

# “Come, Follow Me”



MATTHEW 4:19-20

NORTH GEORGIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE  
JUNE 12-14, 2025 | ATHENS



## LAY DELEGATE REPORT

The 159<sup>th</sup> Session of the North Georgia Annual Conference met June 12-14 at The Classic Center in Athens, Georgia, with Bishop Robin Dease presiding. Approximately 1,800 United Methodists gathered for the session under the theme “Come, Follow Me” based on Matthew 4:19-20 -

*“Come, follow me,” he said, “and I’ll show you how to fish for people.” Right away, they left their nets and followed him.*

### HIGHLIGHTS & ACTIONS

- It was a joy to have the leadership and participation of **70 voting youth delegates** that included the familiar faces of Rev. Hale’s grandchildren.
- We adopted a **2026 budget of \$10,493.931**. (A 5% reduction from 2025.)
- We celebrated that in **2024**, North Georgia Conference **churches paid 92.8% of apportionments**—the highest collection rate in recent years.
- We voted on **four constitutional amendments** ( Regionalization, Inclusiveness of the Church, Racial Justice, Clergy Voting on Delegates to General Conference and Jurisdictional Conference) that were passed in the United Methodist General Conference in 2024 and now must be ratified by two-thirds of the total voting members of all annual conferences. The vote of each annual conference is recorded and submitted to the secretary of the General Conference. *(Results will not be shared until all annual conferences have voted)*
- We adopted **two resolutions**, the “Joint Resolution on Immigration” and the “Resolution on Full Inclusion and Justice for People with Disabilities.” The final text of the resolutions will be posted at [www.ngumc.org/ac2025](http://www.ngumc.org/ac2025).
- We changed the **Standing Rules** by adding one line to section H.2 that will add an LGBTQ Advocacy Representative to the Conference Connectional Ministries board.
- We celebrated the **100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Camp Glisson and its Retreat Ministry**. The Conference Offering was donated to Camp Glisson to support the campership’s fund so more young people can experience “faith-forming fun”.

- We received the first report from the **One Georgia Task Force** that is exploring unification of the North and South Georgia Conferences into one annual conference. The Task Force was seeking approval to continue exploration of unification in the future. and Conference delegates compiled with a blessing to the task force to continue the study of potential unification (*visit [www.georgiaumc.org](http://www.georgiaumc.org) regularly for updates and information.*)
- We approved a motion from the floor to establish a task force to study and report back on **gender clergy salary inequities**.
- We adopted the **conference nominations report** - a 24-page document that includes more than 750 names of the volunteers that make up the 2025-2026 Conference boards, committees, and commissions.
- We approved **sixteen church closures**. A prayer was said for the clergy and laity that served faithfully through the years at these churches. A member of one of the closing churches spoke from the floor, sharing that resurrection is already happening, as some of these closures are the result of mergers that have brought new life, energy, and excitement to congregations.
- We celebrated the **5th anniversary of the Barnes Evaluation and Administration Team**. This team evaluates grant requests and disperses funds to support innovative missions and ministry in the Conference. Since its inception, BEAT has awarded more than \$4.6 million. In 2024, the spending policy allowed \$1,527,474 to be awarded, which funded 32 BEAT grants. For 2025, the funding allocation is \$1,493,000. *Learn more at [www.ngumc.org/beatdashboard](http://www.ngumc.org/beatdashboard).*
- We attended the **Laity Lunch** at noon on the first day of the Conference, which is always a major event for lay delegates. This was an opportunity for the laity to gather for fellowship, food and encouraging words from Kim Powell, Conference Lay Leader. Using the scripture for the Conference theme, she stated that “Jesus tells us that if we follow Him, practice His teachings, and share the Good News with others, we will become more loving and draw our brothers and sisters to Him”. She expressed her gratitude for the warm welcome she experienced when she visited churches and she was also blessed to work closely with the South Georgia Conference this year in joint devotional projects during Advent and Lent.
- We attended the **United Women of Faith Breakfast** on Friday morning at 7 am and were excited to see the ACUMC contingent of seven women thanks to our church bus driver, Michael Lane. The food and the speaker, Dr. Lester A. McCorn, President of Paine College in Augusta were worthy of the early hour. Dr. Lester A. McCorn. He reminded us to “punch holes in the dark,” a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson. We also were introduced to Serina Trueh, the newest United Methodist deaconess from McKendree UMC in the North East District. After the breakfast, unit members had time to visit the vendor exhibits hall and the beautiful artistic presentations in the Brush Harbor Display room.
- We also attended the **2025 Cark-Gammon-Payne Scholarship Dinner** sponsored by the United Methodist Ministers’ Fellowship on Friday evening. We were blessed to hear an inspiring message by Bishop Robin Dease. She reminded us that we have a responsibility to support our black colleges and universities with our talents and time but more significantly with our financial resources, given the current socio-political climate.

