

Good day Aldersgate UMC,

Pastor Randy, Pastor Jon, Dave Halladay, Cindy Amos, Steve Larkin, and I attended Virginia's 242nd United Methodist Annual Conference 20-22 June 2024 in Hampton Roads, VA. For those not familiar with this event, the Annual Conference is made up of Clergy and Laity representation from all churches and Districts that comprise the Virginia United Methodist Conference (VAUMC). These representatives (approximately 1,800 this year) gather to discern the will of God on matters of importance, celebrate joys, and conduct business unique to the VAUMC. John Wesley referred to it as "Holy Conferencing."

This year's theme was "A Conference in Three Movements" with Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson as the officiating bishop. This theme emerged from the belief that there are three principal movements of the Holy Spirit taking place in the present era of the church:

- The theological movement from prevenient grace to sanctification. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.
- The historical movement of Methodism captured in our past, lived in our present, and pointed toward our future. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church.
- The missional movement from gathered spaces into all the world. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in community.

These movements build upon each other, intertwining together to demonstrate what has been, what is, and what will be as God continues to move amongst God's people.

Over the three days, and to further illustrate these themes, the Bishop invited Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, pastor of The Nett Church and District Superintendent of the Central East District in the North Georgia Conference; Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, pastor, professor, and author; and Rev. Woo Kang, Associate Pastor of The Nett Church and the Lead Pastor of At The Table in the North Georgia Conference, to present one of the three movements. To see videos of these three teachings and the entire Annual Conference, [click here](#).

Official Opening of the Annual Conference. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson called the 242nd Annual Conference into session and then invited the oldest member (Rev. Jim Godwin) and the youngest member (Mr. Benton Crigger) to lead us in prayer. Bishop Sue shared about living in Florida when Hurricane Charley was about to hit. They were able to find shelter but described the eeriness of venturing out after the storm. They had no idea what they would find. She described feeling isolated and wondering if the rest of the world even knew about the devastation that just happened. Bishop Sue then shared that later she was able to see the operations system and know that people were very much aware of what was going on – she was very joyful to learn that "we are on a grid!". She transitioned to recalling the story of Jacob and reminded all in attendance that God is on the grid and thus we are on the grid! God calls us to share with everyone that we have been called to be a people of blessing and we are to let people know that they are

not alone that we are all connected to each other. She challenged us to focus more on our spiritual disciplines and we will reflect the fruits of the spirit even more. Communion began next with Bishop Sue presiding. She reminded us that the Holy Spirit is always with us, that we ask for it to pour out on us in abundance, not in a trickle, but in abundance.

Service of Remembrance. The Memorial Service began with Bishop Sue leading the procession of families of those being remembered during the service. The names of the honored dead: bishops, clergy members, clergy spouses, and lay members were read as candles were lit. The Gospel Lesson was Mark 4:35-41. Rev. Kyungsuk Cho began his sermon “Over to the Other Side” with prayer. He shared several stories where people thought he was younger than he actually is. We appreciate being perceived as younger because it makes death seem further away. We avoid thinking about death because it is “the great unknown and uncharted territory”. Rev. Cho shared about the bravery of the first wave of missionaries to Korea, most facing certain death from either disease, accidents, or persecutions. In this faith, we have to keep moving forward to the other side. When things stop moving, it’s death. Most of the problems in the Bible occurred when people stopped moving. We are not remembering a dead story, we are remembering a story of God’s movement. “One’s person’s movement is not just one person’s movement. When the dots are collected, it forms a line. And every line has a direction. All we can do is to keep moving in the right direction.” Sixty-one conference clergy and laity who died since the last Annual Conference were remembered.

Service of Recognition & Call (formerly the Retirement Service and Service of Ordering). Thirty-one persons were part of the 2024 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 763.50 years of service. The Service of Recognition and Call began with processional hymns. Monica Chafinhofer led the Call to Worship. Rev. Jessie Colwell recognized the 31 individuals of the Class of 2024 retirees. After a worship song and a youth reenactment of Luke 24:13-35, Bishop Tom Berlin, Florida Conference, preached the sermon. Bishop Berlin shared that his mother died this week, and he shared some of the tender moments surrounding this time. There were moments when the Holy Spirit prays for you, when you look around and realize you are not alone. “What is the nature of the hope that you carry in this moment and in the days ahead? Our hope is that a relationship with Jesus Christ transforms life.” Bishop Berlin spoke directly to the ordinands that their job is “Hope Leadership”, even though there will be many failures – you have to “fail quickly and move on”. The new United Methodist Church is rise or fall on our Spiritual Roots – we must continue to focus on spiritual disciplines so that our roots will go deeper. Rev. Crystal Sygeel recognized the call of the 14 individuals of Lay Supply Class of 2024 and the 10 individuals of Certified Lay Ministers Class of 2024. Bishop Sue offered a prayer of blessing. Bishop Sue commissioned Deaconess Amy Purdom to the ministry at Staunton High School as a Special Education teacher. Bishop Sue examined the persons being recognized/ordained: 26 Local Licensed Pastors, 3 Provisional Deacons, 11 Provisional Elders, 2 Ordained Deacons, and 9 Ordained Elders.

