

# Annual Conference Session 2024

Nick Strobel

(Note that this report has a lot of embedded hyperlinks to web documents for further exploration.)

The California-Nevada Annual Conference Session 2024 was held at the Sacramento Convention Center on June 7 to 10 (Friday to Monday). There were clergy and lay delegates from more than 280 churches plus ministries beyond the local church. With at least 1 lay and 1 clergy from each church, there were over 750 people attending ACS. The theme was “Following Jesus”. This ACS followed the historic General Conference (GC 2020 but postponed to 2024, just a few weeks prior).



This picture shows the setting for Plenary before it started (so still a lot of empty chairs).

The Jesus banners at the front were painted by Rebecca Ellis ([www.rebeccaellisartist.com](http://www.rebeccaellisartist.com)). The picture below (next page) shows a close-up of the banners and the picture below that is Rebecca Ellis.



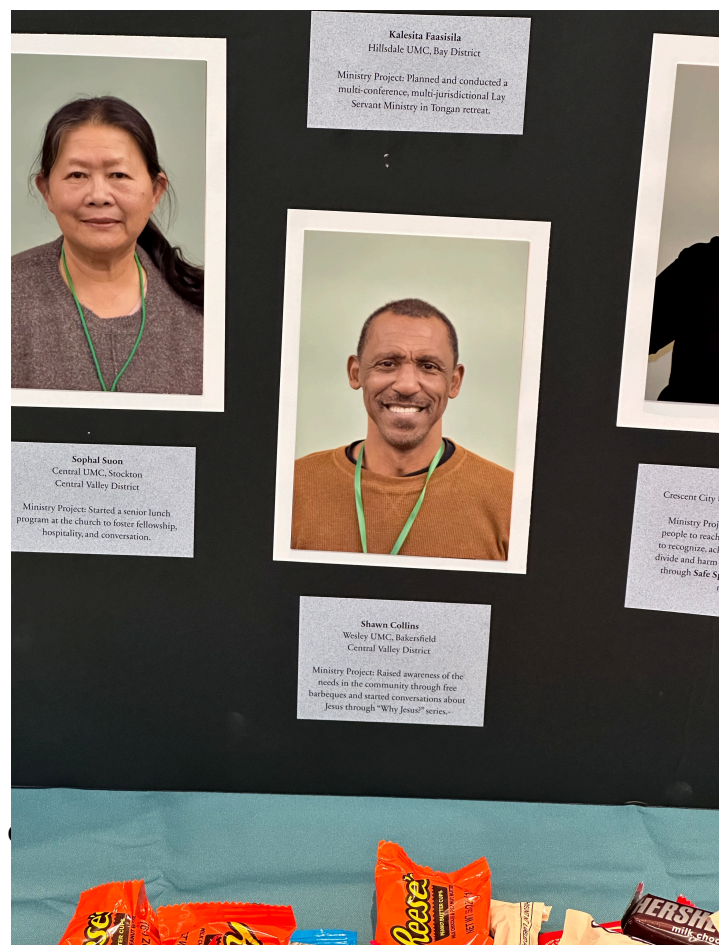




In a different ball room was the space for the display tables and Free Trade Mission Handcrafts. I did not see the usual Cokesbury store for books and other church resources.



Our own Shawn Collins received his certification as a Certified Lay Minister at this ACS. Below are pictures of the Certified Lay Minister display.





The Praise Team from St Luke's UMC in Richmond, CA led by Seru and Emi Vatuwaqa were our music leaders again for this ACS.



Bishop Gregory Palmer was the guest preacher. He is the longest serving active bishop and he is retiring this year. He preached at the Friday opening plenary and the Memorial service on Saturday.





As this ACS was the one right after the General Conference, Bishop Palmer noted that God is helping us to die to what the church was in the past, so that we can now focus on saving the world. We received greetings from representatives of the World Council of Churches and the Pan Methodist Commission, conference pastors serving on General Boards and Agencies of the UMC denomination, and the Pacific School of Religion president.

## General Conference #1

Friday afternoon, Conference Lay Leader Michael Pope and Bishop Carcaño gave the joint Episcopal & Laity Address. They discussed the actions of General Conference and the financial impact of the disaffiliations. Michael led the Cal-Nevada delegation to Annual Conference. She is an extremely capable and powerful speaker, deeply grounded in her faith.



Lay Delegate to General Conference Emily Allen gave a brief overview of what happened at the recent General Conference. She was the Agenda chair for General Conference.

