

Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017 Monitoring Team Feedback

The following is a summary of the feedback cards received during our Annual Conference Session June 2017. This opening page relates to worship experiences overall in both the positive and negative aspects as experienced by Conference Attendees. The subsequent pages, contain alphabetized praises and points of concern experienced during this Annual Conference session. Many points are shared with another category as they represent the intersectionality of the issues. These shared categories are identified in bold at the end of each statement.

This process of monitoring was well received by many. Comments and concerns could be expressed in a safe and, when desired, in an anonymous way. Each attendee submitting a card asking for follow-up and further dialogue was promptly responded to by mid-July by members of the Monitoring Team. A plan and process for monitoring throughout the year and across the conference beyond the Annual Conference Sessions is currently being discussed with the guidance of the General Commission on Religion and Race, Disabilities Ministries and the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.

WORSHIP

CONCERNS

In summarizing the concerns related to Worship, the list is as follows:

- 1) Lack of diversity in style and practice
- 2) Words for songs/hymns were not always projected or the text was too small to read.
- 3) Leadership of worship services was “very white”
- 4) No captioning of Spanish read scripture- English was captioned
- 5) Desiring to have both English and Spanish languages displayed when using the screens.

PRAISES

A summary of the feedback given as positive experiences during the Annual Conference were as follows:

- 1) Joy expressed at hearing organ music during worship services.
- 2) Being able to engage people from diverse backgrounds
- 3) Pleasure at having diverse young people/youth participate in ministry reporting.
- 4) The teaching session gave affirmation of acceptance and feelings of whole-hearted participation.
- 5) Feelings of diverse presentation at all levels in worship, reports and resolution presenters.
- 6) Special touches in worship, especially the dove balloons
- 7) Praise in response to the delivery of Communion, the keynote discussion on prayer, a reference to the teaching time during the Friday session in which this individual experienced whole-hearted acceptance and sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit. One person who felt generally good throughout the Conference and especially during meal times.
- 8) Another comment of praise centered on hearing the hymns of the church with the organ which caused them to feel good and even shed tears.
- 9) A praise was also lifted for having an “out lesbian” with reconciling stole to participate in worship was a plus for this individual. **(SEXUALITY AND CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

Someone concluded that their comments with this statement: “Pretty much a positive attitude and grace.” We continue to hope that many experienced this positive attitude and grace during the Annual Conference.

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

Commission on Religion and Race

PRAISES

- A. People were perhaps intentional in their observations with whom they were engaging and from that gleaned new levels of understanding and mutual acceptance. The teaching session was also felt to have enhanced that sense of acceptance. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, SEXUALITY, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- B. Perhaps one of the most endearing comment came from one individual (described as a white, rural male) who engaged with 3 women from a Philadelphia church whose conversation was not about what divided them but the fact that they were brothers and sisters in Christ simply able to share in the goodness of God and in celebration of the work of the Annual Conference. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- C. Diversity among presenters was noted from the somewhat non-specific both in presenters and reports given. One individual made note of the number of youth and young adults participating in worship and other aspects of Annual Conference. Also, indicative of a reception to the diversity present was a comment related to having scripture read in both English and Spanish. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

CONCERNS

- A. It was expressed that there was a lack of diverse representation in worship. This includes a lack of representation from all people groups and the expressions of musical worship styles that come from these people groups. More specifically, the movement of dance and accompanying of drums and other instruments of worship which give expression to the praise of diverse peoples was not evident. **(C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- D. Secondly, a lack of diversity was expressed in the leadership of worship services which was described as “very white.” Consideration may need to be given to how people groups are asked to participate in the leader of those worship services. **(C.O.R.R. CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**
- E. Additionally, there was concern related to having captioning done in both Spanish and English. This may lead the Conference to consider what other language groups may need to be considered when captioning information from those persons speaking in their native languages. **(C.O.R.R., DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**
- F. At least two points of concern were directed toward the Monitoring Report about the LGBTQ community which one felt was never acknowledged by this committee. Some acknowledgement by this committee would be appreciated. **(C.O.R.R., SEXUALITY)**
- G. Another expressed the concern that the LGBTQ community was complaining about feeling excluded and needed to focus on the greater issue of making disciples for Christ. Additionally, the wearing of the rainbow stole seems to have been an offense as well as a lack of openness from interaction with (to this individual) to discussion and engagement from this community during the Annual Conference both in the present year and the year past. **(C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- H. Finally, to question a person’s self-understanding and identification is: “contemptuous, insulting and bigoted. And again, relating back to the monitoring report, this was an area for concern as well. **(C.O.R.R. AND SEXUALITY)**
- I. In terms of missional outreach, a concern was expressed about what the Conference may not be doing toward reaching out to Arab Christians in the areas. **(C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**
- J. In reference to a General Conference ruling in 2016 asking United Methodist agencies and organizations not to support or host meetings utilizing nomenclature derogatory of

