

MFSA NCC—The Plumb Line

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Weekend of Inclusive Conversation

Wilmington - 5th Ave UMC - Thursday night, January 24

Bill Braswell gathered the five panel members from the LGBTQIA+ community to share their stories. Bill opened us up with prayer and explained that this would be a time of sharing stories, not a focus on the upcoming General Conference with the various plans being considered. Helen Ryde, Southeastern Coordinator from the Reconciling Ministries Network, helped to frame the conversations by utilizing the Gender Unicorn handout that explains Gender Identity, Gender Expression, Sex Assigned at Birth, Physically Attracted to, Emotionally Attracted to, and one's sexual orientation. A short time for questions was provided at the end. Bill closed the meeting in prayer and the panel members and many audience members stayed around for conversations in the sanctuary of the church at the conclusion of the event.

Raleigh - Avent Ferry UMC - Saturday, January 26

Attendees were greeted as they entered the narthex to the sanctuary at Avent Ferry with a handout, rainbow crosses, and refreshments. As the program began, we were greeted by Rev. Donna Thompson. Rev. Thompson shared about Avent Ferry's journey of the All Means All group becoming a Reconciling Community and then the entire church becoming a Reconciling Church. Helen Ryde led those in attendance utilizing the Gender Unicorn like she did in Wilmington on Thursday night. Helen continued the program by explaining the various options before General Conference 2019 delegates. She went through the logistics of General Conference including the planned schedule. She shared her story to the group attending the conference. After a short break, folks who were interested in learning more about how to create a Reconciling Community or lead their churches to become Reconciling Churches met with Helen Ryde. People in the audience shared how their churches had moved to become a Reconciling Church. Many people stayed afterwards to talk and share their stories.

Durham - Epworth UMC - Sunday, January 27 **Journeying Toward Justice Event**

A sign on the street at the entrance to Epworth UMC said: "Helen Ryde, LGBTQ Stories of Hope, Jan 27, 3pm," greeted attendees as they pulled in the driveway to Epworth UMC. Attendees were greeted at the door by a contingent of Epworth members. In Epworth's sanctuary, Rev. Karen Whitaker began the Journeying Toward Justice event with a scripture reading and prayer. She briefly described Epworth's journey in the area of welcoming LGBT folks to the church. The sanctuary was filled. Helen helped set the stage as she had done in Wilmington and Raleigh at the earlier events. Helen and Phillip Jefferson, member and administrative board chair at Avent Ferry UMC shared their stories by including their histories in the church utilizing the journey toward justice theme of the afternoon. They took turns taking the audience on their respective journeys. Phillip described growing up in the church in Florida and the 3 Methodist Churches on the island. He shared about the differences in those churches and how the church made a difference in his life as he went to college, selected a major of

study, and began his career. Helen described growing up in the UK and how the church had influenced her life in many ways. A short time of questions and answers was held and refreshments were served as individual conversations continued in the church's fellowship hall.

Raleigh - North Raleigh UMC - Monday, January 28

Rev. Duke Lackey and Rev. Alan Felton opened the event with prayer and preaching. Rev. Laurie Hays Coffman and Rev. Paul Stallworth modeled how to be in conversation with each other, sharing their journeys in the church and stating their positions regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church. Participants were gathered around tables throughout the worship space with overflow chairs filled around the walls of the room. After Laurie and Paul spoke, attendees were encouraged to talk at their tables about what they had heard from Duke, Alan, Laurie, and Paul and to share with each other what they were feeling. A brief period of questions and answers was held and Sam Isley, a gay lay person in the United Methodist Church who was attending the event was invited to briefly share his story which included pointing out to the audience that the United Methodist Discipline declares that he is incompatible with Christian teaching. Conversations continued in the room after the event concluded.

Sacred Witness Rally - Thursday March 28, 2019



Several hundred people gathered at the Methodist headquarters in Garner. Here are some other numbers: 1,385 have signed the sacred witness petition so far; the signatures cover all 8 districts in the North Carolina Annual Conference; signatures come from over 200 churches in the conference (there are a total of 790 churches in the conference). I think what has happened is that those who support the Traditional Plan have awakened a sleeping giant in The United Methodist Church. I will say the bishop does acknowledge the hurt and concern. She was very careful in her wording and of course mentioned others who felt differently. She brought her boat up alongside the ship of inclusion but was not ready to fully come on board yet. She did take the petition. I believe in her heart of hearts that she wants to see an inclusive church. Our role is to do what she cannot do and make it happen. We must continue resist, do no harm, and stand our holy ground.

--Sam Isley, Treasurer/Membership Secretary for MFSA NCC

Save the date - June 14th 2019 - Gayle Felton Lunch - Holiday Inn, Greenville