

United Methodist Association of Communicators (UMAC)

2023 Annual Meeting Minutes

Charleston, South Carolina | October 22–25, 2023

Attendance: Approximately 150 participants

Note: Nearly 50% of attendees were first-time participants.

Opening Worship – October 22

Worship was held at **Old Bethel and Bethel United Methodist Churches** with **Bishop Jonathan Holston** preaching.

Historic notes shared during the service included:

- **New Bethel UMC**, built in 1853, remained open every Sunday during the Civil War.
- **Bethel UMC** was physically moved—rolled across the street on logs.
- **Morris Brown** worshiped at Bethel in its early history.

Bishop Holston's message emphasized resilience and hope in times of change:

“There might be schism, there might be heartache, but we press forward.”

“This is a place of hope. We are here to shine the light and be generous with the seasoning.”

“We are people of faith who love God and love our neighbors as ourselves.”

UMCom Report – Dan Krause

Dan Krause, General Secretary of **United Methodist Communications (UMCom)**, expressed gratitude for UMAC's ongoing partnership and collaboration.

Key points included:

- UCom continues to support UMAC year-round through shared resources and training.
 - The mission: *“To inspire and equip United Methodists to share the Gospel story.”*
 - Krause encouraged communicators to embrace innovation and explore **new digital doorways** to the church.
 - Emphasis on communication values:
 - Transparency and accountability
 - Humility and authentic connection
 - Empathy and clarity in messaging
 - Krause recommended reviewing the **BBC AI Policy** for insight into ethical communication with emerging technologies.
-

UMAC Business Meeting – October 23, 1:30 PM

Presiding: Todd Rossnagel, UMAC President

President’s Address – Todd Rossnagel

Rossnagel reflected on a season of transition for both UMAC and The United Methodist Church:

“We might have lost some leaves, but the cross and flame are still with us—and so is Trade Gothic Condensed.”

He reminded members that while seasons change, *God does not*, and encouraged communicators to continue telling the Gospel story faithfully.

Highlights:

- UMAC’s annual event moved to fall for 2023.
- Continued engagement through **virtual events and UMAC Networks**.
- Upcoming **website redesign** and **awards program refresh** are in development.
- Emphasis on increasing participation from **local church communicators**.

- **Deborah Coble**, immediate past president, was honored for her leadership and service.

Elections and Appointments

Two new members were elected to the **UMAC Leadership Team**:

- **Dan O'Mara**, South Carolina Conference
- **Kristen Caldwell**, Western Jurisdiction

Helping Hands Scholarship

The **Helping Hands Scholarship** provides funding for a communicator from a Central Conference to attend the annual meeting.

2023 Recipient: *Bongie Moyo-Bango*, Communications Director for the Methodist Church of Southern Africa.

- Covers six countries and serves as a Safe Spaces facilitator.
- Holds a Master's degree in Peace and Governance.
- Published author of Contextual Bible Studies with the World Council of Churches.

Moyo-Bango expressed gratitude:

"I would greet you by saying, 'I see you.' Do not take for granted the generosity, learning, sharing, and network that UMAC provides."

General Conference Preview

Presenters: *Tim Tanton and Gary Graves*

- The postponed **2020 General Conference** will be held **April–May 2024 in Charlotte, NC**.
- Delegates: **862 voting members**, plus reserves and officers.
- Theme: *"And know that I am God."*

- Legislative committees: 14 primary, plus standing and administrative committees.
 - Key legislative topics:
 - **Regionalization** for equity and contextual flexibility
 - **Ethnic Ministry Plans**
 - Potential continuation of **Paragraph 2553** (disaffiliation)
 - **Wespath** proposals for sustainable clergy benefits
 - **Social Principles Revision** (simplified from 65 to 40 pages)
 - Charlotte noted as an accessible “Queen City” with light rail, walkable streets, and a strong local host committee.
-

Morning Worship – October 23

Leader: Rev. Matt Rawles

Speaker: Rev. James Lee on “AI and Faithful Communication”

Rev. Lee explored the role of **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** in ministry, introducing terms like “*Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT)*”.