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

Native Americans wonders why the United Methodist Men (UMM) are going to a Phillies game with the Atlanta Braves. This concern is described as disrespectful. **(C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**

- K. One concern was lifted regarding statues of Gen. Stonewall Jackson and Abraham Lincoln in a bathrobe on the lawn of the state capital of Charleston, W.V. This was sent to **GCORR** for further assessment and response.

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

COSROW

PRAISES

- A. Women showing kindness and concern for a young mother as she tended to her child's special needs. I saw women in the restroom ensuring no one in line.
- B. Tom Albin – lifting up women – mothers, carriers of life and sustainers.
- C. Women giving respectful space to a young mother as she took care of her child. I saw women clearing a path for a wheelchair-bound sister, and ensuring there was no one waiting in the restroom line who needed the larger stall.
- D. Participation was diverse in many ways – Friday & Saturday. **(COSROW, CORR)**
- E. People were perhaps intentional in their observations with whom they were engaging and from that gleaned new levels of understanding and mutual acceptance. The teaching session was also felt to have enhanced that sense of acceptance. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, SEXUALITY, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- F. Diversity among presenters was noted from the somewhat non-specific both in presenters and reports given. One individual made note of the number of youth and young adults participating in worship and other aspects of Annual Conference. Also, indicative of a reception to the diversity present was a comment related to having scripture read in both English and Spanish. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- G. Perhaps one of the most endearing comment came from one individual (described as a white, rural male) who engaged with 3 women from a Philadelphia church whose conversation was not about what divided them but the fact that they were brothers and sisters in Christ simply able to share in the goodness of God and in celebration of the work of the Annual Conference. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

CONCERNS

- A. In Ordination Service – Question – In worship liturgies such trouble is taken to eliminate “he” in reference to the Divine – why the ‘wisdom’ song addressing wisdom as ‘she’? I know its Biblical – so is ‘he’ for the Father, Son: Jesus.
- B. There was a complete lack of inclusive/expansive language in worship.

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

DISABILITIES

PRAISES

- B. I use a mobility device and I found many people being willing to assist me when needed.
- C. Someone helped me bring my food to the table; I have mobility issues.
- D. People were perhaps intentional in their observations with whom they were engaging and from that gleaned new levels of understanding and mutual acceptance. The teaching session was also felt to have enhanced that sense of acceptance. **(DISABILITIES, SEXUALITY, C.O.R.R., COSROW, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- E. Diversity among presenters was noted from the somewhat non-specific both in presenters and reports given. One individual made note of the number of youth and young adults participating in worship and other aspects of Annual Conference. Also, indicative of a reception to the diversity present was a comment related to having scripture read in both English and Spanish. **(DISABILITIES, C.O.R.R., COSROW, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

CONCERNS

- A. The video screens were not able to project words/text in a large enough scale to be seen clearly from various points in the meeting room. This issue may also be addressed in concerns related to Conference Sessions (in a later portion of this document) and how we can best help people to be part of the worship in those aspects which need to be visualized via the screens.
- B. Additionally, there was concern related to having captioning done in both Spanish and English. This may lead the Conference to consider what other language groups may need to be considered when captioning information from those persons speaking in their native languages. **(DISABILITIES, C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**.
- C. Several concerns related to the facility and the safety of being in the facility were expressed. Those concerns included the safety and comfort issues related to the seating. The chairs were felt to be unsafe and that many people didn't fit into the chairs properly. Additionally, the concern was lifted as to what happened to the red, cushioned chairs from times past. **(DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

ATTITUDE ISSUE:

- D. One person wrote: "I felt I was marginalized by two of the people "in charge" and by one lay delegate. I had a suggestion to place the sign language interpreters closer to the stage rebuffed, because the person "in charge" felt they were only for the hearing impaired, whereas I feel that people who hear well also benefit from the beauty and interesting gestures of sign language. When I saw Bishop Peggy signing during the hymns, I felt tremendous uplift and inspiration."

