

## 2014 West Virginia Annual Conference Summary

The 46th session of the West Virginia Annual Conference met June 12-15 at West Virginia Wesleyan College in Buckhannon, W.Va. Bishop Sandra Steiner Ball presided during the session which emphasized the theme, "Discover Christ."

Guest preacher, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton (Western PA area) returned to the place of his ordination to preach at two worship services. His first sermon, "Discover Relationship," was based on the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well, as told in the Gospel of John.

"I believe this story represents one of the greatest challenges of the Christian journey, to love people like he (Jesus) did," said the bishop.

Bickerton preached again Friday morning, where he urged the conference to re-discover joy. He used the song "Happy" by Pharrell Williams to demonstrate joy and conference members responded by dancing in the aisles of Wesley Chapel.

The conference also concluded a year of emphasis on Imagine No Malaria. Since 2007, the conference has raised \$425,000 to combat the deadly disease.

The Cabinet of the West Virginia Annual Conference presented a report that demonstrated the perseverance and hope local churches and ministries show even in times of hardship and "giants in the land" such as addiction, depression and the perceived cultural irrelevance.

Resident and presiding Bishop, Sandra Steiner Ball based her address on Isaiah 40, verse 31: "but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint."

"God wants to renew our strength, to make us able," she said. "I hear Isaiah telling us to look around at the big world. Behind it is a creator who has the expansive power of life that can make a grasshopper soar like an eagle."

Dr. Elaine Heath led two conference teaching sessions that focused on how missional communities can reach new people.

Bishop Ernest S. Lyght, who served the West Virginia Conference from 2004-2011 preached a sermon during Sunday morning ordination that encouraged attendees to embrace the steps along the journey of faith.

"When we are on the spiritual path, the whole world is open," he said. Conference passed a resolution that strengthens clergy training regarding the issue of sexual assault. They also approved a rule change that allows seminarians to take up to 66 <sup>2</sup>/<sub>3</sub>% of their courses online, except for those related to preaching and pastoral care.

Conference adopted a \$12,027,139 budget for 2015, a decrease of \$59,829 or 0.49% less than the 2014 budget.

At the end of 2013, membership stood at 97,363, down 1,818 from the end of 2012. Worship attendance stands at 41,820 down 1,725. Church school attendance stands at 19,455, down 1,372.

Seven elders and three deacons were ordained. Five were commissioned: one as a deacon and four as elders. Nine elders, one deacon, and four associate members entered into a retired relationship with the conference. Eight local pastors were recognized as retired.

Conference video highlights may be viewed at [wvumc.org/conference](http://wvumc.org/conference)

-- prepared by Laura Harbert Allen, director of communications