Key insights:

- AI enhances creativity; it does not replace human purpose.
 - Ethical considerations around authorship and accountability remain vital.
 - Communicators must “keep their hands on the wheel” when using technology.
 - Encouraged warm, collegial, and faith-centered use of AI tools.
-

Business Session – October 24

Presiding: Todd Rossnagel

Treasurer's Report: Presented by Tim Jones, covering an 18-month fiscal period.

Thanks extended to **Kristen Gillette** for her assistance.

2024 Goals

- Increase value of UMAC membership
- Manage annual meeting expenses responsibly
- Expand the **Helping Hands** scholarship program

New Initiative: Helping Hands “Award of Excellence” – \$150 donations in honor of Annual Conference communicators, with proceeds supporting the scholarship fund.

Guest Greetings

- **Theresa Faust**, Research Manager at UCom and President of the Religious Communicators Council (RCC), brought greetings and invited participation in RCC events.
- Gratitude was expressed to **GNTV** for their production support.
- **GCFA** sponsored the luncheon.

New Leadership Team Members Confirmed:

- Dan O'Mara
- Kristen Caldwell

The meeting closed in prayer led by Tim Jones.

Key Presentations and Workshops

Misinformation & Disinformation – Sabrina Joy Stevens

Stevens encouraged communicators to focus on recognizing truth rather than chasing falsehoods.

Guiding principles:

- Set intentions and boundaries for engagement.
 - Avoid repeating misinformation—replace or redirect.
 - Prioritize empathy and relationship over being “right.”
 - “Compassion conquers confusion.”
 - Effective communication should be **accurate, aspirational, and actionable**.
 - *“Pause, pray, and pursue clarity.”*
-

General Conference Ministry Updates

Reports were shared from several **Ethnic Ministry Plans** and General Boards:

- Native American Comprehensive Plan
- Hispanic/Latino Plan
- Korean Ministry Plan
- SBC21
- Asian American Language Plan

These ministries called for unity, contextual innovation, and budgets that reflect mission priorities.

Bishop Thomas Bickerton challenged communicators to lead with renewal, not reset:

“We don’t need a reset; we need a renewal.”

“Focus less on who left and more on those who remain United Methodist.”

“Tell not their story, but our story.”

Morning Worship with Bishop Bickerton

Scripture: *Isaiah 43:1–7, 18–19*

Bishop Bickerton reminded communicators that change is central to Methodism:

- “The minute you think things are set, God reveals a new course.”
- “There is no personal holiness without social holiness.”
- “Communicators must not only tell the story—they must create the story.”

He urged members to lead with love and hope, proclaiming:

“In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit—get out of here and transform this church.”

Shop Talk – UM News and UMCCom

Panelists: Joe Iovino, Julie Dwyer, and Poonam Patodia

Highlights:

- New explainer videos, “Table Tuesdays,” and *The Recap* news series.
- *#BeUMC* campaign continues, with a new post-General Conference brand campaign in development.
- Focus on **peace and connection** during Advent.
- “The story of the UMC isn’t one story—it’s millions of stories.”

Covering General Conference: Panel Discussion

Panelists: Jasmine Haynes (Mississippi), Kay Panovick (West Ohio), Patrick Scriven (Pacific Northwest), Melissa Lauber (Baltimore-Washington), and Fred Koenig (Missouri).

Guidance for communicators covering GC2024:

- Build relationships with delegations early.

- Prepare background materials and spokespeople.
- Remember: “You work for the local church—tell the story they need.”
- Protect personal time and spiritual grounding during conference.
- “Even when the process disappoints, the mission continues.”

Closing

The 2023 UMAC Annual Meeting concluded with worship, gratitude, and a renewed call to faithful storytelling and connectional communication.

—Sybil Davidson, Secretary