

Opening Plenary – 10:00 am

The 161st gathering of the California-Nevada Annual Conference began with a welcome and the singing of hymns. Andrea Davidson led a litany with sterling examples of our vision: The Passion of Jesus Christ; Compassion for All. Bishop Warner Brown called us to order with warm greetings. Roll Call of laity and clergy was taken. Clergy members answering the roll for 50 years or more were recognized:

John Albright (60); John Moore (65); Jim Corson (58); John Schmidt (68); Oscar Escamilla (52); Bill Beck (51); John Corson (51); Don Cunningham (54); Don Fado (53); Bob Swartz (51); Norm Calloway (59); John Foster (50); Sarge Wright (66); John Emerson (51); Harry Dutt (52); Dick Whitmore (56); Phil Greer (53); Julius Davis (62).

Dorothy Straks introduced the theme of the Conference as *Passion in Jesus Christ; Compassion for All*. Each day will focus on one of the 4 Visions of the Conference that we developed last quadrennium. Bishop Brown introduced his wife, Minnie Brown, and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Warner Brown, Sr. The service of Jennifer McGrath in the Conference Office was noted with appreciation. Debbi Grundman, the “right arm of the Bishop,” was introduced and thanked for capable assistance during the Bishop’s transition. Laura Smith, newly hired Executive Assistant to the Bishop, was introduced. Linda Wiberg introduced a video showing our Conference staff at work. Kelly Newell and the youth delegates spoke of their fundraising project for *Nothing But Nets* to wipe out malaria.

Bishop Brown gave the State of the Conference address. He remarked that 30 years ago this session, in 1979, he was welcomed into the California-Nevada Annual Conference. It was while at this conference that he began his journey that lead to his election as a Bishop, and this Annual Conference helped send him on that journey. He is pleased to be coming home to the region, and to friends and family.

Even in these challenging times, the Bishop sees that we have talented leaders, committed people, and abundant opportunities. He likened these times to the times of Nehemiah. Jerusalem was devastated, but Nehemiah heard the call of God to rebuild the walls and repair the gates. He shared that call with his friends, and even though he was scoffed at and distracted, he continued to proclaim, “I have a great work,” and persevered. He assigned teams to work and the wall was built with God’s grace. The gates were opened for the exiles to return to Jerusalem, to return to their homes. A new era began.

We are in a new era. The world is in a place of change and we can’t be isolated from that. We are forced to abandon long held assumptions – as the rest of world perhaps did long ago! We are all sisters and brothers on an Ark – given the stewardship of the world by God. God has already given us enough for whatever we need, but not whatever we want. We lead the country in our cultural diversity and are uniquely gifted to speak a word of hope to the world about this very issue – we are one world.

Bishop Brown reminded us that our primary task is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This is the time to welcome new people, new opportunities, and new ways of doing things. We need to open our doors, not to rent space, but to make room for God’s people. We need to re-learn how to form one another in discipleship. Africa and the Philippines are growing Methodist churches like crazy, but not Europe nor the US. In our Conference we are shrinking faster than we can grow. We lose numbers equivalent to 4 or 5 churches a year. Let’s face it, change will happen – the question is will we engage it to shape it to our preferred future?

We used to be a powerhouse until growth slowed down in the early 1900s. About that time the clergy stood up and told the laity not to worry, that everything was in the clergy's hands. But that has given us complacency and a shrinking church, not disciples nor the transformation of the world. We must pool our wisdom, be in connection, realize relationships are our strength, and cooperate rather than compete. We can reshape the model – circuits – but we all need to think and act our way into our future. We need to share, support in hard work, expand communication, and be accountable to one another. We are all needed to repair the gate and welcome the exiles home.

This Conference began, more than a year ago, to ask the question, “What do we measure?” Vital Signs and LPLI provide opportunities to help us move into greater vitality. We are learning about ourselves. Now we need to take the next steps. The General Conference has invited us to be accountable – the Bishops have cut their own salaries. The Conference Office has made cuts in staff and salaries. Cal-Nevada is the worst collector of apportionments in the entire church. It is time for us to do our part to contribute our share to the mission of the church. **Let us be open to the mind of Christ.** We can rise from the ashes! Everything is on the table – we will consider everything before us openly and with trust. Let us open the door and meet the world.

The address from Bishop Brown was warmly received. Announcements and instructions regarding the prayer center were given. The session adjourned for lunch.

Clergy Session – 1:30-5:30 p.m.

The Clergy Session met for its particular business of the Annual Conference of approving the ordaining and commissioning of clergy and honoring the new retirees.

Laity Session-1:30-5:30 p.m.

The Laity Session met under the leadership of Conference co-leaders Burt Yin and Gayle Sherman. Orientation to work of the Conference was given.

After the dinner break, we re-gathered and ended the day with a service of Holy Communion.