## WORSHIP SERVICES

A **Service of Holy Communion** was available to delegates each morning at 7:30 am and at the beginning of each session, we were led in **daily devotions** by leaders from our colleges’ and universities’ campus ministries.

We were also spiritually fed in four powerful worship services during the Conference that reflected the heart and mission of The United Methodist Church.

- **Opening Worship: Bishop Robin Dease** preached on Psalm 78:1-4, reflecting on the importance of passing faith to the next generation. The United Methodist Church is focused on making an impact on all humanity with faith, passion and love. She reminded us that God is calling us to be shepherds and not tycoons; that we should reflect on the call to serve and that when we sign-up, we step into obedience to God. She ended the sermon with this admonition, "May you answer the call on your life to serve with joy. It is time!!"
- **Service of Licensing, Commissioning, and Ordination:** On Thursday evening the Conference licensed 7 new local pastors, commissioned 5 provisional members, ordained 1 full connection deacon, ordained 6 full connection elders, and recognized a transfer of orders from deacon to elder. Each ordinand was given a handmade stole crafted by North Georgia United Methodists as a symbol of our connection. **Rev. Dr. Jimmy Asbell Jr, pastor of Vineville UMC** in the South Georgia Annual Conference, preached on I Corinthians 13:1-13, "And the Greatest of These is Love." Speaking directly to the ordinands, provisional members, and licensees, he said this scripture is more suited for ordination than for weddings because people don't care what you know, until they know you care. He told them that they will make deposits when they visit the sick and send encouraging text messages and withdrawals when they don't show up when promised and insist on having their own way. He reminded them to live an unmatched love that stands in contrast to that of the world. He emphasized to lead and serve with love. The Clark Atlanta University Philharmonic Society wowed us with their performance during the service.
- **Service of Remembrance:** This memorial service held on Friday afternoon was in remembrance of the saints of the church who have gone before us. **Rev. Greg Porterfield of Wesley UMC** in Evans, selected 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 for his sermon with the topic - The Perishable Must Put on the Imperishable. He reminded us that death is the imperishable and no one is exempt from this experience, so why are we surprised when it comes. We can't fight it or run from it, so the perishable must put on the imperishable. However, we should be led by the spirit to trust in God and what He can do alone. Rev. Porterfield closed with the affirmation that we will share God's name until all our names are called in heaven. The names of the clergy, clergy spouses, and laity remembered this year were called. On display during the service there was a butterfly for each name called and at the end of the service, the butterfly was given to a family member.
- **Closing Service of Word & Table:** The 159th session of the Conference closed with worship and Holy Communion. Glisson Camp and Retreat Center staff and alumni led the worship with music and singing of camp songs and hymns. **Russell Davis, director of the North Georgia Camp and Retreat Ministries**, gave the sermon. He reflected on Holocaust rescuers who courageously acted to save others. It was hard to find any connection among these heroes. They spanned ages, genders, races, faith groups, and more. But a post-World War II researcher did find a common thread—compassion. When people act from empathy and servant-hearted love, they aren't just following Christ, but embodying the character of Christ. Our work as the church isn't only to teach about following Jesus, but to equip one another with the character of Jesus. "It has to be built into everything that we do," he said. "Especially in our ministry with children and youth."

After the sermon, each District Superintendent read the names of the clergy receiving a new appointment in their district, and each district lay leader offered a prayer. In closing, Bishop Dease officially fixed the July 1, 2025, appointments.

