

**THE LAITY ADDRESS**

**OF THE**



**CONFERENCE LAY LEADER**

**TO THE**

**185<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SESSION**

**OF THE LIBERIA ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**HELD WITH**

**CAPE PALMAS, GARRAWAY, GRAND GEDEH, SINOE, NANA  
KRU & KRU DISTRICT CONFERENCES**

**HARPER CITY, MARYLAND COUNTY**

**MARCH 12-18, 2018**

**THEME: A Future with Hope**

**TEXT : Jeremiah 29:11 & Romans 5:1-6**

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**Introduction:**

Today, I looked at the past and extend gratitude to my late father the Rev. William K. Moses Nyneswah and my mother Ruth Moses Nyneswah who brought me forth into this world and had prepared me for the present day reality. To God be the glory for great things he has done.

**Greetings:**

Bishop Samuel J. Quire, Jr. and Mother Quire, Resident Bishop of the Liberia Area, Bishop Arthur F. Kulah (Retired Bishop), Bishop John K. Yambasu, of the Sierra Leone Annual Conference, Bishop from the Ecumenical Partnership, Bro. Rudolph Merab, Lay Leader Emeritus, Special guests, Officers and members of the Liberia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, my wife, mother Josephine K. Nyneswah, Brothers and Sisters in Christ.

I bring you warm Christian greetings of peace and love from the officers and members of the Conference Board of Laity, my wife and I with our 3 kids (Dehkontee, Nyennekon and Tolbert, Jr.) in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Bishop, Members of the Cabinet, I am excited to let you know that there has been a cordial working relationship between the Clergy and Lay people of our Church. This is engendered in our love for Christ and willingness to serve our Church. The relationships continued to grow thus enriching the work of our various local churches. As, Bishop and myself visited churches across some of our districts I see a sense of unity, love for Christ and oneness. The Board of Laity continue to meet to deliberate on the works of the various units in the Church. Additionally, we continue to make contacts and work with our first and second/regional Lay Leaders and District Lay Leaders.

**The election of the Conference Lay Leader 2017:**

Firstly, let me extend my thanks and appreciation to God the Author of human existence to have enabled me to be the one to lead the laity of our church. Secondly, to all members of the United Methodist who have given me the power and authority to lead them for four years to serve as the President of the Board of Laity. To you all, I say BRAVO.

It has not been easy since we took over the mantle of authority but through it all we made it by His grace and by your prayers for the first year of leadership of our beloved conference.

### **Planning Retreat of the Board of Laity:**

The Annual Planning Retreat of the Board of Laity was held in January, 2017 before we were elected to serve you. However, the 2017 Proposed Calendar of Events was approved and adopted as the working tool for the conference year. The 2018 planning retreat of the Board of Laity will be held at the end of March this year where all of the regional lay leaders and district lay leaders will be invited for their input by the grace of God. This change in time was due to the postponement of the LAC.

### **The Four [4] years Strategic Plan Committee:**

We are grateful to our Resident Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Samuel J. Quire, Jr. and his team for the far sightedness of appointing a “Think Tank” Strategic Planning Committee to craft document for the sustainability of our church. We started the crafting of the plan and the preparatory work before the one hundred and eight-four session of our church in Gompa City, Ganta , Nimba County where many views were heard from our members and officials of the church. Members of the committee include: -1-

Mother Christina Jallah, Mth. Christina Harmon, Rev. George D. Wilson, Rev. Dr. Julius Sarwolo Nelson, Jr., Rev. Dr. Jerry P. Kulah, Prof. Johnson N. Gwailkolo, Bro. Kojo Weeks, Rev. Momo S. Kpaan, Rev. Roland Clarke, Bro. Darlington Cheeks and your humble servant Bro. Tolbert G. Nyneswah as Chairperson. The committee started with the central office staff, and few conference officials and other prominent United Methodists. The work of the committee is so dynamic, tedious and evolving to the extent that others left why we including new coordinators like brother Darlington Cheeks. Questions of our concern included the following:

1. Where are we as a church/conference?
2. Where do we want to go as a church/conference?
3. How do we get to where we want to go?

Brethren, this committee was able to reach to all regions within the borders of our conference where views from members of our church were heard. This implies that all of the districts were reached in terms of visitation by the office of the Conference Lay Leader in a very short period of time. The regional groupings were as follows: Region Two included the following districts: Gbarnga, Kokoyah, Jorquilleh, Lofa River, Gompa and Tappita Districts. Region Three included the following: Cape Palmas, Barabo, Kru Coast, Sinoe, Nana Kru, Grand Gedeh and Garraway Districts and lastly was Region One which included the following districts: Saint John River, Saint Paul River, Monrovia, Kakata/Farmington River, Rivercess, Morweh and the Grand Bassa Districts. We are thankful to God for the successful hosting of these training and workshops.

