



Update from the DSW Annual Conference

Lay Leaders to Annual Conference, Laurie and Scott Campbell

This year's Desert Southwest Annual Conference was held June 12-15th at the Rio Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas. The theme, "And Let It Begin With Me", was centered on two scriptures:

Jeremiah 17:14 Heal me, LORD, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.

and Psalm 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Annual Conference is 3½ days packed full of worship, presentations, discussion and voting on issues reflecting the 'business' of the conference, a memorial service for clergy and other leaders that passed in the last year, a presentation of the 2025 clergy appointments, an ordination service, and more.

The conference opened with Elvis (yes, Elvis!) leading us through a number of gospel songs, including "How Great Thou Art" and "Amazing Grace". Only in Vegas, baby!

A recurring prayer of Bishop Carlo Rapanut's throughout the conference was "Lord heal the world", with all participants responding with "And let it begin with me". So, many of the topics presented covered aspects of individual health—health of the mind, body, and spirit. Healthy individuals can build healthy churches, which lead to healthy communities and a healthy world.

Bishop Carlo's opening address focused on each of us being "ripples of renewal". He emphasized how each of our actions and words matter, because they cause ripples that we often do not see. We can create ripples of good and healing, or ripples of hurt. But for each of us to send out ripples of healing, we must ourselves start from a place of health and humility.

Day 2 began with a prayer vigil for immigrant communities. Our Conference Immigration Task Force committed to developing a 90-day action plan that will include training and guidance on how we can act for justice. Bishop Carlo mentioned that we can support migrants with prayer, deliberate acts of advocacy, and kindness. You can read the task force's call to action [here](#).

A presentation that stood out for us was that of the keynote speaker, Kara Lassen Oliver, who spoke about Sustaining Faith in a Vulnerable World. Kara shared four practices that have helped her sustain

her faith. These are practices, because each is associated with a type of prayer or meditation. The practices are:

- Knowing your belovedness: practicing a breath prayer by thinking of your special word for God on each inhale and your deepest desire with each exhale
- Listening deeply: practicing a centering prayer by focusing on a sacred word
- Choosing joy: practicing a breath of joy
- Metabolizing trauma: practicing yoga or journaling

One afternoon included workshops on various topics related to individual health and wholeness. We attended a session on processing grief and another where we practiced “holy listening”; that is, listening to another person share what’s on their heart without making any facial expressions or comments. It was surprisingly difficult and moving at the same time.

A highlight of the conference was when our very own Toni Smith was commissioned as a Deaconess. Toni is Jesus’ love in the flesh and we are blessed that she leads Catalina’s Congregational Care Team and touches many lives with her visits.

The most important work of this annual conference was to vote on four constitutional amendments that were approved by the 2020/2024 General Conference. For these amendments to take effect, they must be ratified by the votes of annual and central conferences across the worldwide UMC. Each Annual Conference in 2025 will be participating in this process.

The four proposed constitutional amendments we voted on are:

- **[Ballot #1: Worldwide Regionalization](#)** – Changing the structure of the UMC to create equity across the worldwide church.
- **[Ballot #2: Paragraph 4, Article 4](#)** – Expanding inclusiveness in church membership, especially in relation to gender and ability.
- **[Ballot #3: Article V: Racial Justice](#)** – Standing against racism and colonialism.
- **[Ballot #4: Educational requirements for clergy members](#)** – Clarifying local pastor status regarding eligibility for clergy delegates.

Each ballot was voted on separately and stands on its own and each requires a 2/3 aggregate approval to pass. Unlike other ballots, we will not know the voting results of our specific conference nor any other. Based on dates of various conferences, they are expecting to be able to announce the results of each ballot in mid-November.

For our Desert Southwest Conference, we voted on and approved:

- Nominations made for various committees
- A 3% increase to the minimum base compensation for clergy
- The 2026 budget
- The divestiture from fossil fuels; that is that the DSW Conference not knowingly make investments in any company or entity whose core business activity involves the production of coal, petroleum, or natural gas

- Continuing the work of the Commission of Religion and Race (CORR) to promote deeper personal and communal transformation in the areas of diversity awareness, racial equity, equality and justice, and its intersectionality.

All in all, it was a productive, informative, and fun conference. For those interested in more details about the conference, you can find videos, pictures, and PDFs on the conference website:

<https://dscumc.org/annual-conference/>.