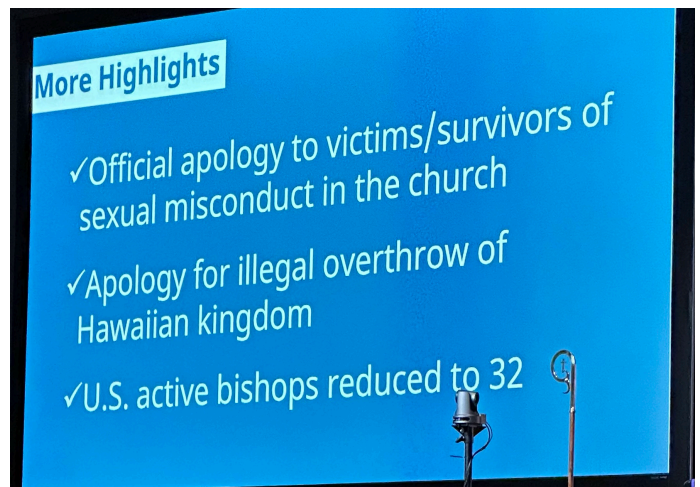
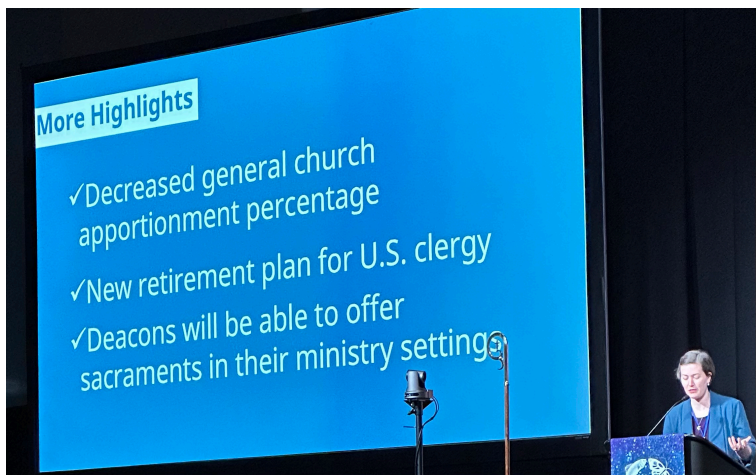




She talked about the “3 R’s” of the General Conference: Regionalization, Revised Social Principles, and Removing Restriction. With Regionalization, the UMC’s presence in the U.S. and eight central conferences in Africa, Europe, and Philippines would become regional conferences with equal authority to set many ministry policies for their missional contexts. This requires a constitutional amendment, so although it was approved by more than 2/3rds of the General Conference (78% voted in favor), it also needs to be approved by over 2/3rds of the sum total of annual conference lay and clergy voters worldwide over the next 18 months. We will be taking that vote at the 2025 ACS.

The Revised Social Principles is the result of a 12-year process led by another Lay Delegate from our Annual Conference, Dr. Randall Miller, who has attended 10 General Conferences. Cal-Nevada has led the denomination to bring about the full inclusion of our LGBTQIA+ siblings into the life of the church. The Revised Social Principles are more globally relevant, theologically grounded, and succinct. The Revised Social Principles also removed the exclusionary language about homosexuality and broaden the description of marriage as a sacred, lifelong covenant between an “adult man and adult woman of consenting age or two adults persons of consenting age.” That wording came from a lay delegate from the Zimbabwe East Conference (in Africa) on the floor of the General Conference. The language is now neutral with regard to matters of human sexuality—all people are persons of sacred worth and there is no mention of homosexuality in the Revised Social Principles.

The “Removing Restriction” refers to the removal of the UMC’s bans on the ordination of clergy who are “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” and the officiation of same-sex weddings. Note that the language is permissive, not mandatory—a local church pastor can still refuse to officiate a same-sex wedding if they desire and an annual conference can still choose to not ordain self-avowed practicing homosexuals. The new language treats EVERYONE the same.

