

FUMC NEWS

THOUGHTS ON THE MOUNTAIN SKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE



The Annual Conference held June 7-10 in Ogden, Utah, was an amazing experience in so many ways! It was interesting to note that the first conference was in 1744, or 274 years ago. Attendees received an orientation to the schedule of activities before the opening session. There were booths and displays of all kinds in the hallways, from Cokesbury Publishing to Native American groups, youth activities, mission trips and others. Once registered, we had time to visit tables, roam the halls and generally orient ourselves to the Eccles Conference Center layout.

This conference was different from past ones, in that the Yellowstone Conference (WY, MT and one church in ID) and the Rocky Mountain Conference (CO, UT and WY) were to be held concurrently, and in that we would be voting on a union of the two conferences.

There was much debate on how this would take place, including how to handle differences in clergy policies and salaries, etc., and this took a lot of time to discuss in order to allow everyone to speak their opinions. Voting was done for the first time on electronic fobs we all carried around our necks, which we were told saved a lot of time from the old system. There was definitely a learning curve for using them!



In between business sessions, there were a variety of things going on, including wonderful worship, beautiful music, youth speeches (one by our own Matthew Utley), and, of course, lots of singing. We had laughter, tears, and all emotions in-between, as we discussed and debated various aspects of the Mission Shaped Future proposal to join our conferences. We also heard more about the Way Forward Commission's recommendations to the Council of Bishops, which suggested that the One Church Plan would allow for different approaches in different places.

In the voting on Saturday, each conference voted overwhelmingly to approve the new Mountain Sky Conference, creating a huge geographical area that will certainly challenge us to find ways to address differences in our respective cultures while embracing our similarities. This process of union will take place over the next two years, as everything from clergy salary and housing allowances to pension plans are unified. The opportunity for mission is significant, as our new body goes forward with a renewed spirit and intention.

Evenings were spent on additional events, such as the moving Memorial Service for deceased clergy and spouses held in the Egyptian Theatre, with the sermon given by our retiring District Superintendent, Skip Strickland. The second evening was spent outside at the amphitheater where we had a "tent revival" featuring "John Wesley" aka Bishop Karen, more singing and music. This was followed by a fund-raising tradition of the Yellowstone Conference, the Tug of Love, where six teams (Drought, Flood, Fire, Tsunami, Earthquake and Tornado) competed and raised over \$7,000 in donations for ministry in Angola. We were also treated to Tongan dancing and great food, provided by the Tongan UMC from Salt Lake City. Finally, heard the amazing youth bell choir from Christ UMC of Salt Lake City. In addition to these organized events, we had time to share meals together, meet and talk with other delegates and to even stroll down historic 25th Street close to the convention center and hotels.

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Another activity was the Ministry Immersion that offered a chance to learn more about one of several areas of mission. Several of us attended the Housing, Safety & Justice Advocacy, where we heard what Crossroads, a Salt Lake City organization, does in that community to assist the homeless. Their ministry also advocates to local and state officials for policies that address homelessness. Other ministry topics were UMCOR West, Serving Seniors and the Elderly in Ogden, Red Cross, Family Promise (like Angel House), Childrens' Mental Health, and Community Shelters and Housing.

On Saturday, we were introduced to the new clergy teams in the various circuits and districts of the conference, where attendees could celebrate with their appointed clergy.

As I think back on the experience, it was so many things to me personally. It was a time to get to know others from FUMC Loveland better, as well as a chance to make new friends. It gave me a better understanding of conference structure and activities, as well as an appreciation for the talented staff that not only put on an amazing event, but also works hard during the whole year supporting our UMC efforts. Bishop Karen and other leaders of the conference were totally awesome, bringing high energy and loads of fun throughout our stay. The dedication and talents of our clergy were certainly on display, and the added plus of our conference's diversity was amazing.



The final day, we attended a wonderful worship service, which included the beautiful harmony of the Tongan choir, and a moving sermon by Bishop Karen. Then, retiring clergy were recognized, and new deacons and elders confirmed, including Lee Anderson Harris. All in all, it was an experience that was very informative, interesting and emotional. As we look toward the special conference in 2019 with anticipation, we do so as the Mountain Sky Conference, and I am sure that it will be another exciting event!

-- Gene Clarke

It was amazing to see history in the making with the combining of the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone conferences. The process was both tedious and exciting. I had the unique privilege to watch the Rocky Mountain teens and the Yellowstone teens blend so seamlessly that by the end of the week they were great friends and looking forward to the opportunity to join forces and work as one in their new Mountain Sky Conference. We can learn a lot from our teens when it comes to acceptance and open-mindedness. The planning team made sure the teens were a visible presence throughout the conference. People often say the youth are the future of the church, but really, they are the church of today and regardless of age, are vital players in our church community.

Peace and blessings,
Ann Kessler