

The John Street United Methodist Church Board of Trustees

Alan Stapler, Manhattan

Jim Hohenstein, Manhattan

Jay Cardwell, Peconic, New York

Rosalie Bonner, Manhattan

Jackie Landler, Longmont Island City, New York

Ray Rogers, Sea Cliff, New York

Andrew Bain, Brooklyn, New York

Scott Slobodnyak, Manhattan, New York

Sheryl Parkinson, Manhattan, New York

Resident Bishop of the New York Annual
Conference – *ex officio*

GCORR Equity Monitoring Report No. 9

The power of words that stigmatize, marginalize, and diminish the full humanity of people can never be underestimated. When words are codified into rules, policies, and practices of discrimination, harm prevails over love. Equity is about creating access. Actions of the General Conference on May 1, 2024 changed systems, policies and practices that had excluded an entire group of people since 1972.

Within the history of our beloved Church are examples of codified exclusion of groups of people viewed as too dangerous, sinful, weak, impure, broken, unworthy, and/or defective to be fully included in the ministries, leadership, and membership of the denomination. Racism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia mark our evolution as a denomination. We acknowledge Indigenous women, children, and men; captured/enslaved African women, children, and men; African Americans; immigrants from many lands; women; and LGBTQIA+ individuals who have been deeply harmed by the Church. Our denomination has evolved to acknowledge active participation in racism, colonialism, xenophobia, sexism, and homophobia, sometimes with apology and repentance, sometimes not.

During Wednesday's Plenary session, an historic event occurred in the quiet act of approving Consent Calendar A05 by a vote of 692-51 (93%). Among the items in the calendar was one that

finally removed the “incompatible with Christian Teaching” language used against LGBTQIA+ people for 52 years. Then the quiet moment erupted into song and celebration. As delegates voted on this impactful legislation, it likely brought about what psychologists refer to as cognitive dissonance, when a person or group holds two seemingly opposing ideas at the same time. When the consent calendar was overwhelmingly approved, removing the incompatibility language from the Book of Discipline, there were moments of deep release and acknowledgment that after 52 years, new freedom is now possible, particularly for the United States and European regions of the UMC. This is one of the ideas in cognitive dissonance. The other is our desire is to maintain a vibrant and genuine relationship among regions worldwide. The 93% affirmation is clear and required votes from all across the worldwide conferences present. Yet, we do not know yet how the decision to remove the language will be received in some Central Conferences and Annual Conferences when delegates and bishops return home. Maintaining unity and strong genuine relationships requires that we understand that regions may process the understanding and impact of the decisions at a different pace over time.

As these discussions and those on the projected changes to the pension program for clergy from the United States, we have observed a greater

diversity of delegates coming forward to speak to the issues. This is an encouraging sign.

Bishop David Wilson, Great Plains Episcopal Area, and first Indigenous (Choctaw Nation and Cherokee heritage) Bishop of The United Methodist Church, challenged delegates to make decisions with a mindfulness of how those choices will affect the next seven generations, not on self-interest. Last evening we rejoiced in the installation of Bishop Tracy Smith Malone as the first Black woman President of the Council of

Bishops. A new day has dawned. Then, as delegates and observers departed the building, a rainbow appeared over the Convention Center, giving hope in the promise of calm after a storm. It prompted one observer to post a devotional scripture on social media:

“By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79 NRSV)

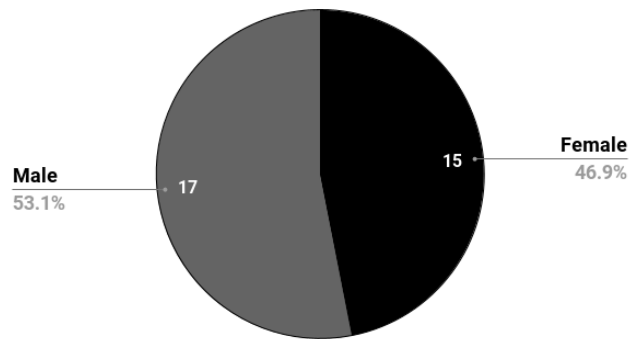
GCSRW Monitoring Report, May 2

Our Wednesday morning worship carried the theme of us all being surrounded by a rich cloud of witnesses. The Oklahoma Indian Missionary General Administration Choir, the sermon by Bishop David Wilson, and the music of the choir from the Philippines all caused us to remember those who have gone before us and who now witness our actions. Hearing Bishop Wilson speak of our “Creator God” allowed us to move beyond gender-limiting language. As the names of the Bishops, spouses of Bishops, and delegates who now watch over us from the other side were read, we were reminded of the great faith heritage that brought us to this day.

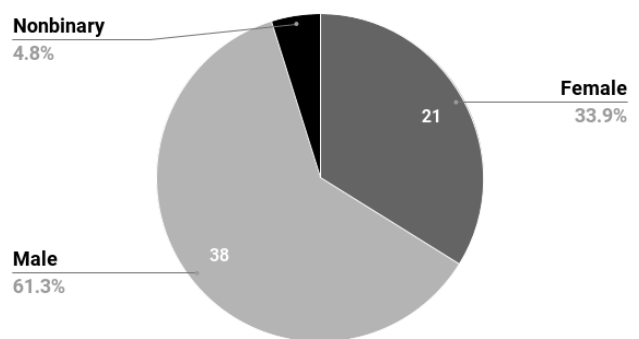
As we moved into the plenary session, we greeted many of our friends from other Methodist denominations. By their presence today, we were reminded of another circle of witnesses born out of our Wesleyan roots, and we give thanks.

The morning saw historic action as the delegates voted to approve the Consent Calendar, and by that action, removed the hurtful language toward our LGBTQ+ siblings from the *Book of Discipline*. That action demonstrated that sometimes the “cloud of witnesses” is as close as the other side of the voting bar of the conference, and even within the bar.

05/01 - Speakers From Stage - By Gender



05/01 - Speakers From Floor - By Gender



Now, this report turns to how we extend our witness by examining the voices that get heard in our gathering during these two weeks. Today we saw a balance of voices who spoke from the platform during the plenary session. At the time of