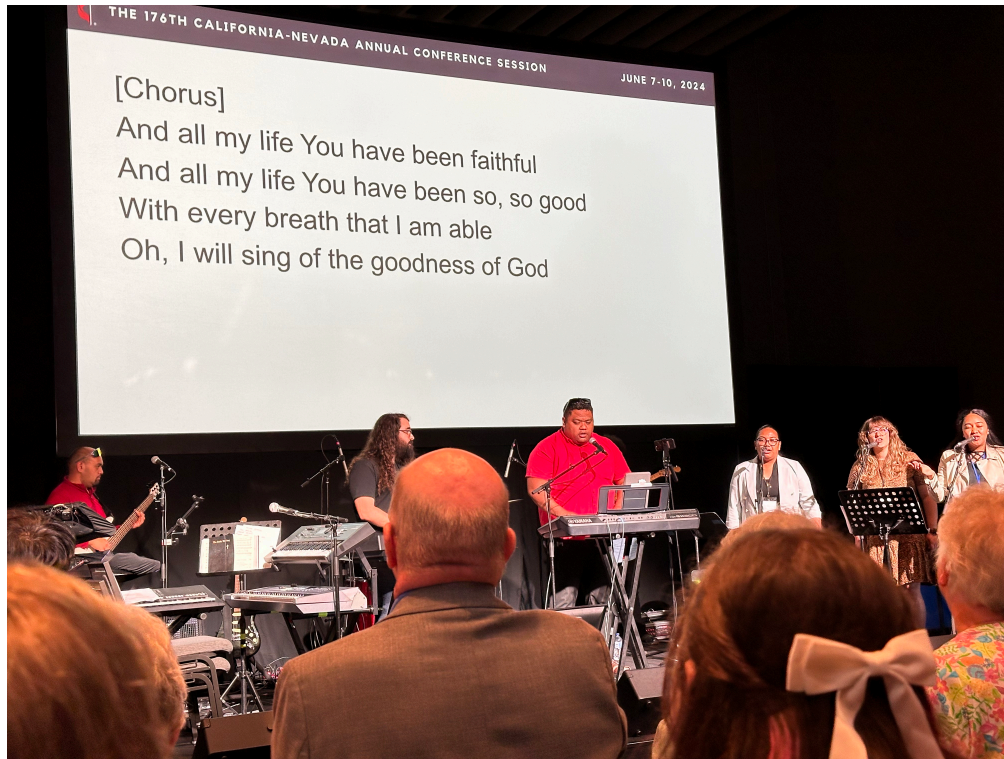


Other highlights of General Conference include: decreased general church apportionment percentage, new retirement plan for U.S. clergy that goes into effect in 2026 (a 401k type program called “Compass” instead of a pension — see also the UM News article about the new Compass retirement system), deacons will be able to offer sacraments in their ministry settings, an official apology to victims/survivors of sexual misconduct in the church, an apology for the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom (a Methodist pastor played a key role in that event), and the number of active bishops in the U.S. was reduced to 32. The number of bishops in the Western Jurisdiction will remain at 5, so two bishops from other jurisdictions will move to Western Jurisdiction when Bishop Carcaño and Bishop Olivetti retire this year.



## Laity Session

Friday ended with separate Clergy and Laity sessions. Conference Lay Leader led the Laity session. District lay leaders gave highlights of ministries in their districts as well as awards to significantly active lay members. Cafe Agape, a young adult music group from Los Rios district led worship music at the Laity Session (picture below).



Mary Cheung, Director of Leadership Development told us about the new ConneXion E-Learning portal for lay servant ministries.



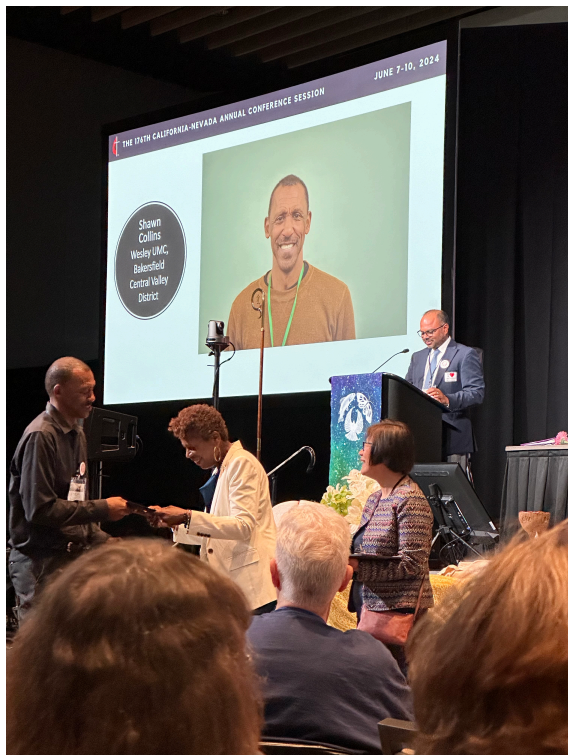


ConneXion will provide anytime, anywhere access, keep track of the courses you've taken, give you reminders and nudge messages, and show you what courses to take next in the program.

Chaitanya Motupalli, Associate Director of Laity, told us about the "Tea with Chai" program and the Certified Lay Ministry.



As I noted above, Shawn Collins received his certification at this ACS and the graduation ceremony took place in the Laity Session. The next several of the pictures below are from that.