- The service concluded with a blessing sung every week of camp at Glisson for more than 50 years, "My Friend."

*(You can watch all of the worship services on the North Georgia Conference website)*

## AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

A number of individuals and congregations were honored and recognized by the Conference. These include:

**Harry Denman Evangelism Award** went to:

- Denman Award for Clergy: Jamey Prickett, pastor of Gainesville First UMC
- Denman Award for Laity: Neil Duggan, member of Tucker First UMC
- Denman Award for Youth: Julia Allen, member of Community First UMC in Carrollton

**Discipleship Ministries One Matters Award** goes to a congregation that has demonstrated significant revitalization in discipleship, marked by an increase in professions of faith and baptisms from zero to at least one in the previous years. This year, Discipleship Ministries agreed to name five One Matters recipients in North Georgia:

- Griffin Chapel UMC, Rev. John Woods
- Atlanta Bethany UMC, Rev. Harold Yen-Pyo Hong
- Walker UMC, Rev. David Collins
- Bethlehem UMC Atlanta, Rev. Michael Dean Myers
- Faith UMC Griffin, Rev. Al Danso

**Francis Asbury Award** named for early American Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury, who called for the establishment of a school in the vicinity of every church, the award recognizes United Methodist individuals who have made a significant contribution to supporting, strengthening, and promoting United Methodist ministries in higher education. This recipient for North Georgia is

- Rev. Sam Hopson, director of the Georgia Tech Wesley Foundation.

**Faith Connection Federal Credit Union Scholarship Award** recipient this year is

- Shemaiah Perry, a student at Brandeis University.

**Marian Wilder Award**, presented by Aldersgate Homes/Collinswood, is a new recognition highlighting congregations with exceptional outreach to those with developmental disabilities. Three churches received the award:

- Athens First UMC
- Dunwoody UMC
- North Decatur UMC

**Areas of Focus: Churches of Excellence Awards:** given to churches excelling in the areas of focus of the Annual Conference. Recipients were:

Scriptural Literacy and Imagination

- Ben Hill United Methodist Church
- Chamblee First United Methodist Church

Health and Wellbeing Award of Excellence

- Ben Hill United Methodist Church
- New Hope United Methodist Church in Gainesville
- Mount Carmel United Methodist Church in Norcross

Community Engagement Award of Excellence

- Ben Hill United Methodist Church
- Birmingham United Methodist Church
- Clayton First United Methodist Church

- Cornerstone United Methodist Church
- East Cobb United Methodist Church
- Northside United Methodist Church
- Tucker First United Methodist Church

New Faith Opportunities and Communities Award of Excellence

- Ben Hill United Methodist Church
- Trinity United Methodist In Cartersville

### **Special Recognition**

The Annual Conference recognized journalist Shelia Poole for decades of service covering faith, non-profits, and The United Methodist Church for the Atlanta-Journal Constitution. Shelia has attended General Conferences, Annual Conferences, worship services, town halls, and gatherings, telling the story of the church through the top news outlet in the state.

### **THE NUMBERS**

- Annual Conference Special Offering: \$25,193 was given to the Special Offering for Glisson Camp & Retreat Center. Additionally, donations for the Ministerial Education Fund of the North Georgia Conference totaled \$4,679.53.
- Statistics: At the close of 2024, in the North Georgia Conference
  - Churches: 416
  - Membership stands at: 204,415 (down from 211,504 in 2023)
  - Average Attendance at all weekly worship services: 39,430 (down from 40,288)
  - Average Attendance of persons who worship online: 47,088 (up from 40,874)
  - Professions of Faith: 982 (up from 907 in 2023)

The next session of the North Georgia Annual Conference will be June 18-20, 2026, at The Classic Center in Athens, Georgia.

*Some of the information in this report was taken from the 2025 North Georgia Conference summary written by Sybil Davidson, Director of Communications and published on the conference website.*

*Respectfully submitted by Georgia Wilson, Lay Delegate for Andrews Chapel UMC  
Minister Jackie Parker, Alternate Delegate*