

Rural Renewal Summit

Plenary Speakers & Workshop Leaders

Plenary Speakers



Michael Beck

Michael Beck is Director of Re-Missioning for Fresh Expressions US. Michael serves as co-pastor of Wildwood UMC with his wife Jill, where they direct addiction recovery programs, a jail ministry, a food pantry, an interracial unity movement, and a network of 15 Fresh Expressions that gather in Tattoo parlors, dog parks, salons, running tracks, community centers, and burrito joints.



Abraham and Amanda Gross

For over 20 years, Abraham and Amanda Gross have served their small community of Cavendish, Vermont where he is the pastor of the Baptist Church and she is the 1st grade teacher at the town elementary school. In addition to having six children, they also serve Jesus through roles in the fire department, the foster care system, and local government. In 2009 they started an ecumenical initiative to support long-term ministry in northern New England, called 25 to Life.



Hugh Halter

Hugh Halter has been a consistent practitioner voice in the contemporary missional movement authoring such works as *The Tangible Kingdom*, *And..the gathered and scattered church* and *FLESH*. He has planted three churches across the country and now lives in Alton Illinois leading Lantern Network as a kingdom ecosystem and enterprise network. He helps direct Brave Cities which exists to equip apostolic leaders in new church forms and kingdom integration.



Leah Hidde-Gregory

After 30 years in the United Methodist Church, Dr. Leah Hidde-Gregory became an elder in the Global Methodist Church in June of 2022. During her ministry, she served in the Oklahoma Conference, the North Texas and the Central Texas Conferences. Most recently, she served as a District Superintendent. Leah has a heart and passion for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. She has spent much of her ministry in church revitalization, revival and church growth. She holds a Doctorate in Ministry in Church Leadership Excellence from Wesley Theological in Washington, D.C.; a Masters of Divinity from Perkins School of Theology; and a Bachelors in Psychology and Sociology from Texas A&M. She is married to partner in ministry, Stan. They have two daughters, both getting married in the next year, and a son who is still at home.



Ron Johnston

Dr. Ron Johnston is the Executive Director of Small Church Connections, an organization committed to serving small churches across Canada. Previously he served as Director of International Programs at International Teams Canada. Prior to that he was a pastor for more than thirty years. He is a graduate of Tyndale Seminary and Acadia Divinity College where he earned a Doctor of Ministry degree. He recently was part of a research project on small churches in Canada which was just released in January, 2023. He is the author of *Reality Check For The Church*. He is the father of three children and the grandfather of seven.

Plenary Speakers, continued



Tim Thompson

Rev. Tim Thompson is the administrative assistant to the bishop and director of faith community formation. In partnership with the bishop and cabinet, Tim helps set long-term objectives and strategies of the conference. He is responsible for developing, interpreting and implementing comprehensive new faith and revitalization development programs and processes that will lead the Mississippi Conference into a future of vital, effective and transformative communities of faith. Tim serves as a consultant on many aspects of local church life. His office provides community analysis and assessments, training, vision casting and strategic planning -- facilitating a process to evaluate the ministry effectiveness of a church that concludes in a strategic plan for today and the future.

Workshop Leaders



Paul Byrd

The Rev. Paul Byrd directs a collaborative program at Mercer University between McAfee School of Theology and the School of Medicine. This program supports the physical, mental, and spiritual health of communities by coordinating the efforts of clergy and health care professionals as they work together to address rural health disparities in Georgia. Prior to joining Mercer, Paul spent almost 30 years as a chaplain in children's hospitals in Birmingham, Alabama and St. Petersburg, Florida. Paul is married to Terri and is the father of Turner and Evann, two remarkable young adults. When not working, Paul enjoys hiking, exploring outdoors, home remodeling, cooking, and reading a good book.



Jon Davis

The Rev. Jon Davis, Ph.D. coordinates major Fresh Expression events, training and resources for the Dinner Church Collective and is a mission strategist and trainer on the Fresh Expressions team. He is an Episcopal priest serving as the part-time Vicar of Christ Church in Cedar Key, Florida. He has expertise in youth ministry, worship and liturgy, church growth and planting, missions and more. He and his wife Beth live on a little farm in Oviedo, Florida.



Luke Edwards

Luke is a Mission Strategist and Trainer and also the Associate Director of Church Development for the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. Participating in local, regional, and national levels of the Fresh Expressions movement has given Luke a unique perspective into the future of the church in a post-Christian society.



Matt Lake

Matt Lake serves as the Lead Pastor of First Church of Williamsport, PA—an urban congregation that consists of a mix of traditional and contemporary worship experiences including a network of fresh expressions of ministry called the Acts Network. Matt has also worked with a variety of churches in consultant and coaching roles.