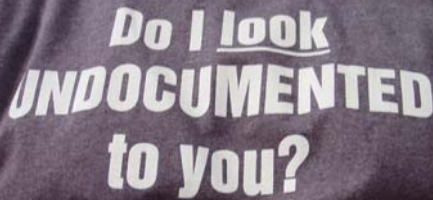


In Brief



In Conference Business Friday:

RS 220 - (undocumented immigrants) Presented with 2 amendments (one amended editorially); further amended

on line 38 page 51, added "and oppose any militarization of our borders." The resolution was approved after discussion.

RS - 217 (camping covenant between VT UCC conference and NEAC) Approved.

RS - 207 (renewal of anti-racism commitment) Approved after "discussion" from the floor highlighting the ongoing importance.

RS - 204 (amendments to sexual misconduct policies) Approved with several editorial/friendly amendments.

RS - 221 (Hebrews 11 fund, substitute resolution on handout) Resolution passed after failed motion to refer, and after lengthy discussion and acknowledgement of the difficulty of ministry in various contexts in our time and place.

Removed from consent calendar: RS 205 (clergy background checks) and RS 206 (lay background checks)

Our best year, Holmes says, is the one ahead.

"Your speech changed my life. It was awesome."

That comment, reflecting the views of many, was the first in a series of questions and comments directed to keynote speaker Reverend Doctor Zan Holmes as he returned to the podium on Friday morning.

Dr. Holmes described how he came to serve St. Luke Community United Methodist Church and how, in the 28 years he served as pastor there, the church grew from about 50 members to over 6000 members. Dr. Holmes attributed this transformative growth to an intensive congregation-wide focus on bible study and the constant revisiting of their vision statement.

He acknowledged that keeping the vision alive is one of the greatest challenges a church faces. Quoting from Proverbs, Dr. Holmes reiterated that without vision, the people will perish, "but I say to you that without passion for the vision, the vision itself will perish," he added. To keep the vision alive, the congregation of St Luke's reflected on their vision annually, noting its "cross shape," calling for both a personal relationship with God on a vertical axis, and an outward focus on justice with their community on a horizontal axis.



This seeking of justice, Dr. Holmes said, is different from performing acts of charity; the latter provides for short term "first aid," while the former seeks to address systemic problems of injustice.

Responding to questions about the difficulty of bearing witness to and celebrating our differences without worshipping them, Dr. Holmes acknowledged the challenge not only to the denomination but to the church as a whole.

"The future of the church is dependent upon our willingness to celebrate our God-given differences," he said.

He further stated that the church needs to do a better job of being in ministry with those different from ourselves, as we are losing the United

Methodist Church's historic place as one of the most diverse denominations in the country. "We are losing members in the United Methodist Church because we are not reaching out to the folks in our communities around our churches," he said.

Dr. Holmes concluded his remarks with the reminder that all people are going on to perfection, and "we cannot afford the luxury of liking ourselves too much." Our best year, Dr. Holmes said, is the one ahead of us as we are invited to "claim the brand new future that God is offering."

Looking below the surface

Following the reaffirmation of New England Annual Conference's commitment to combating racism, Commission on Religion and Race Chairperson Lisa Fagerstrom invited reflection and conversation about the ongoing work of anti-racism. In small groups, the delegates discussed the physical characteristics that we experience as difference upon first encountering a person, and then unseen differences that emerge after individuals get to know each other.

We make almost instant assumptions based on these differences, Fagerstrom acknowledged. "This doesn't make us bad people; it just makes us people," she said. She issued the challenge to look below the surface level, where the differences between one another might seem obvious. Just as the majority of the mass of an iceberg is hidden below the water, the greater part of a person lies beyond the surface level, where Fagerstrom invited the body to find connection and similarity. Quoting John Wesley, she said, "if your heart is with my heart, let us take each other's hands and go forward together."

Delegates were invited to make a commitment to one specific action to combat racism, and those ideas will be gathered and compiled so that individuals and churches can benefit from one another's ideas to continue the work of justice and inclusion.

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Reporting: Rebecca Clark.

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Ziegler Preaching Award Winner: Ruth Merriam

Are you a Thermometer or a Thermostat?



Rev. Dr. Ruth Merriam, 2010 Ziegler Preaching Award Recipient

Ziegler Preaching Award recipient the Reverend Doctor Ruth Merriam undertook the daunting and elusive art of preaching on Friday night. Speaking from the text of Nehemiah 8:9-12, she recalled the comparison made by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, describing the difference between a thermometer, which measures temperature, and a thermostat, which controls temperature.

Rev. Dr. Merriam invited the assembly to decide whether we are thermometer people or thermostat people. The former, she said, respond directly to the experiences around them; their moods are a reflection of the things that happen to them. By contrast, thermostat people determine ahead of time what their response will be,

no matter what happens to them.

Rev. Dr. Merriam cited several examples of "thermostat people," who refused to be defined by their circumstances. Nehemiah, she said, was such a person, who told the people rebuilding Jerusalem to depend on the Lord's joy, which is boundless, rather than their own, which may or may not be in evidence. Imagining Nehemiah's words, she said, "stop thinking about your own situation, as dire as it might be, and think about God's. Since this is a holy day for God, set your thermostats on joy, and out of that joy, God's joy, share what you've got."

At the conclusion of her message, Rev. Dr. Merriam shared a story about a young man named Salvy, who was trapped and paralyzed with a neck injury during the earthquake in Haiti. She described how Salvy prayed for an angel when it



Salvy and James join Rev. Ruth Merriam on stage as she told of their story of faith and connection in the midst of the Haiti earthquake aftermath.



Pastor, songwriter, and humorist Lee Domann lifted our spirits after a long day conferencing.

seemed that death would not come for him, and how another young man, James, came and cared for him, reminded him to have faith in God's healing power, and carried him to a hospital where Salvy received treatment and was able to walk again.

Introducing both young men to the conference body amid a tearful standing ovation, Rev. Dr. Merriam reiterated that we all have the decision to draw our strength from God's joy or from our own. "Are you a thermometer person or a thermostat person set on transformation?" she asked. "It all depends on attitude, on whose joy it is that's most important to you. "