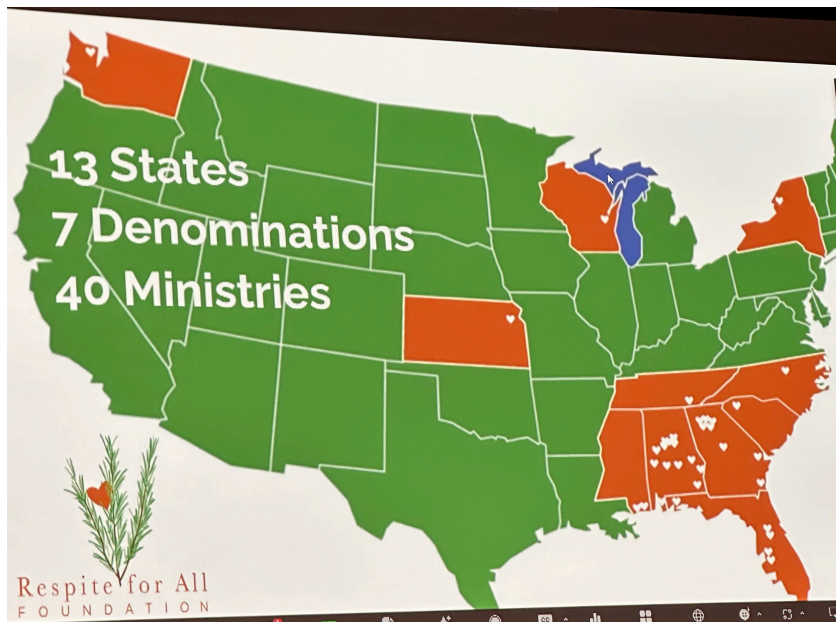


Shawn's certificate:





The Laity session ended with a presentation about the “Respite for All” ministry that provides social support for families living with dementia ([www.respiteforall.org](http://www.respiteforall.org)). It began in Alabama and the Annual Conference is hoping we can pilot it here in California and Nevada.



Respite for All communities of care-givers, participants, and volunteers are based on a social model of care, so no medical staff are required. No medications are given in the 4-hour Respite day. Program fees are used to pay the part-time director at a site but the rest of the work at a site is done by volunteers.

**[Link to Friday Re-cap from CNUMC communication staff](#)**

## Saturday



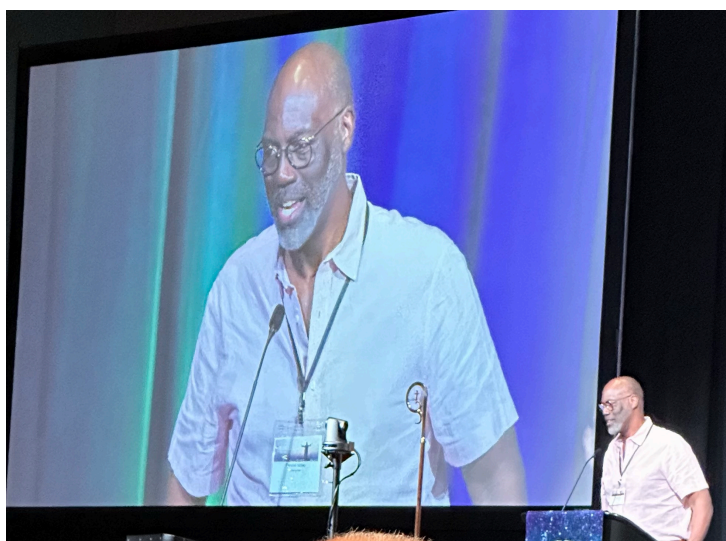
Young adult delegate Kristen Choi from Mt Tamalpais “Mt Tam” UMC gave a powerful devotional on service to others to start the day.