Official Conference business. Official Conference business was spread out over the three days. For the complete list of official business, see the Book of Reports by [clicking here](#) and the Official Packet by [clicking here](#). Below are a few of the key actions.

- A Commission on Truth telling & Reconciliation and Creation Care Work Group was formed. Rev. Andrew Ensz made a motion June 20 that the Annual Conference make a Resolution of Apology to LGBTQ+ persons for harm committed on them by the Virginia Annual Conference. After a number of discussions for and against, there was a motion to table the recommendation until June 21 for the members to have time to review. On June 22, a motion was made to create a Commission of Truth Telling and Reconciliation to further study the Apology resolution; members from both sides of whether to have the apology together made the motion. The Commission would report at the next Annual Conference. The motion passed and Bishop Sue offered prayer.
- The newly established 'Extended, Extended Cabinet'. Bishop Sue and Conference Lay Leader Martha Stokes introduced the work of the 'Extended, Extended Cabinet' This group was a gathering of conference leadership, beginning in January of 2024 to build relationships, discern directional aims, and develop a common focus for the work of the Virginia Annual Conference in the next quadrennium. This team included the Appointive and Extended Cabinet alongside members of the Common Table and Board of Ordained Ministry. The principle of this group's work said "At God's initiative, the Virginia Annual Conference exists to support the transformation of lives by facilitating Christ-centered connections between individuals, local churches, communities, and across the wide array of God's creation." Priorities coming from this work for the Virginia Annual Conference would be making time to grow in relationship with God and neighbor, and define the practical roles of the Annual Conference, the District, and the Local Church within VAUMC.
- New Annual Conference site announced. At last year's Annual Conference, the members approved a motion to allow The Site Selection Committee to search for new venues for the Annual Conference. This year The Site Selection Committee made the recommendation to consider Harrisonburg for 2026. The recommendation was overwhelmingly approved.
- New District Superintendents. On Saturday, Bishop Sue introduced Rev. Beth Givens as the new District Superintendent to the Coastal Virginia District, and thanked Rev. Dr. Cecelia Brooks for her service as she moves to a local church. Bishop Sue recognized Rev. Denise Bates as she retires and Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert will be the new District Superintendent of the Mountain View District. **Rev. Kirk Nave was recognized as the new District Superintendent of the Northern Virginia District.**

- General Conference Delegation. Virginia's General Conference Delegation represented by Rev. Lindsey Byanham Freeman and Warren Harper gave a report on the General Conference session. The vote on Regionalization will occur during the 2025 Annual Conference and results across the denomination will be released in 2026. For more details about the General Conference, [click here](#).
- Rules Committee. The Rules Committee Report offered the following recommendations: (1) the Site Selection Committee seeks more flexibility in its ability to negotiate and plan our gatherings – a reduction to one year instead of three years. (2) to reinstate the two separate teams: Conference Commission on Religion and Race and the Conference Committee on Ethnic Local Church Concerns. (3) restore resolutions as part of our proceedings. The recommendations were approved.

Wrap-up stats. The Conference Statistician and Treasurer reported the following statistics for 2023:

- 876 churches, 257,777 members, 85,568 in average worship attendance, 1,864 professions of faith, 1,172 baptisms, and 43,458 small group participants
- 39,000 served in missions (reaching over 1,400,000) and 6.6 % of church revenue was used in missions
- Apportionments receipts totaled \$22,541,060 with a collection percentage of 81.29%. Second-mile benevolences totaled \$1,004,502
- Over \$82,000 was collected for the conference offering. The offering benefits: Partnerships of Hope Countries (50% of goal) supports Brazil, Cambodia, Mozambique, Native Americans, Haiti, and Vietnam and UnDue Medical Debt (50 %)
- UMCOR kits were organized at the district level for the second year in a row totaling 11,455 hygiene kits, 656 cleaning kits and 2,316 menstrual kits, for a total of 14,427.
- Thirteen Churches were closed.

As noted above, the Book of Reports can be found by [clicking here](#), the Official Packet by [clicking here](#), and the entire Annual Conference video recordings by [clicking here](#).

As I noted last year, I am absolutely convinced Virginia's United Methodist Annual Conference is flourishing and moving forward led by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, a Spirit filled servant of God.

Paul Amos
Lay Leader
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