SENSORY ISSUES:

- E. The room temperature needs to be changed (too cold) –This member will not attend next year if this is not fixed.
- F. One person simply wrote: "TOO LOUD!"
- G. Lighting in this venue triggers migraines: I struggled with taking migraine medicine all through the conference time.

VISIBILITY/AUDIO ISSUES:

- H. Please put consistent type face on the screen and put a DARK banner behind it. The typeface is too small to read from the back of the room and impossible to see when the background was multicolored.
- I. Speaking too quickly when the corrections to nominations were being made. Could not make the corrections and missed being able to make some of them.
- J. Monitors were not equal in brightness and clarity.

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

- K. Screen were so far away and hard to read any captions or hymn words on them. Position one screen or two at least half way back so they can be seen better.

MOBILITY ISSUES:

- L. Please dismiss people with mobility problems before others are dismissed so they do not need to stand in long lines
- M. One opening for everyone to go through into the dining room for lunch/dinner is unsafe and makes it difficult for people with mobility issues to make it into the dining room
- N. Need Handicap seating in the dining room area close to the food tables.
- O. One person suggested a separate table of food for handicapped to use so they do not need to wait in long lines.
- P. One person noted they saw someone struggling to maneuver walker/wheelchairs through buffet lines.
- Q. Carpet in the women's bathroom is ripped and is a tripping hazard.

CHAIR ISSUES:

- R. One person witnessed that a person of substance (girth-weight) could not find a chair for clergy or other sessions.
- S. Chairs are a major safety factor for people with back, hip, leg, problems. Not sturdy. Not meant for sitting for long periods of time. Many broke from regular use.

COGNITIVE ISSUES:

- T. I struggle with picking up on implicit or unwritten rules so I did not know whether I could abstain from voting on something I think is silly to even consider voting on. For someone like me, the rules need to be explicitly explained.
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The following are Notes from July Disability Committee meeting to share with Monitoring Team:

OVERALL VENUE ISSUE: To our knowledge, our Annual Conference has never asked/pollled LAITY / CLERGY if they would be willing to pay a bit more to break the agreement/have Conference at an ACTUAL CONFERENCE site and stop going to this venue that is simply not set up for Conferencing but for Fairs, expositions, etc.

The food issues: Although the Disability Committee announced this during and prior to the Annual Conference, we had no one stop by the disability table to request the service we offered of pairing a person with mobility issue with a 'helper' for mealtime. People were doing this on their own and most people want an accommodation made so they can DO IT THEMSELVES. If we designated food tables and seating specifically for people with disability issues who need it, we could easily have committee members simply go to those tables to assist if needed.*Please note this suggestion came from people with disabilities at this venue and not from our committee members.

All food, for the price we pay, seems to be on the low budget side (iceberg, not romaine lettuce) "Salad" had lettuce, grape tomatoes few if any other vegetables mixed in. * "Lunch meat" style turkey and Roast beef. It seems that low budget, less nutritional foods are being prepared. *NO CHOICE of sugar free beverage (just water). Only sweet tea that was not marked SWEET.

Vegetarians/Special diet had a separate place to retrieve food...this happened the first day but the second day they were told to select from the buffet which left them with very, very few options. Dietary issues are not being adequately addressed. People who need Gluten free vegetarian with serious single food allergies are not being adequately served. Single food/latex/gluten allergies are not simply special requests...they are medically necessary accommodations that must be met. What is the law in Pa regarding Latex

Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017 Monitoring Team Feedback

gloves? The food handlers at Expo Ctr were wearing latex gloves which can send someone into anaphylaxis.

Disability Committee Suggestion: After people fill out registration form, Disability Committee needs to obtain that particular dietary need (not just 'low salt,' 'gluten free', but the specific request) and then take directly to the person/cook on at the Expo center who is in charge of the food. This person was extremely helpful and they will accommodate specials diets but communication needs to happen.

The seating issues: CHAIRS WERE DOWNRIGHT DANGEROUS. DAVE GOSS was literally collecting chairs that were breaking and stacking them in the corner. Dining Room-Friday-person fell and hit their head on the floor when their chair broke away underneath them. The person could have had a concussion, although they were so embarrassed they said they were "fine."

One large man literally had no where to sit, was afraid to sit in a white chair, and needed to wait until a red chair was provided for him after he checked in to the conference.

*MANY people count on a STURDY chair with a sturdy back or even arms to use while they rise to standing (which we do when we sing, applaud, go to the microphones, etc.) Sitting on a RICKETY FOLD OUT CHAIR for three days is unsafe, physically intolerable, and unconscionable for the price we pay for this conference. *A lot of people take their vacation days and self pay with no scholarships to come to conference!