Thanks also to the LAC/UMC for the sponsorship of our trips and for those who were in attendance. At the end of these trainings, the strategic plan of the conference was drafted and will be presented at the seat of this conference for approval and onwards implementation by the LAC/UMC. Many thanks to all of you for your inputs and constructive criticism for the job done by the committee.

#### **Visitation to some District Conferences:**

Brethren, let me salute you all for keeping the torch of our conference burning for the period under review. Even though we did not visit in person, all of the district conferences, due to either conflicting and competing time /schedules and our own style of delegating responsibilities to other members of our team. However, we shall ensure that those districts we did not visit in person will be reached. Those districts visited by the Conference Lay Leader, and the rest of the associate Lay Leaders and some members of the Board of Laity were:

- Saint John River District from November 26 to December 3, 2017, conference held at Camphor Mission Station,
- Saint Paul River District Conference held in Tallah, Benson UMC, from November 30, to December 3, 2017,
- Karata/Farmington River from December 13 to December 17, 2017 held with the Duahzon United Methodist church.
- Monrovia District Conference was held as scheduled from December 8 to 10, 2017 at the Doe Juah UMC made some contributions on behalf of the Board of Laity.
- The Gomba and Tappita Districts were visited on January 7 to 14, 2017 as planned and organized by both districts.
- Kokoyah District was also visited during their District Conference from January 8-14, 2018. Bro. Joe Malleh represented the Board of laity. We visited the official opening ceremony of the
- Weala District Conference on January 24, 2017 in Weala Town, Margibi County. That ended the official visitation of our leadership for the conference year with districts. We want to promise other districts that were not visited, most especially districts in the south-east of our country. We will; by the grace of God to meet you at your various conferences or training and workshops this conference year.
- and the Morweh District Conferences.

We were present and officially attended the official induction ceremonies and programs of the following districts: Saint John River District, Weala District, Tappita District

### **Visitation to Local Churches:**

Brothers and sisters in the household of faith, again I am pleased to inform you that some local churches were visited and in our weak way as President of the laity. Some handsome contributions and other donations were made to some needed churches of our conference doing their individual organized programs as we received request.

Churches visited during the 2017 conference year were the FUMC. On many occasions, we worshipped with the First UMC of the Monrovia District Conference during their regular services and organized programs; just to name few: God Power Week which was celebrated on June 4, 2018, the celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Birth Anniversary of mother Richlain N.K. Quire, the wife of our own Bishop, hosted by FUMC. We were part of the first Sunday worship service at FUMC of the Monrovia District in January of every year. The Bishop of our conference preached the New Year message in 2018. I was part of the service representing the lay people of our church.

We celebrated Bishop's first year anniversary of leadership of our great church held at the First United Methodist church.

I also represented the Board of Laity as President in observance of their Fifty Homecoming Day program of the FUMC on July 16, 2017 of the Grand Bassa District Conference. At the end of the rally, donation and cash contribution were made to the church through your humble servant on behalf of the Board of laity. The New Hope UMC of the Monrovia District Conference was also visited on Sunday, December 17, 2017 in observance of their Building Project. Your humble servant was again asked to launch the project for the building project of the New Hope UMC.

Our work is not restricted to only visiting big churches, but we are cognizant of small and poor churches in our conference, therefore we visited the dedication ceremony of New Life UMC. We made contributions and donations and pledged along with Bishop to tile their church edifice. Assessment has been concluded.

We were also part of Bishop's delegation in celebrating the 141 anniversary of the Martha Tubman Memorial UMC. The theme of the celebration was "God has spoken". On the other hand, I was also part of Bishop Quire's delegation at the official dedication of the Trinity UMC of the Monrovia District Conference, which I am member of and the Bishop of our church delivered the day message.

### **Organizations and Young People Annual Conferences:**

We are thankful to you all for the working relationship for the conference year as Lay and Associate Lay Leaders to you and as organizations and fellowships. During the period under

review, we visited all organizations and fellowships annual conferences either in person or by representation of the Board of Laity. The first organization to host its annual convention was the Church School which is headed by Mother Frances M. Porte. The conference of the Church Sunday school was held at our White Plains Retreat Center, Montserrado County. The Youth Fellowship was next in hosting their conference. The fellowship is presently headed by Bro. Maxwell Lawrence.