## General Conference #2

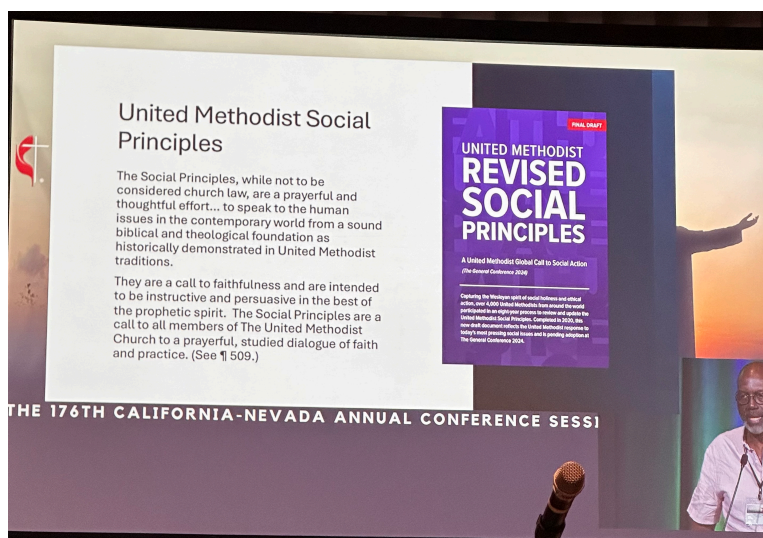


Rev Elizabeth Brick was one of the clergy General Conference delegates. She shared her experience from General Conference which included a significant amendment she authored in the GC Ordained Clergy Committee that was then approved by the whole body. The amendment was to Paragraph 367 in the Discipline that would create a process of readmission of pastors who were terminated for violating previous (now deleted) church rules about homosexuality (e.g., for officiating at same-sex unions). You can hear more about her work at [this YouTube link](#).



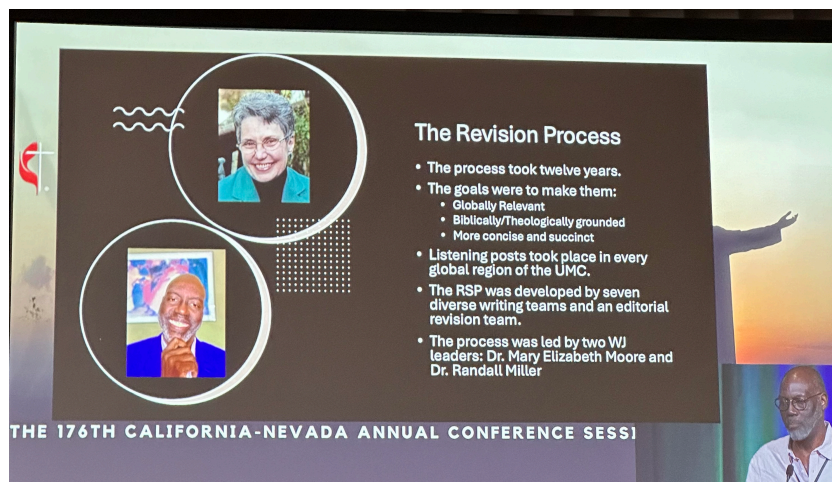
Dr. Randall Miller is probably the most experienced of the delegates to General Conference with this year being his tenth General Conference. He was the chief editor/leader of a 12-year effort, involving over 4000 people (yes, 3 zeroes!) in crafting a new set of Social Principles for the church. The Social Principles are not church law but are prophetic statements. He also talked about Regionalization.

The following slides are from his presentation about his experience at General Conference.

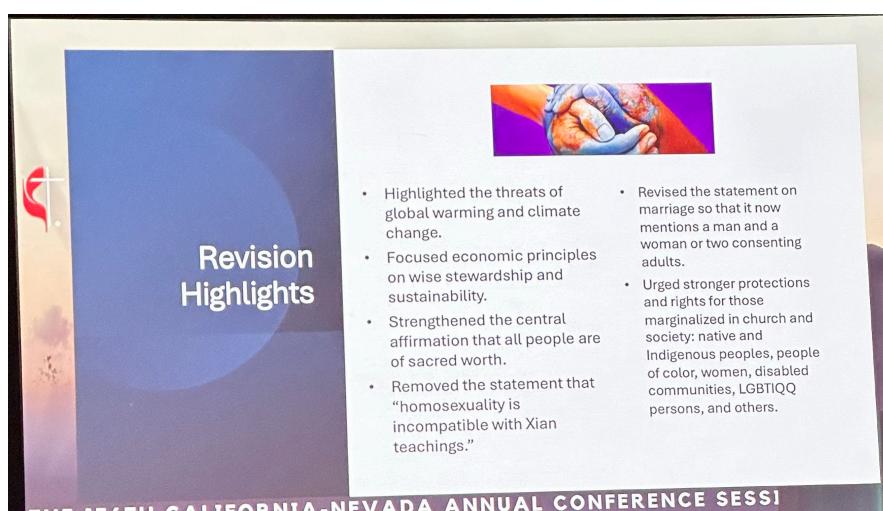


The Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort...to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions. They are a call to faithfulness and are intended to be instructive and persuasive in the best prophetic spirit. The Social Principles are a call to all members of the United Methodist Church to a prayerful, studied dialogue of faith and practice. (See ¶ 509.)





The Revision Process took 12 years. The goals were to make them globally relevant, biblically/theologically grounded, and more concise and succinct. Listening posts took place in every global region of the UMC. The Revised Social Principles were developed by seven diverse writing teams and an editorial team. The process was led by two Western Jurisdiction leaders: Dr. Mary Elizabeth Moore and Dr. Randall Miller.