Venue set up issues: *Single table facing forward was better than table facing sideways with people needing to situate their chairs facing forward (Neck & back strain, very uncomfortable). No room for conferencing materials on the table with tables set up this way.

Emergency Procedures: Our conference can sometimes be contentious/quarrelsome although we all agreed this year was TRULY HOLY CONFERENCING with very few of these issues. However, No plan for getting to safety should a major issue break out (shooter/person making threats to body). Physical dangers (trips-falls/chairs?) and no plan of action for 911 emergency or to find a specific person in the large crowd. Could bring this issue up to Sessions/ other committees on Connectional Table (Health/Healing?).

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

SEXUALITY

PRAISES

- A. People were perhaps intentional in their observations with whom they were engaging and from that gleaned new levels of understanding and mutual acceptance. The teaching session was also felt to have enhanced that sense of acceptance. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, SEXUALITY, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- B. A praise was also lifted for having an “out lesbian” with reconciling stole to participate in worship was a plus for this individual. **(SEXUALITY AND CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

CONCERNS

- A. In addition to generalized concerns as it relates to homosexuality, some have stated they witnessed a mean spiritedness or cheers of laughter erupting when resolutions regarding sexuality were withdrawn or defeated.
- B. representatives of the LGBTQIA community were repeatedly refused the opportunity to speak when at the microphone. Another expressed concern at the marginalization of LGBTQIA persons as well as women as those who experienced trauma in this Conference.
- C. Some felt they were being chastised for not supporting the LGBTQIA community and still others criticized the symbols and actions of support for those brothers and sisters of this community.
- D. At least two points of concern were directed toward the Monitoring Report about the LGBTQ community which one felt was never acknowledged by this committee. Some acknowledgement by this committee would be appreciated. **(C.O.R.R., SEXUALITY)**
- E. Another expressed concern that there was no transgender bathroom.
- F. A concern was lifted about an individual who desired to speak on issues which concerned matters pertaining to LGBTQ and sexuality and this individual was forced to sit down due to the procedural uses of Robert’s Rules of Order which prevented them from having an opportunity to speak. They feel Robert’s Rules has no place in the decision-making process. There needs to be a way for people to be heard.
- G. Finally, to question a person’s self-understanding and identification is: “contemptuous, insulting and bigoted. And again, relating back to the monitoring report, this was an area for concern as well. **(C.O.R.R. AND SEXUALITY)**

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

PRAISES

- A. Worship appears to have had significant impact on many. The organ was viewed as significant for some in terms of their hearing and participating in worship. Some felt the music presentations were excellent. There was special enjoyment in the atmospherics, especially when the “dove balloons” were added during worship as a reminder of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Special mention was made of Bishop Weaver sharing during the Memorial Service which lent to a sense of well-being in Annual Conference.
- B. A praise was also lifted for having an “out lesbian” with reconciling stole to participate in worship was a plus for this individual. **(SEXUALITY AND CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- C. People were perhaps intentional in their observations with whom they were engaging and from that gleaned new levels of understanding and mutual acceptance. The teaching session was also felt to have enhanced that sense of acceptance. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, SEXUALITY, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
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- E. Perhaps one of the most endearing comment came from one individual (described as a white, rural male) who engaged with 3 women from a Philadelphia church whose conversation was not about what divided them but the fact that they were brothers and sisters in Christ simply able to share in the goodness of God and in celebration of the work of the Annual Conference. **(C.O.R.R., COSROW, DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**

CONCERNS

- A. It was expressed that there was a lack of diverse representation in worship. This includes a lack of representation from all people groups and the expressions of musical worship styles that come from these people groups. More specifically, the movement of dance and accompanying of drums and other instruments of worship which give expression to the praise of diverse peoples was not evident. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS, C.O.R.R.)**
- B. Secondarily, this lack of diversity was expressed in the leadership of worship services which was described as “very white.” Consideration may need to be given to how people groups are asked to participate in the leader of those worship services. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS, C.O.R.R.)**
- C. Additionally, there was concern related to having captioning done in both Spanish and English. This may lead the Conference to consider what other language groups may need to be considered when captioning information from those persons speaking in their native languages. **(C.O.R.R., DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**
- D. The video screens were not able to project words/text in a large enough scale to be seen clearly from various points in the meeting room. This issue may also be addressed in concerns related to Conference Sessions and how we can best help people to be part of the worship in those aspects which need to be visualized via the screens. **(DISABILITIES, CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**
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- F. Known representatives of the LGBTQIA community were repeatedly refused the opportunity to speak when at the microphone. Another expressed concern at the

Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017 Monitoring Team Feedback

marginalization of LGBTQIA persons as well as women as those who experienced trauma in this Conference.