The Young Adult Fellowship which is still under the leadership of Abraham P. Johnson hosted its conference in Saclapea, Nimba County, Gompa District conference. The Board of Laity was represented by Bro. Bill G. D. Innis, I., who is also special assistant to the Conference Lay Leader. The result of elections of the young Adult was placed on hold based on complaints filed by another group of young people of the conference. This is a very delicate situation; the Council on Young People's ministry is assiduously doing everything possible to resolve the matter of the young people. The Laity is very concerned and want to a speedy and amicable resolution.

We were also part of the Conference United Methodist Women organization conference held in Tappita. Elections for the women were held. The new leadership is now headed by mother Muriel V. Nelson as National President. Mother Sarah Q. Nah is the outgoing president of the women organization. Others were elected representing geographical balance and representation. We are grateful that the elections went well. We also say bravo to Bishop Quire who stayed and witnessed the process. Your humble servant stayed up to 3:45am, observed and counted the ballots during a very exhaustive electoral process. At the women conference, contributions were made to the CUMWO on behalf of the Board of Laity.

The Conference Men also held its 35<sup>th</sup> Annual Session with the William N. Ross MUMC, Grand Gedeh District Men Conference. The conference was colorful and rewarding; even thou I did not make a physical appearance, but the regional Lay Leader bro. Allison Paygar represented the Board of Laity. Contributions were made to the Men Organization for the construction of the parsonage project in Kakata Farmington River District.

### **The United Methodist University:**

The United Methodist University has been a visiting site of the Conference Lay leader as Vice Chair of the Board of Trustees. We attended all call and regular board meetings of the university. We were part of the budget hearing of the university where we gave our input for the success of the university. We infused new dynamisms and pragmatic ways of preparing, executing the UMU budget under the leadership of a budget committee of the board headed by Dr. Monie R. Captan. This means, we have stressed strongly for resources to go to the wellbeing

of the students and the improvement of UMU campuses. We also stressed that departments heads of the university should know and execute their respective budgets and other measures.

On the other hand, we attended the farewell program in honor of Professor Honorable Johnson N. Gwaikolo on behalf of the Board of Laity who left for state matters of our beloved country. Let me use this occasion to again officially congratulate him on his election and induction as representative within the 54<sup>th</sup> legislature. We played a meaningful role as your lay leader in the transition process of the University. Based on consultations with the Bishop and other members of the Board of Trustees a new acting president in person of Dr. Albert Coleman was appointed.

Additionally, I am pleased to report to you that a newly constructed campus of the Winifred J Harley Nursing College Gompa City, Ganta Town, Nimba County was officially launched by the Bishop and the Board of Trustees. During this ceremony we were present and presented 30 chairs for the use of the students.

#### **District Laity:**

We are pleased to report that, most of the Districts observed their Laity Day. We are grateful to our lay people for remarkable works that are ongoing in our districts. Thanks to my regional lay leaders.

#### **Bishop's Cabinet Meeting, 2017:**

The Bishop Cabinet Meeting was held from July 26 to 30, 2017 with the Gbarnga District Conference. We represented the board of laity, gave briefings on the state of the laity and presented excerpts of the strategic planning process. I am pleased to say that it was an honor that we were received and appreciated by Bishop and his cabinet.

#### **Council on Finance and Administration in review 2017:**

I am pleased to report that we attended all called and major meetings of this council. Budget was approved, and we worked alongside with the Office of the Area Financial Executive (AFE) Officer of the General Board of Global Ministries. If you can recall, during the 184<sup>th</sup> session of the LAC/UMC our conference was engulfed with a lot of financial challenges, including mismanagement and other financial and administrative improprieties. This you know caused confident crisis from our partners and mistrust in the Annual Conference. However, all is not lost, we have worked diligently and expeditiously with the office of the Bishop, the office of our potent and current chair of the CCF&A to bring sanity to this very crucial and important area in our ministry. Consequently, we did the following few things: 1) negotiated with GBGM where an MOU was signed that immediately removed the barriers that allow our conference to begin

receiving funding or restored parity 2) developed a sound financial management policy, which should serve as a resistant and 3) put in place a sound accountability and transparency mechanism. We ardently hope that we can abide by these measures to avoid the past.

Today, things are moving smoothly, and salaries are current for employees at the central office. We are working out modalities to improve the current salary regime.