Revision Highlights:

- Highlighted the threats of global warming and climate change.
- Focused economic principles on wise stewardship and sustainability.
- Strengthened the central affirmation that all people are of sacred worth.
- Removed the statement that "homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings."
- Revised the statement on marriage so that it now mentions a man and a woman

or two consenting adults.

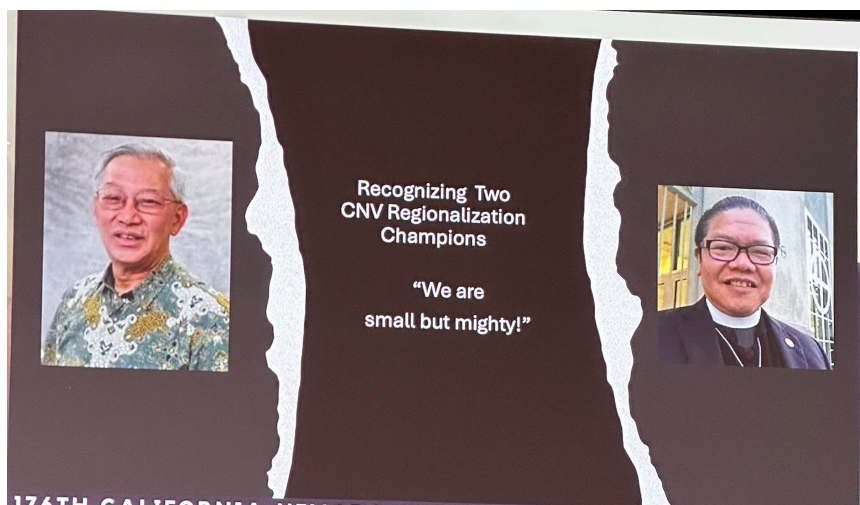
- Urged stronger protections and rights for those marginalized in church and society: native and indigenous peoples, people of color, women, disabled communities, LGBTIQQ persons, and others.



Dr. Miller also discussed Regionalization on behalf of Dr. Hyok-In Jeffrey Kwon, clergy delegate to General Conference. You can [hear Dr. Kwon's experience on YouTube](#).

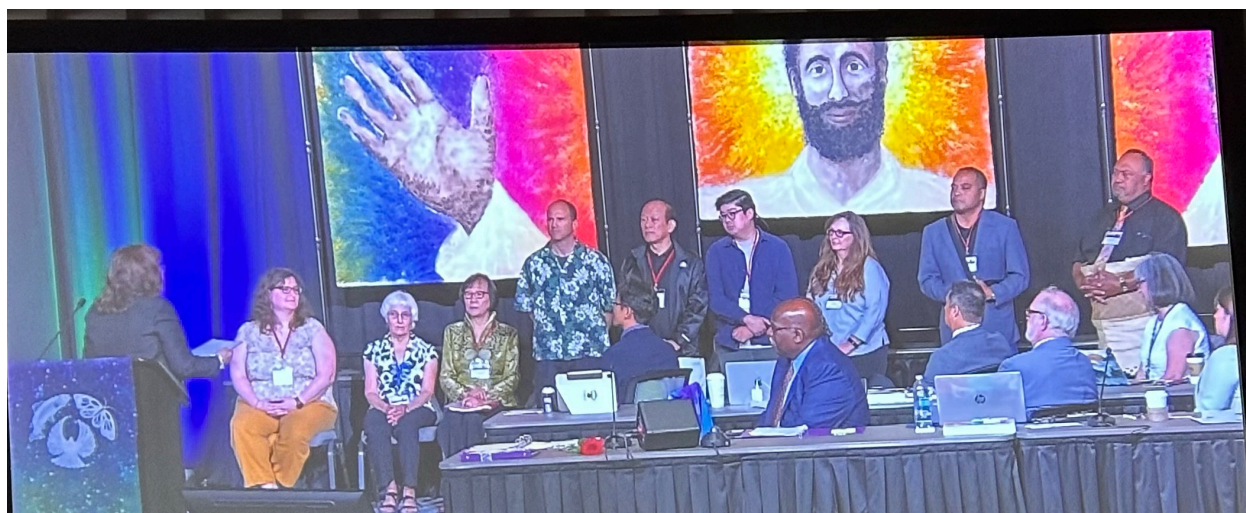
- Worldwide Regionalization was essential to all the Gen Conf progress.
- The Christmas Covenant team and UM leaders from outside the U.S. developed the proposal.
- Regionalization creates seven semi-autonomous, global regions for governance and decision-making.
- Every annual conference must vote to ratify the necessary changes to the UMC constitution.





