

Guidelines for *Holy Conferencing*
Alabama-West Florida Conference – 2008
Bishop Larry M. Goodpaster

Holy Conferencing is Biblical and Wesleyan. The people called Methodist have been gathering in “conferences” since the days of John Wesley. Historically it was a time set aside to testify, raise questions, discuss, consult, discern, set direction and account for the ministry of God among the churches and the people. This year as we gather at Frazer Memorial United Methodist Church for our Annual Conference, we do so for inspiration, testimony, conversation, discernment, direction setting, and accountability.

As your presiding officer and resident bishop, I offer these basic principles as the guidelines that we will practice during our days together.

- We will listen to one another in a spirit of Christian love. As conversations and discussions are held, we will remember to be active listeners and patient responders.
- We will respect one another as members together in the Body of Christ, even if we disagree with an opinion or statement. We are not trying to win arguments but rather in sharing perspectives we are seeking God’s direction in our deliberations.
- We will be careful and attentive in defining terms and will avoid needless use of inflammatory words or vague generalizations.
- We will not cheer, applaud, groan or grumble while others are speaking, nor at the conclusion of a statement from a sister or brother. Conference is not a political convention or staged theater.
- We will conduct ourselves at all times in the Spirit of Jesus the Christ, and will seek the Way of Jesus in what we do and how we do it.
- We will be ready at appropriate times to enter into a time of prayer which may involve silence, centering, and/or verbal prayers. Any lay or clergy member may rise to a “Call for Prayer” in the course of our conferencing and, at the discretion and direction of the presiding officer the proceedings may immediately be interrupted for prayer, or the call may be temporarily delayed.

Robert’s Rules of Order is the standard operating process for conducting the business of our Annual Conference. Within the broad, permissive “rules” the following procedures will be followed in our discussions and deliberations.

- To speak on the floor of the Conference, you must be seated within the bar of the Conference and be wearing your name tag. Raise your hand and, when called upon by the bishop, proceed to the designated microphone. (Do not go to the microphone before being recognized by “the chair.”)
- At the microphone, please state your name and the local church where you are a member or the office or institution to which you are appointed.
- Each person is allowed three (3) minutes to speak. The bishop or conference secretary will alert the speaker when 30 seconds remain.
- In deliberations around a motion, resolution, petition, or report, after two (2) speeches have been heard in favor of the item and two (2) speeches have been heard in opposition to the item, the presiding officer will “test the body” to determine if we are ready to proceed to a vote.

In the spirit of a Wesleyan *holy conference*, I am, as your bishop, appreciative of the support and cooperation of the lay and clergy members who will be participating in our session during these days.