trying to draw a picture of God—and all that God is doing—can feel just as daunting as that little girl’s task.

That’s how I felt at our 171st Minnesota Annual Conference: overwhelmed at times, humbled by God’s grace, and refreshed and even re-energized by all that is stirring in our Minnesota Conference and connection.

Let me share just a few highlights.

Bishop Lanette Plambeck began her Episcopal Address by proclaiming, “Gratitude is how we enter holy ground. Gratitude is how we remember who we are and whose we are. Gratitude glorifies God and calls us to our highest purpose.”

That theme—gratitude—grounded and nourished us. Her emphasis on gratitude helps us gather in as one, united body of believers that morning.

And one retiring pastor shared that he ends each day naming three things he’s grateful for and offering them back to God in prayer. Gratitude, he said, changes everything.

It does. Like dark soil rich with potential, gratitude helps us grow, exposes weeds we didn’t realize had sprouted in our hearts, unites us as one, and softens us for God’s work.

As Cicero once said, “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.”

And how can we argue with Willie Nelson, who added, “When I started counting my blessings, my whole life turned around.”

Bishop Plambeck also reminded us of our United Methodist mission. Does anyone want to take a stab at it...?

“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

She then introduced our newly worded vision which is: “The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus Christ, who empowered by the Holy Spirit, Love Boldly. Serve Joyfully. Lead Courageously in local communities and worldwide connections.”

With these three phrases...love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously on big huge banners on the stage at the Conference.

And they were being consistently echoed through the conference—preached, repeated in prayers and recited in Calls to Worship, and even printed on these beautiful circular keepsakes.

These phrases help give a necessary cohesion, gathering us all in as one. But these words were permission giving, they release us from only being a faint reflection or faint echo of others, but allow us to be who we are...creating many in mission.

Expect to hear more about those phrases in the future.

And then I fully enjoyed the teaching of Rev. Dr. Tim Eberhart. With humor, depth, and a deep grounding in both theology and ecology, Tim didn't sugarcoat the realities of our time.

He painted a vivid and clear picture of our current struggles and described how climate disruption, political division, spiritual fatigue, and community breakdown are colliding in what Eberhart, called a “polycrisis.”

And Eberhart went on to say, “...“Let me begin by affirming what many of us are feeling deep in our bones,” he said. “It really is that bad.” And I felt the whole room, 500 hundred pastors take a deep breath, we sighed.

I believe it was in part because he named the constant, pressing, at times overwhelming swirl of what is going on in our nation and has even intensified in the last week.

He named the weight pastors carry in trying to hold everything together even as things feel like they are falling apart. He explained we are in a time called an “age of disintegration”.

But he also brought hope. And he spoke in words that connected and ignited my soul. He wove together deep Wesleyan theology with ecology – with an understanding of deep truths reflected in nature.

For instance, he talked about how trees survive and regenerate after a fire. We know this in our bones as Minnesotans.

Pinecones remain like hard rocks, seeds inside the cone sealed up with resin. And those seeds need the grace of fire to break out of their dormancy; the fire opens and releases the seeds so they can begin to germinate and be the bearers of new life.

Eberhart then changed up the metaphor and invited us to look for those “fire seeds”—tiny sparks of renewal that survive even the most devastating burn.

He identified five: following Jesus in active discipleship, following Jesus is inherently social, being a life-long learner and fostering that for all, radical equality of all persons, the being and work of God is love.

Eberhart said that in times of crisis, what Christians believe is important—but how they live matters even more. Eberhart urged the Church to recover a vision of discipleship as a daily, embodied practice.

He challenged us to be a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life.” Quoting John Wesley a Christian, “...thinks, speaks, and lives according to the ‘method’ laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

He shared voices from the past, voices of Thomas à Kempis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer—both of whom called for faithful living not as a private pursuit but as a visible, communal witness, especially in times of fear and plague.

He affirmed, amid the upheavals and trends of our time, what our tradition tells us is this: Come what may, the surest way forward is to focus on following Jesus in living, active and—yes, costly—discipleship,” said Eberhart.

May we take that to heart today.

And there were, of course, resolutions, motions, amendments, mini-speeches, and then voting for and against certain proposals.

Here is a quick rundown of just a few bold proposals, bold ways to love...the Conference approved resolutions for:

Promote creation care, to commit to taking climate action. Specifically, every local church, charge, cluster, or district is urged to create a “green team” or strengthen an existing one for action in four areas each year—worship, education, practice, and advocacy.

To eliminate racial covenant language from property deeds, discriminatory laws from city and county books.

For a study to alleviate the church insurance crisis. One pastor joked, but in all seriousness because he use to sell insurance, “It would be far cheaper for us as a denomination to own a construction company to re-roof and fix all our churches than what we have now, each church paying their own insurance.”

Against the ethnic cleansing in Gaza and the West Bank.

For humanitarian aid to be sent to Gaza.

For an increase in our apportionments of 48,636.

For the approval of Compass, a plan that automatically enrolls pastors into building their pensions.

We can't capture everything God is doing—but we can each do something. Here are a few invitations I offer, for us as individuals and as a church:

Practice Daily Gratitude.

Try naming three things each day you're thankful for—whether in the morning over your oatmeal, over a good cup of coffee, as you drive home from work, or right before you fall asleep at night. Gratitude softens our hearts and roots us in God's grace.

Live Your Faith Boldly.

Ask yourself: How can I follow Jesus today—in my words, in my time, in my relationships? Remember: faith isn't just what we believe, but how we live.

Join the Care for Creation.

Our Conference passed a resolution urging each church to create or strengthen a

“green team.” Might God be nudging you to take part? Let’s explore how we might expand our worship practices and advocate for this good gift God has given us...this earth. .

Embody Our Mission.

“Love Boldly. Serve Joyfully. Lead Courageously.” These are not slogans. They are a way of life. In your family, your community, your workplace, your church—where is God inviting you to step forward?

As we now turn to a time of reflection and prayer.

Where have you seen glimpses of God lately? In what moment, person, or experience has God quietly shown up in your life this past week?

Or what fire seed is God stirring up in you right now? Is there a small spark of renewal—an idea, a longing, or a next faithful step—invite God to blow on those embers, invite God to fan those into flame?