•Ratification required a collective 2/3 majority of all those voting in annual conferences over the next two years.

The two Cal-Nevada leaders responsible for guiding the Church to regionalization are shown at left (Dr. Kwon on left and Israel Alvarez on right)



Six pastors being asked by the Bishop the ordination questions in the Discipline asked of all those seeking to be ordained as Elders with Full Connection. Sepuloni Feleunga, Saulisa Kanongata'a, Karla Lundin, Henry Pablo III, Peter Suhn, and Charles White.

Saturday afternoon was the Memorial Service for clergy and clergy spouses who passed since last ACS 2023.

Recommendations passed on Saturday (select links to view them):

- [3a: Closure of New Fruits UMC South San Francisco + 3b: Closure of North San Juan UMC](#);
- [7: Amend Standing Rules to revise Conference Committee on Pacific Islander Ministry](#)
- [8: Amend Standing Rules to create Conf Comm on Tongan Ministries](#)
- [9: Cal-Nevada Annual Conference Divestment from Fossil Fuels](#) — [Supplemental info link](#) showing why divestment also makes good financial sense
- [21: Resolution to endorse California Legislature's Reparation Task Force and US House Resolution 40.](#)
- [22: Regionalization legislation study and preparation](#) (we vote on regionalization next year).

**[Link to Saturday Re-cap from CNUMC communication staff](#)**



# Sunday



The Conference CORE Team gave their report on Sunday morning. The CORE Team oversees the program ministry of the Cal-Nevada Annual Conference that is grouped into four Focus Areas: Compassion & Justice, Congregational Development, Leadership Development, and Partners in Ministry.

All of the initiatives/programs arise from the four Core Values:

- Collaborative Ministry of empowered laity and clergy rooted in Wesleyan Discipleship
- Diversity and Inclusion that invites and engages all for world transforming actions
- Innovation that creates new ministry expressions and opportunities for transformation and renewal
- Connectionalism that is faithful and fruitful

The Conference vision for the next three years will be the themes for the three ACS starting with this year: Following Jesus (this year's ACS theme), Thriving in Community (next year's ACS theme), and Healing the World (ACS 2026 theme).

Today included the fixing of appointments for the Central Valley District. Pastor Anne Schlesinger is returning as our pastor! She is entering retirement status as of July 1 but will continue working full-time (with compensation) for the coming year. The left picture was taken when her name was read by DS David Niu and the right picture was after all appointments were declared and blessed (Nick, Pastor Anne, and Bill Blair)



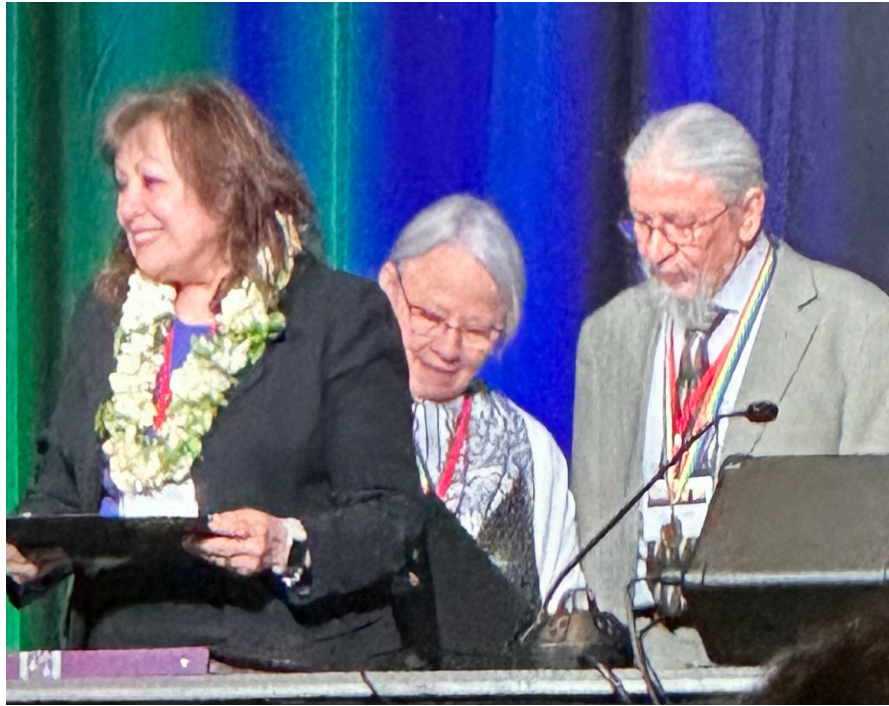


Retiring pastors are asked to make a short video highlighting their ministry by answering the following questions: what scripture has been the most important for guiding and supporting you in your ministry; what has been your most memorable experience; and what words of advice do you have for active clergy, especially those beginning their clergy career? Below is a link to a video of her video. Below that are pictures when she received her retirement medallion.

