

Good day Aldersgate UMC,

Pastor Randy, Pastor Jon, Cindy Amos, Janet Hedrick, Steve Larkin, and I attended Virginia's 241st United Methodist Annual Conference 15-17 June 2023 in Roanoke, 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 "United as One in Mission." - Focusing on moving beyond the walls of the church in mission.

The first day (June 15) kicked off with the official call to order of the 241st Annual Conference, followed by hymns, prayers, a short message from our new Conference Bishop (Sue Hauptert-Johnson), and Communion. The afternoon consisted of reports from the various VAUMC Boards, Committees, and the Cabinet which are laid out in the Book of Reports. To see the complete Book of Reports, go to <https://vaumc.org/ac2023/> and scroll down a bit and click on Book of Reports. A side note, during pre-computer/internet/email/ era, Annual Conference was the only way of disseminating and receiving vital information unique to the Conference, thus the Book of Reports. The last action of the day was the vote on the Christmas Covenant Regionalization Plan (Christmas Covenant). This plan was presented by the VAUMC Delegation which will represent VAUMC interests at the upcoming worldwide United Methodist Global General Conference in 2024. After some questions from the body, it was clear not all delegates were familiar with the Christmas Covenant. So, the Bishop ended day one session early to allow all to study and better understand the plan. The Christmas Covenant is a proposed construct to allow the Global United Methodist Church to remain united in the face of differing opinions within the Church on various topics such as human sexuality. By designating the United States and the other Central Conferences (Africa, Europe, etc), as Regional Conferences, each Regional Conference would be afforded the contextual flexibility to address mission and ministry actions unique to their respective Regions. This would then allow the United Methodist Global General Conference to focus on global issues such as theology, missions, shared witness, etc. The Christmas Covenant was introduced from Central Conferences outside the United States. For more details, refer to page 54 (Report from the Virginia Delegation) of the Book of Reports. Please note VAUMC will provide more information about this plan soon.

Day two (16 June) started with morning Eucharist, hymns, bible study followed by the vote on the Christmas Covenant which was approved by show of hands. The balance of the morning was dedicated to recognitions, awards, and presentations by key missional partners. The afternoon was devoted to those required reports such as the Site Selection, Equitable Pastor Compensation, Board of Clergy Pensions, Treasures Report, Council on Finance and Administration, Board of Trustees, etc. All reports were received and approved by show of hand. Some key points from discussion on the various reports are Apportionments will go down by 4% in 2024, the minimal pastor salary compensation will increase by \$1000, and the establishment of a

working group to review the overall pastor compensation package such as salary, housing allowance, health care, pensions, etc.

Day three (17 June) opened with a 5K Run/Walk (Pastor Randy, Cindy and I participated in this event) registration fees went towards the Annual Conference offering, morning Eucharist, singing, bible study, a VAUMC offering, and recognition of retirees. Mid-morning, we recessed as the Annual Conference prepared for the Service of Ordering of Ministry and fixing of their Appointments. Although this was the last event of the entire Annual Conference and takes up only a small portion of my report, to me and others in attendance, this was by far the most important and moving event of the entire Conference. Seeing Pastor Jon (and others) being ordained was deeply profound and one could truly feel the Spirit of God moving thought out the Annual Conference.

Some key facts from the VAUMC this year:

- Thirteen churches were closed, and two new faith communities were announced.
- 59 new faith communities have been planted in the conference since 2008. Of these, more than 70% remain active.
- Since October 2022, the total number of VAUMC churches who have disaffiliated under Paragraph 2553 is 107 churches and will pay VAUMC ~\$8.46 million.
- Related to disaffiliation within the Virginia Conference, the projected effect of disaffiliations would be 6.4% of local church revenues, 10.7% of apportionments, 9.3% of membership, 13.2% of average worship attendance and 13.1% of professions of faith.
- After all disaffiliations, the VAUMC will stand at ~900 churches with ~268,000 members.
- Fifty-eight persons were part of the 2023 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 1,210.25 years of service.
- Over the last year, there were 95,239 in average worship attendance, 1,950 professions of faith, 1,157 baptisms, 44, 000 small group participants, 40,000 served in missions (reaching over 1,200,000) and 6.1% of church revenue was used in missions.
- Apportionment receipts were \$23,398,006, a 3.75% increase from 2021. 2nd-mile benevolences increased \$55,000 from 2021.
- The 2024 budget was approved for \$27,362,000, a 1.33 % reduction from the 2023 budget.

As your Lay Leader, I am convinced Virginia's United Methodist Annual Conference is alive and flourishing; led by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, a Spirit filled servant of God.

Paul Amos
Lay Leader
Aldersgate UMC