

Celebration Recap: The Alabama Emerald Coast Conference Celebration Launch Sept. 8-9, 2023

Praise be to God for moving in our midst!

It was a beautiful blessing for all of us to gather together to celebrate our formation, our freedom and our future! The inaugural Annual Conference of the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference of the Global Methodist Church was truly a Celebration Launch on Friday, September 8 and Saturday, September 9. Our theme was “Offer Them Christ”, and it was presided over by Bishop Scott Jones and myself as President Pro Tem of the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference.

Saint James Global Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama did an excellent job hosting this first and historic Annual Conference. The conference began on Friday morning at 11:00 am with a warm welcome by myself, as President Pro Tem, and my wife, Rev. Janeese Spencer. This was coupled with a greeting from the new Lead Pastor of the host church, Dr. Harrison Bell. It was a powerful opening worship service on that Friday morning as Trey McKay and the band opened with powerful and passionate worship, and Janeese led us in a time of extended prayer. I then had the privilege of preaching a message that I sought to align with our conference theme, “Offer Them Christ.”

Our excellent worship for the conference was led by Trey McKay and the band from Covenant GMC in Dothan, Alabama. Others from Saint James GMC also helped lead and participate in several services providing worship music, sound, and media coordination. Special thanks to Trey and the band from Covenant as well as Linwood McClain, Diane Scott, Corine Free, Henry Miller, Cyle Conoly, Robert Shimp and others from Saint James.

After this service the majority of the delegates and guests enjoyed a wonderful Dreamland BBQ lunch together at the church. Then, the Laity Session, presided over by Gene Floore, our AEC Conference Lay Leader, and the Clergy Session, presided over by Bishop Jones and Dr. Mike Hoppe, Chair of the Board of Ministry, were held in different parts of the building. These sessions were enthusiastically attended by expectant attendees who were excited to be together again. Following these clergy and lay gatherings, the AEC Conference offered six very helpful breakout sessions which were well attended.

The evening worship experience featured one of our guest preachers and my good friend, Dr. Jeff Greenway, President Pro Tem of the Allegheny West Provisional Conference of the GMC. The opening prayer for this service was offered by Rev. German Gomez Mendoza, Director of the Hispanic Ministries for the AEC. Dr. Greenway

preached a thoughtful and inspiring message entitled "A Look Forward" which gave us multiple, practical steps empowering us to go from here (where we are) to there (where we want to be). Many responded to his message and took notes to be used later in their churches. As a part of this service, we had an extended prayer time led by Darlene Kelly and Rev. Jeremy Smith, as well as a special presentation about our Covenant Mission Partnership with the Democratic Republic of Congo Provisional Conference. The President Pro Tem of this new conference in the Congo, Dr. Kimba Evariste, along with Rev. Rural Ausley, Pastor Emeritus at Crosspoint Church, shared about the extremely important work happening throughout the vast Congo. A special offering was taken to support the ministry of the GMC in the Congo and to purchase 15 Yamaha Crux Rev Motorcycles for the 15 Presiding Elders there. We raised over \$32,000 which was more than enough to buy the motorcycles! After the service, everyone enjoyed great fellowship and their favorite ice cream bar in the lobby.

Rev. Janet Krantz preached and Rev. Janeese Spencer presided over the 8:00 am communion service on Saturday morning. Many of the 28 clergy women in the AEC Conference participated and assisted in this service. Rev. Hannah Hutchinson shared a beautiful testimony which touched us all. Rev. Krantz's message was titled "Unashamed" and was a challenging message to everyone to unashamedly preach the Gospel and the Cross of Jesus Christ. Communion was served by 8 women clergy who are actively serving in our new conference. This was a special and very moving service with a closing prayer and sending forth by Rev. Jennifer Rezek.

The Business Session, presided over by Bishop Jones, started at 9:00 am, and it was thrilling to hear the reports from different leaders in our AEC conference as we considered how much had been done in just four months since we officially launched on May 7. We celebrated that we now have 165 clergy with more joining every week, and that we have 135 churches with more voting soon to join the GMC and become a part of the AEC Conference. Since May 7, our Leadership Team and Cabinet have been formed along with various Boards and Teams. Reports were given by: the Dean of the Cabinet, Dr. Larry Bryars; the Chair of the Finance and Administration Team, Bill Hopper, was ill, but Dr. Harrison Bell, the Secretary of the AEC, made the report; Dr Mike Hoppe, Chair of the Board of Ministry; Gene Floore, the AEC Conference Lay Leader; and our final report was presented by myself as President Pro Tem. As part of my report, I called for two days of prayer and fasting in the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference for all of our sister churches in the AWFC of the UMC and who are still in the process of "Discernment". October 12 and November 12 are the two dates set aside for our prayer and fasting. We are asking our AEC members to not only pray and fast for those churches seeking to have a vote to disaffiliate and then to be voted on by at the Called Annual Conference on Nov 12, but we are also asking them to pray for all of those churches who have disaffiliated and are still in the process of deciding the next steps for their future. In my report, I also announced the launch of our Disaster Response Team headed up by Ron Toole. We collected over \$4,000 for Disaster Response and had many donations of supplies and flood buckets as well.