**Pastor Anne's retirement video link on Youtube**







There are 18 pastors retiring this year with nearly 500 years of combined service. Our Annual Conference is the only one (or one of the very few) that has an endowment board, the Conference Claimants Endowment Board (CCEB), established in 1891. This year the CCEB presented a check to the Retired Clergy Association for \$136,000 and a check to the Board of Pensions for \$2 million that subsidizes the great majority, if not all, of the Annual Conference's funding for the Retiree health care plans.

On Sunday, we passed Recommendation 6: 2025 Minimum Salary which is the *floor* of a pastor's compensation—churches can always pay more, especially for those in high cost of living areas. This year's minimum salary value includes a 3.30% COLA. We also passed:

- Recommendation 4: 2025 "Past Service" Pre-1982 Service pension rate
- Recommendation 5: 2025 Retired Clergy rental/housing exclusion

The Ordering of Ministry Service (commissioning and ordaining of clergy, local pastors, deaconesses) was on Sunday afternoon. Pictures below (on next page) are from the service.

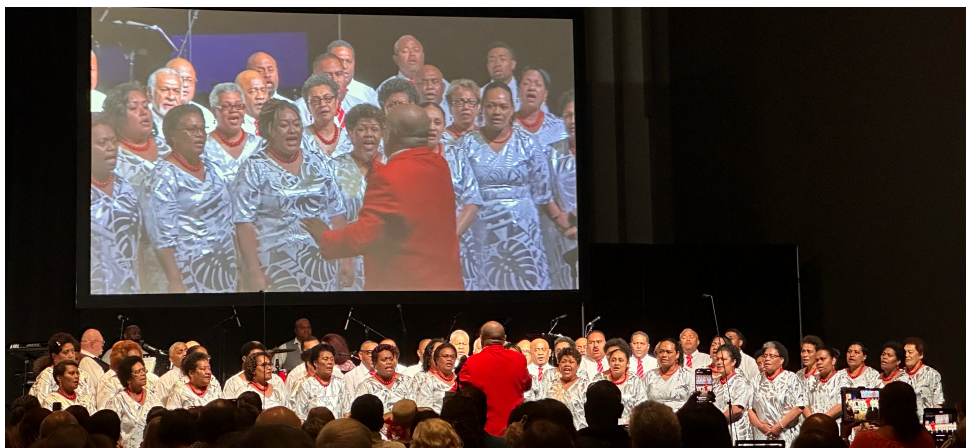




Four people are first time Licensed Local Pastors, three are commissioning towards Elder's Orders, two are already ordained Elders transferring in from other annual conferences, one was elected as an Associate Member, and six were ordained as Elders with Full Connection. Two bishops from other denominations also helped in the service: Rt. Rev. Megan M. Traquair, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Northern California; and Rev. Jeff R. Johnson, bishop of the Sierra Pacific Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (standing in front left, just to the left of Michael Pope).



Ordained Elders and commissioned ones on way to Elder status near the end of the service. Two deaconesses were commissioned: one as a registered nurse and the other as a Special Education teacher. The Cal-Nev UMC Fijian choir sang two songs and concluded the service the Hallelujah Chorus from Handel's Messiah.





## **Link to Sunday Re-cap from CNUMC communication staff**

### **Monday**

The 2025 Budget was passed unanimously. It is based on a projected tithe funding amount from local churches of \$5.8 million (about \$350,000 more than 2023 actuals). Local church tithing has increased from 8.4% to 9.3% overall and the number of churches that are paying the full 10% tithe (or more) has increased as well. Our Annual Conference has been able to pay 100% of the General and Jurisdictional apportionment for seven years in a row. The apportionment will be \$1,636,403. The budget includes a staff COLA of 3.6% and healthcare premium increase of 12%. Funding from other sources beyond the local church tithe is projected to be \$750,000 less than in 2023, so the total projected spending for 2025 will be \$8 million compared to actual spending in 2023 of \$8.4 million.

The Nominations Report (Recommendation 2: Conf Com on Nominations and Connectional Leadership Development Report of Nominations) was passed.

The Cal-Nev UMC General Conference and Jurisdictional delegates and reserve delegates were elected to serve in the General Agency Membership Jurisdictional Pool as well as 14 others nominated from the floor.

I recall all recommendations at this ACS were passed unanimously; if there were nay votes, they were very small in number.

## **Link to Monday Re-cap from CNUMC communication staff**

Reports and other information presented at the ACS and a photo album of the ACS are available on the ACS 2024 page.