

2018 Joint Annual Conference

June 6-10 several members of St. Paul's and Covenant traveled to Ogden for the Joint Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Annual Conference. Those who attended were pastors Patti Agnew and Sami Pack-Toner; retired clergy, Terry Turner and his wife Anita; lay members JoAnn Chambers and Marty Thielges from St. Paul's and Nanette Holmes from Covenant; and Dave Nielsen, Yellowstone Conference Chancellor. Debbie Irby represented UMVIM as the Yellowstone Conference Coordinator. Marianne Niesen also came for the Clergy session.

In a historic vote, the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone annual conferences agreed to become the new Mountain Sky Conference on June 9 during a joint gathering at the Eccles Conference Center in Ogden, Utah. The vote followed a full day of debate and amendments in which the delegates approved a six-section Plan of Union. Bishop Karen Oliveto, of the Mountain Sky Episcopal Area, closed the two conference sessions and reconvened the body as the new Mountain Sky Conference later that Saturday evening.

The approval comes after nearly two decades of discussion about uniting Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone. For the last two years, the groundwork for a new annual conference was done through a process called Mission Shaped Future, which brought together laity and clergy from both conferences to vision and discern what it means to "live in God's grace and abundance as we lead a re-energized peaceful and compassionate movement to claim the life-changing love of Jesus Christ for ALL people." Pastor Sami was a clergy member of this committee.

In the approved Plan of Union, the purpose of the new Mountain Sky Conference is to "renew and establish vital congregations; develop leaders who are gifted at empowering local churches and laity in church mission; and establish new faith communities to meet the needs of our unique mission field." The six sections of the Plan of Union focus on Clergy Excellence; Conference Organization; Congregational Development; Assets, Property, and Legal; Leadership Excellence; and Community Engagement. Dave Nielsen, Yellowstone Conference Chancellor, helped the leadership work through the legislative process as we voted on each of the six sections.

During the Thursday evening plenary session, conference leadership introduced new electronic voting devices which helped smooth the voting process on Saturday. When the final votes were tallied, delegates from both annual conferences voted in favor of the union. A majority vote by each conference's delegates was necessary for the union to be approved. The voting devices provided accurate and efficient vote counts and will be used at future conferences, district gatherings, and other meetings.

The new Mountain Sky Conference now covers four states: Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana, and one church in Idaho. It comprises nearly 400 churches and more than 70,000 members. The episcopal office is located in Greenwood Village, Colorado. For background on Mission Shaped Future and the road to the new Mountain Sky Conference, go to www.mtnskyumc.org/missionshapedfuture.

Erin Hawkins, the General Secretary for the General Commission of Religion and Race, gave the conference keynote address. As she spoke about narrative, both in our lives and others', she reminded all that there is never a single narrative, but many that work together. She ended her address urging the conference to "join together with God for God's story."

The conference attendees heard a report from Rev. Donna Pritchard, pastor of First UMC in Portland, OR. She is also a member of the "Way Forward" commission which is presenting options for the United Methodist Church to resolve the conflict we have over issues regarding the role of LGBTQ persons in our church. The special General Conference to decide these issues will be held in February 2019. Tyler Amundson is one of the clergy delegates to this conference.

The theme for this year's gathering was "Safety, Homelessness, and Justice." Entities from the Mountain Sky Area presented their ministries over the past year, including the Board of Stewards, Youth Leadership, Lay Leaders, and Mission and Ministry directors. These groups highlighted their work with the conferences and the communities they serve. The winners of the Telling the Story video contest were also announced, with Littleton United Methodist Church of Littleton, Colorado taking first place. These

videos were submitted by local churches to tell their mission stories. Evangelical UMC in Billings also placed in the top four. They focused on the Free Store located in their church. The top four videos are all [available on our website](#).

On the morning of June 8, conference attendees joined in service and education around the conference theme of "Safety, Homelessness, and Justice." After a brief worship and commissioning, participants went out to the Ogden community to volunteer and learn. At the Eccles Convention Center, United Methodist-affiliated organizations offered resources about their ministries that participants could take back to their local communities. Marty, Patti and Dave attended the Intermountain workshop which engaged people around the topic of children's mental health. Crossroads Urban Center focused on education and advocacy regarding housing and safety. JoAnn went out with the Crossroads folks to provide smoke detectors/batteries to families in the neighborhood. The UMCOR West Depot brought supplies to Ogden so participants could learn about UMCOR, sort donations, and pack relief kits, which totaled over 2,200. HUMM collected four big cartons of items for hygiene kits which Patti took to Ogden for us.

Friday evening was a joyous celebration of mission! Four Tongan United Methodist churches and one Samoan church from the Salt Lake City area held a pig-roast for Conference attendees. Entertainment included singing and dancing by members of First Tongan UMC in Salt Lake City and the Wesley Bell Ringers and the MAD (Make a Difference) band from Christ UMC also in Salt Lake City. The Wesley Bell Ringers were especially interesting to Anita Turner who directs the bell choir here at Covenant UMC. This group left after their performance for a bus tour which included a stop in Helena in July at Our Redeemer's. A highlight of the evening was the Tug-o-Love competition! Eight teams—representing different natural disasters—raised money for Angola pastors and disaster response. In the end, Team Flood prevailed in the winning tug. [See video of the winning tug online](#)

There were around two dozen youth in attendance at the joint gathering. These young people were present throughout the conference as ushers and tellers, prayer leaders, and active legislative participants. Abbie Thompson, former St. Paul's member, has been serving as Youth Coordinator for Yellowstone for the past several years.

The final event of the conference was the Ordination Service on Sunday morning. We were especially pleased to be there for the ordinations of Calvin Hill, pastor at Blackfeet United Methodist Parish and Dan Viehland, new pastor at East Helena.