

## Cabinet Report – Annual Conference 2017

### *“A Cabinet Full of Shoes!”*

I’m sure that you have heard the saying, “No one can fill his/her shoes!” That’s a phrase often expressed during times of transition – as a United Methodist people, those words have been heard a time or two when the pastor has announced that he or she is moving to a new appointment. “We will miss you – no can ever fill your shoes, pastor!” They are words spoken out of respect and love, intended to communicate admiration and confidence in the leadership the pastor has exhibited in his or her ministry tenure.

Last year at the 2016 session of Annual Conference, those very words were most likely spoken in this very plenary room, vocalized during the time of celebration and recognition of our Episcopal leader, Bishop Thomas J. Bickerton. Who could ever fill these shoes? Or maybe it was better said this way, “Whoever leads us next has big shoes to fill!” Indeed, some BIG shoes!

On September 1, 2016, our new Episcopal leader, Bishop Cynthia Moore-Koikoi, arrived to begin her tenure here in the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference. And let’s just say this – Bishop Cynthia may not physically fill those big shoes – but does she ever bring the shoes! The phrase “shoe fashionista” comes immediately to mind – but the essence of this image is that Bishop Cynthia has not arrived to simply fill another’s shoes but she has brought an array of shoes to wear as our Bishop, a unique set of gifts and abilities and experiences to share as she leads the Western PA Annual Conference and as we walk together, Bishop and Conference, in ministry.

Your WPA Cabinet has been blessed to welcome and work alongside Bishop Cynthia. As each of us come to the shared table, we have worn our own shoes. We are a collection of God’s people, each with their own favorite pair of shoes to wear – in the midst of this wonderful diversity of gifts and abilities and perspectives, we share a common love of Jesus Christ as our Savior, and for the particular expression of the Church we call United Methodist. Yes, we prefer that one special pair of shoes that is ever so comfortable, but through the covenant of community, we have dared to walk with each other – to appreciate each other’s footwear – and sometimes to even consider what it is like to walk in each other’s shoes.

In keeping with the theme of “WPA Chic – Dressed in Love,” your Western PA Cabinet would like to share with you some highlights of the paths we have walked together in ministry, wearing the shoes that God has uniquely given to each one of us.

Bishop Moore-Koikoi has invited the Cabinet to live into a new structure consisting of two distinct parts: the Appointive Cabinet and the Coordinating Cabinet. The Appointive Cabinet is comprised of the Bishop, the Assistant to the Bishop, and the ten District Superintendents. As the name suggests, this body conducts the work of appointment making and the ongoing supervision of our clergy and churches across the Conference. The Coordinating Cabinet

includes all members of the Appointive Cabinet but adds the Director of Connectional Ministries, the Conference Treasurer, the Director of Communications, the Director of Congregational Development and Revitalization, and the Conference Lay Leader. The primary focus of this body is to coordinate the overall ministry of the Annual Conference, particularly in the comprehensive fulfillment of our 5 Areas of Focus. Each of these parts of the Cabinet are convened clearly and distinctly, honoring boundaries of confidentiality and time. Like any new pair of shoes, we are still in the “breaking in stage” of this new structure but are already seeing the fruit of deeper conversations and strategic coordination of the ministries of our Annual Conference.

As with any wardrobe, there is an ever changing dynamic to our life together on the Cabinet, as colleagues step out into the next phase of their ministry and new partners in ministry are welcomed around the table. During this particular season of ministry, we celebrate the ministries of William Meekins, our Assistant to the Bishop; Allan Brooks, our Franklin District Superintendent; and Bill Blair, our Connellsville District Superintendent. As each of these three excellent servants of Jesus Christ move back into front line ministry in local churches, we pray God’s blessings upon them and express our gratitude for the wisdom, insight and dedication they have shown in their life with us. In turn, we welcome three new partners in ministry around the Cabinet table – Renee Mikell as the Assistant to the Bishop; Bob Zilhaver as the Connellsville District Superintendent; and Jodie Barron Smith, as the Franklin District Superintendent. These three persons have said yes to wearing some new shoes, so we pray God will use them in powerful ways and add to the blessing of our life together.

In Ephesians 6: 15, as found in the NRSV translation, we read “As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace.” One of the exciting developments in our Cabinet is a renewed emphasis on prayer and being agents of God’s peace. We have willingly and joyfully placed on our feet the shoes of prayer and devotion. As has been our rhythm, every day when the Appointive and Coordinating Cabinet convenes, we begin with a time of worship, led by various members of our body. On the second day of the Cabinet meeting, we host an “all building” worship service where all Conference staff is welcomed and the Sacrament of Holy Communion is celebrated. Recently, we have covenanted together to improve our “peace-making” skills as we read “Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict.” (The Arbinger Institute).

Last Fall, Bishop Moore-Koikoi invited Brad Lauster, the Washington District Superintendent, to assume the new role of Cabinet Spiritual Director, one who is tasked with helping us always keep our eyes on Jesus and to grow deeper in our faith. On April 29, 2017, all members of the Cabinet began a 40-day Prayer Challenge, in anticipation of the 2017 session of Annual Conference. Using Mark Batterson’s Draw the Circle as our devotional guide, the Cabinet covenanted together and drew a circle of prayer around Annual Conference in the following ways: 1) Jesus to be lifted up and exalted; 2) Annual Conference would be a sacred and safe place; 3) Unity; 4) Discipleship; 5) People to respond to God’s call on their lives to enter

ministry; 6) Bishop Cynthia's leadership as our Episcopal leader at her first Annual Conference with us would be celebrated and affirmed; (click) and 7) Revival.

Even as we are in the midst of our Annual Conference, we would invite you to put on your "prayer shoes" and join with us in an intentional prayer time for these 7 areas and others. Brad did give each of the Cabinet members a hula hoop to use as a portable "prayer circle." He even gave us permission to have some fun with our hula hoops! While we don't have a hula hoop for each one of you today to use, we would invite you to form a symbolic circle of prayer in this room right now. Whether you stand or remain seated, whether you are inside or outside the bar of the Conference, whether you take a hand of someone near you or place your hand on their shoulder – let's draw a circle of prayer around this gathering of God's people and our entire Annual Conference.

I have asked Brad, our Cabinet Spiritual Director, to lead us in a time of prayer.

(Prayer)

Rev. Alyce Weaver Dunn  
Dean of the WPA Cabinet