The entire business session took about 50 minutes, and then we heard Rev. Keith Boyette bring a wonderful message on "Who Do You Say That I Am?". In this message, he wove in a special report and update on the growth and effectiveness of the GMC around the world. We now have over 3,250 churches in the GMC with more and more joining us weekly. It was an upbeat business session with an encouraging and hopeful message about the future of the AEC and the GMC. The reports were all approved unanimously!

After the business session, the attendees took a break for lunch off site, except for 65 people who stayed for the Clergy Spouses Luncheon hosted by Rev. Janeese Spencer, Vicki Bryars and others who served. They enjoyed a special lunch and dessert as they got better acquainted, met the other spouses in their district and heard an uplifting word from Rev. Janeese Spencer about the great opportunity they have for ministry as spouses. It was an honor to have the Bishop's wife, Mary Lou, who also attended and addressed the gathering.

The ordinands had a special lunch onsite on Saturday as they prepared for a photograph session and for the Ordination Service itself. The climax of the whole conference was the Ordination Service held in the Worship Center at Saint James GMC. The Bishop presided and many others, including Chair of the BOM, Dr. Hoppe and myself as President Pro Tem, also assisted in leading this beautiful service. The Bishop preached a most appropriate and powerful message he called "Servant Leadership Again." After the message, it was such an honor for everyone to witness 39 men and women ordained to be GMC Clergy in the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference! It was a great privilege for each of the ordinands to have the Rev. Keith Boyette, the Global Methodist Church's Transitional Connectional Coordinating Officer, place the GMC stole over their shoulders. It was a huge celebration with everyone giving them a standing ovation at the end, and then we sang "Here I am, Lord". There were refreshments for all of the ordinands and their families, as well as all those attending, in the lobby at the conclusion of the service which marked the end of the first Annual Conference of the Alabama Emerald Coast Provisional Annual Conference of the Global Methodist Church! The impactful Ordination Service was designed by a team that included Wes Kelly, Chris Cook, Clint McBroom, Mike Hoppe, and others.

Throughout the entire Annual Conference, there was a prayer vigil undergirding each and every person and church represented. Each church and each Pastor were prayed for by name during the Celebration Launch. There is no doubt that the Lord blessed this conference and poured out his Holy Spirit in a mighty way at this Celebration Launch and one of the reasons has to do with the prayer warriors who stayed on their knees for all of us! We thank each and every one of them!

In addition to the main Annual Conference gathering, the AEC Conference Board of Ministry organized a "Beginning Pastors Workshop" on Thursday, September 7 also at

Saint James GMC. This workshop was designed for Pastors who were receiving their first appointments or were certified candidates for ministry. Led by Dr. Larry Teasley and other members of the BOM, the workshop covered various topics including sermon preparation, spiritual formation, and church administration. It was attended by 27 men and women plus those who led the workshop.

There are so many people to thank who were involved in the planning, implementation and leading of this Celebration Launch! I want to thank the AEC Conference Celebration Launch Planning Team: Jeremy Smith, Trey McKay, Janeese Spencer, Harrison Bell, Andy Krantz, Janet Krantz, Gene Floore, Amanda Hinson, Mike Hoppe, Chris Cook, Wes Kelly, Clint McBroom, Kyle Gatlin and the Cabinet members.

Besides the AEC Conference Planning Team, there was a small army of dedicated clergy and laity from various churches in the AEC who volunteered and worked tirelessly for many months. There is no way to list them all by name, but we want to thank each and every one who planned, prepared and served! We also want to express our appreciation for each of our exhibitors/vendors who are our partners in ministry. See a complete list of each of our exhibitors/vendors in the Conference Journal.

I am attaching a copy of the Conference Journal which has listed the names of the: AEC Cabinet members, AEC Leadership Team members, Board of Ministry members, Finance and Administration Team members, AEC Conference Lay Leader, the 39 ordinands who were ordained in our class of 2023, the breakout sessions and their leaders as well as all of our gifted speakers and partner exhibitors/vendors.

Our 2024 Annual Conference will be held at Crosspoint Church in Niceville, Florida on May 5 -7. Please mark your calendars now and plan to join us for another inspiring and exciting AEC Annual Conference.

Praise be to God for His powerful presence at our inaugural Annual Conference and Celebration Launch! And praise be to God for the people of the Alabama Emerald Coast Conference of the Global Methodist Church as we seek to be where God is moving!

Blessings,

Dr. Lester Spencer
President Pro Tem
Alabama Emerald Coast Conference
Global Methodist Church