

## Report on the 2024 Desert Southwest Annual Conference

The Desert Southwest Annual Conference 2024 opened on a very positive and inclusive note, with prayer and singing in both English and Spanish. Titled “Making a Way”, the [guiding scriptures](#) were Isaiah 43: 18-19 and Jeremiah 29:4-7, 10-14, which reminded us that God has plans for us even when we are in exile, and that he is always doing new things. [Bishop Carlo A. Rapanut](#), an immigrant himself from the Philippines, set the tone in his opening remarks by sharing that all who are dislocated in any way can feel in exile, even in the United Methodist Church. We need to start by acknowledging exile, but then plant ourselves where we find ourselves so that we can live into hope, health and wholeness. He challenged us to become a healthy church for a healthy world by the Desert Southwest’s 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.

In addition to opening worship, we want to mention two other worship moments. Kate Bartlow spoke during the opening devotion Saturday morning and described both what is good and what needs to be changed in our denomination. Consistent with the overall theme of the Conference, she challenged us to think about what it really means to be welcoming. [Bishop Karen Oliveto preached](#) at the Ordination Service Saturday evening using the walk to Emmaus story to remind us that Jesus is always present, that we need to keep the fire burning, and that we need to do the work.

Our [delegates to General Conference 2020](#) shared their experiences, consistently stating that it became a time to heal, and a time to celebrate. A significant piece of their work was to remove harmful and discriminatory language from our UM Book of Discipline including bans related to ministry by, with and for “self-avowed practicing” gay and lesbian people. Because of this work, we celebrated another special moment when Reverend Susan Morgan was reinstated as an elder in full connection. She had previously surrendered her credentials because of the harmful language and discrimination in the church. Trying to amend the sins of our past did not end there: Bishop Carlo read a [statement of apology](#), first shared at General Conference and read in every annual conference, that acknowledges our failure to properly care for victims of sexual misconduct.

We had many learning opportunities. For example, the laity learned more about our neighbors from the Tohono O’odham Nation and the impact of some of the laws that try to govern the conflict when modern needs meet history. Those of us who are interested in all things Wesleyan enjoyed a lecture about John Wesley, where we learned a new way to consider the word “vile”. He used it to mean something that he did NOT want to do because it was reprehensible, BUT at the same time God was calling him to do it. (Preaching outdoors was vile.) The presenter, [Dr. Ashley Boggan](#), challenged us to find those tasks that are God-driven and that further challenge us to break the rules of society: a demonstration of Wesleyan *vile*-tality.

Of course, we also participated in the more routine tasks of Annual Conference. We elected Alberta Farnsworth to be the Conference Lay Leader for the next four years. We voted on equitable compensation, and approved a budget of \$5,560, 615. We voted on a [number of resolutions](#): we approved combining the New Faith and Vital Faith Committees into a single New and Vital Faith Committee; we did NOT approve divesting our investments from companies involved in the production of fossil fuels.

A bittersweet moment at Annual Conference is when we need to acknowledge the faithful completion of their work by some of our member churches. Bowie Community UMC and Central UMC (Phoenix) closed their doors after a combined total of more than 267 years of ministry.

Much more happened at Annual Conference than we could describe here. Please talk to our lay members of Annual Conference for more information: Kelly Deyoe, Brenda Hunter, Diane James and Zachary Rhein.

Visit our website ([umcstmarks.org](http://umcstmarks.org)) for [links to videos and information](#) referenced in this report.