### **United Methodist Rural and Agriculture Development Program:**

Brethren in the Lord, it is time to make use of our soil, a blessed land that has been given to us as a gift from God. The United Methodist Rural and Agriculture Program [UMRAP] was officially launched on August 25, 2018 at the headquarters of the United Methodist Central Office. Again, your humble servant served as chief launcher of this program. And made the initial contribution of US\$500 for this important program based on Bishop's self-sustainability dream. We pray that God will strengthen the hands of those in authority of this department.

### **Region One, Two and Three Associate Lay Leaders Update: {Sis. Theresa Davies, Bro. John D. Kolley and Bro. Allison Paygar}**

Brothers and Sisters, we are pleased to inform this august body that all our Regional Lay Leaders are working very hard in their individual assigned area.

### **Associate Lay Leader achievements**

For the period under review, activity planed was mainly focus on visitation across the region, participation in districts functions and laity workshop. For achievements, they were able to visit districts and other local churches in their region acquainting themselves with the districts and its laity.

### **Boards and Committees Meetings:**

We are pleased to inform you that nearly all of boards and Committees of the conference met at least twice or three times during the conference year.

### **Board of Trustee:**

The Board of Trustee is a critical lifeline of our conference. We assisted with the drafting and review of a policy and guidelines for acquisition and management of our church properties. We adopted and approved a new system of lease collection and deposition.

The Retreat Center in White Plains is being refurbished by the Reeves Memorial UMC in consultation with the Board of Trustees. We are grateful for that. Presently, a lease is being

negotiated by the Reeves family and the LAC. Your humble servant was unequivocally clear that all functions of young people at the retreat center should be at no cost to them so that young people ministry can be enhanced.

### **The Department of Health**

As the adage puts it, "Health is wealth", it is important to keep ourselves healthy at all time. At this Conference you will notice that a booth has been setup to provide first aid services to conferees. We have helped to ensure that drugs and medical supplies were provided to support the department cater to our people.

### **The Ministry to the Aging:**

The conference Lay Leader was blessed to be part of many meetings sponsored by this department under the leadership of Rev. Anna S. K. Kpaan. Lots of contributions and donations were made from our end to this department. We are grateful to the director and staff of this department. It is worth to mentioned that we provided transportation support to some shut-in members of the Aging to attend hospital or medical services.

### **The Council on Youth and Young Adults:**

**The young people ministry is dearest to our hearts, since we are a product of this Ministry. About 40% of my discussion with the Bishop is always focus on the young people works. We** must extend our thanks and appreciations to the Chair and members of the Council on Youth and Young Adult for the level of work done so far. Much more needs to be done. Working with the Bishop, I am confident we will settle the management issues at this department including the leadership issue for the young adult fellowship.

### **Necrology:**

O death, where is thy sting! During the period under review, we received the death news of the some of our brethren who started the journey with us but the cold hands of death took them away. Just to name you few: J. Lamark Cox, Sr. former Conference Lay Leader, Mth. Alfreda Anderson former Conference Associate Lay Leader, Fth. Bro. A B. Anderson, and Bro. Solomon Dennis, former Lay Leader of the Kokoyah District Conference and other brothers and sisters who labor in the vine yard. May their souls and other faithful departed rest in peace.

**Recommendations:**

**Brethren in the household of faith, I am pleased to make the following recommendations for your humble considerations.**

1. That we encourage stronger collaboration between our organizations, their leadership, laity and clergy of our beloved church.
2. That more training be conducted for the laity in all regions of our church on roles and responsibilities of each official and members of our conference.
3. That a board be constituted by the bishop at the seat of this 185<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference for the Community Service Department for effective monitoring and oversight.
4. That the Strategic Plan be adopted as a living document and be implemented at all levels of the Annual Conference as guiding documents with priorities.
5. That the Annual Conference at the least provide a functional office space and equip it for the Board of Laity at the central office.
6. That priority be given to qualified United Methodist lay people in the running of the various schools within our School system

**Conclusion:**

We want to extend our profound thanks and appreciation to Bishop Samuel J. Quire, Jr. and his cabinets for the level of work done so far for the smooth running of the conference and the manner in which things were handle for the conference year. Secondly, to all districts lay Leaders and the entire Board of Laity for the corporation we received during our first round of leadership for the 2017 conference year. Finally, to our families and friends, we say thank you for your support and encouragement we received during the period under review.

Yours faithfully,

Father Tolbert G. Nyneswah  
Conference Lay Leader