

SERMON TITLE: "Annual Conference Report"  
SCRIPTURE: James 2:1-13  
PREACHERS: Tim Conrad, Lay Leader, and Rev. Kim James  
OCCASION: June 26, 2022

Tim Conrad, Lay Leader, spoke about his impressions of the Laity Session and other things that he noticed/experienced. He commented on James 2:1-13, the scripture which was used by the Youth in the opening worship service at AC.

Rev. Kim said the following:

### **MOUNTAIN SKY ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2022**

For laypersons like Tim, there's a lot that's new and strange about an annual conference. But this was my 34<sup>th</sup> time to attend this event. For clergy like me, Annual Conference is like a class reunion and family reunion all in one. In 2020 and 2021, we met over Zoom, and that was certainly as effective as it could have been. But it felt soooo good this year to get together in Helena and touch and hug one another. Because COVID is still a reality, however, we did wear masks and we kept this Annual Conference meeting short. To finish our business, we'll have an Annual Conference part 2 over Zoom in October.

Just to review the basics, our Mountain Sky Conference consists of all the United Methodist churches in Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, and one town in Idaho. Our bishop is Karen Oliveto, who has served as our leader since she was elected in 2016. Our Conference also has seven District Superintendents, plus a number of other ministry specialists.

After the initial worship and informational sessions on Thursday morning, we of the UTWCO District got together in the church basement for our district lunch. Everyone introduced themselves around the room and told about something good happening in their church. Hilltop UMC in Sandy invited everyone to come to their September 16-18<sup>th</sup> annual Gospel Music Workshop, and Grand Junction First UMC offered to bring their "Tech It Up" computer workshop to any church that would like to try out that ministry with kids.

Later, I came across Rev. Rebekah Simon-Peter in the display table area. Rebekah told me about her desire to come to our church and work with us on *Forging a New Path*, in this post-pandemic time. After coming home and talking with Church Council Chair David Barron, I followed up with Rebekah and got us signed up. Church Council members and everyone else, please put this “Next Steps” event on your calendar now. Rebekah will come here to FUMC to speak with us on Wed, July 27, at 7:00 p.m., to help us begin planning our post-pandemic future.

Back to Annual Conference in Helena: On Thursday afternoon, we were told about a new branding emphasis for our conference called “You Belong.” This belonging message goes like this:

As siblings in the Mountain Sky Conference, we pledge to welcome the marginalized . . . We are being called to model and create learning opportunities that promote acceptance of all . . . It’s time for others to know that we all belong. If you dream, you belong. If you try, you belong. If you find yourself wandering, you belong. If you doubt, you belong. If you’re searching, if you mourn, if you love--you belong! But there are side effects, positive ones: You and others may change, heal, and grow! You belong!

Along that same line, Rev. Aaron Gray told us about a new conference-wide initiative called “A Table for All.” This actually was the theme of our whole conference, but Aaron explained it like this. “In the past,” he said, “our congregations raised money and built churches, hospitals, and schools. Now it’s time to raise money to make sure that our small-town United Methodist churches don’t close. Inclusivity of all people isn’t just for the big cities. Every county in every state in our conference needs to have churches where everyone is welcome.”

Tim told you about the Laity Session on Friday morning. While the lay members were gathered together at Covenant UMC in Helena, we clergy were gathered at St. Paul’s UMC. In that clergy session we voted to approve candidates for licensed and ordained ministry. And we talked about the Florida Annual Conference’s decision in the prior week. Their clergy session had rejected a whole group of 16 ministerial candidates, because there was concern that three of them might not be straight heterosexuals. Later, in our Mountain Sky plenary session, 94% of our laity and clergy voted to invite

those 16 Florida candidates to come and do ministry in the Mountain Sky Conference where we would welcome them to the table for all.

Next, we talked about the expectation that Western Jurisdictional delegates will elect three or possibly four new bishops in early November, when they meet at Christ UMC in Salt Lake City. Some names were raised as possible candidates for bishop. Then persons were invited to join a committee that will vet those candidates in advance of our Annual Conference meeting part 2, which will be held in October. If you would like to participate in that vetting committee, let me know and I'll try to connect you.

On Friday evening, we tended to the older clergy with a special dinner for those who are retiring this year. Then, back in the St. Paul's sanctuary, we held a Memorial worship service. I'm not sure if it was due to COVID or not, but it seemed like so many of our retired clergy and spouses died in the past year. It was a time of blessing to remember those good and faithful servants of God.

Then on Saturday morning, we held the ordination worship service, which is always one of the highlights of Annual Conference. Great music, liturgy, and the promise of future ministry lifted our spirits as we prepared to leave Helena and head back to our many different churches, where we would invite people to belong, to join with us at a table for all.