- G. Another expressed concern that there was no transgender bathroom.
- H. A concern was lifted about an individual who desired to speak on issues which concerned matters pertaining to LGBTQ and sexuality and this individual was forced to sit down due to the procedural uses of Robert's Rules of Order which prevented them from having an opportunity to speak. They feel Robert's Rules has no place in the decision-making process. There needs to be a way for people to be heard.
- I. Another expressed the concern that the LGBTQ community was complaining about feeling excluded and needed to focus on the greater issue of making disciples for Christ. Additionally, the wearing of the rainbow stole seems to have been an offense as well as a lack of openness from interaction with (to this individual) to discussion and engagement from this community during the Annual Conference both in the present year and the year past. **(C.O.R.R., CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- J. A concern was expressed about the "contempt" exhibited concerning the letting go of the former Conference Treasurer in the reference to "getting rid of any reference to his name" on the conference nominations report. This individual felt the use of the word "removed" would have been more grace-filled.
- K. Several concerns related to the facility and the safety of being in the facility were expressed. Those concerns included the safety and comfort issues related to the seating. The chairs were felt to be unsafe and that many people didn't fit into the chairs properly. Additionally, the concern was lifted as to what happened to the red, cushioned chairs from times past. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS, DISABILITIES)**
- L. A concern that the same individuals utilize the microphones in response to various issues. This concern is related to the lack of response by other persons in the life of the Conference due to monopolization of the microphone by some.
- M. In terms of missional outreach, a concern was expressed about what the Conference may not be doing toward reaching out to Arab Christians in the areas. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS, C.O.R.R.)**
- N. In reference to a General Conference ruling in 2016 asking United Methodist agencies and organizations not to support or host meetings utilizing nomenclature derogatory of Native Americans wonders why the United Methodist Men (UMM) are going to a Phillies game with the Atlanta Braves. This concern is described as disrespectful. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS, C.O.R.R.)**
- O. A concern was lifted regard a vote concerning the Central Conferences who were not present for the vote. The question being how can this Annual Conference determine issues concerning parties who are not present at the time of a vote. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- P. A concern was lifted regarding the request to ask "all pastors" to stand by the Bishop. This left out other clergy at the various levels in which they engage in ministerial work in the life of the Conference and denomination. The concern noted that the Deacons remained seated. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- Q. A concern was noted regarding how we as United Methodist engage our history. The consideration is around whether to look at the Uniting Conference of 1968 which would include the EUB and Delaware Conferences rather than from the inception of United Methodism from the 1700's. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- R. Another concern was expressed regarding the right-to-vote among clergy. This is related not only to the length of service this person has held (25 years) but reminded themselves that they chose to serve a smaller, poor church which causes them to feel like an "outsider" considering the requirements for voting rights among clergy. Their response to this in that moment was to remind themselves of their call by God to serve people. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS)**
- S. Another concern surfaced regarding the procedures around the handling of Candidate information and being near the balloting box. (The proximity to the ballot box in secular

**Eastern PA Annual Conference 2017
Monitoring Team Feedback**

voting procedures is different). They were also concerned about being given information concerning an issue they found to be controversial upon entering the Conference.
(CONFERENCE SESSIONS).

- T. A final concern noted was the lack of diversity in attendance at the Annual Conference. Their observance was that there was less than 10% people of color at the Annual Conference. **(CONFERENCE SESSIONS).**

Each of these concerns represented is worth serious consideration even though the answers for them may be challenging to give or to which to respond. It is good to hear of areas which can help us enhance our sense of togetherness as it is determined what can be addressed.

Submitted:

Rev. Tracy A. Duncan, Barbara Skarbowski, Rev. Andrea Haldeman, Rev. Susan Worrell

Rev. Tracy A. Duncan, Member, Commission on Religion and Race

Barbara Skarbowski, M.A., United Methodist Deaconess, Chair, Disabilities Ministries

Rev. Andrea Haldeman, Chair, Commission on the Status and Role of Women

Rev. Susan Worrell, Co-Chair, Commission on Religion and Race