

Moving Forward in God's Mission: Virginia Annual Conference 2019

You can view all the proceedings of AC 2019 by visiting the archived livestream of the 237th session: <https://vimeo.com/vaumc>.

You can view photos from the weekend at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vaconf/albums>.

The theme for the 2019 Virginia Annual Conference, held June 20-22, 2019 at the Berglund Center in Roanoke, Va., was "Moving Forward in God's Mission." The conference theme was based on Matthew 28: 18-20.

2020 Delegation to General Conference, Jurisdictional Conference

Voting for the 2020 General Conference delegation (11 clergy and 11 laity), Jurisdictional Conference (11 clergy and 11 laity) and alternates (10 clergy and 10 laity), started the Thursday, June 20 and concluded that night. Clergy and laity were split to conduct the voting.

General Conference Elected Clergy:

Tom Berlin
Lindsey Baynham
Meredith McNabb
Rob Vaughn
Rhonda VanDyke
Mark Ogren
Grace Sun-khil Han
F. Elizabeth Givens
Jason C. Stanley
G. Kirk Nave
Jonathan Page

General Conference Elected Laity:

Warren Harper
Martha Stokes
Shirley Cauffman
Darlene Amon
Beth Christian
Alison Malloy
Marshall Bailey
Jill Gaynor
Joshua Blakely
Jacob Paysour
Mark Elder

Jurisdictional Conference Elected Clergy

Jeff Mickle
Doug Forrester
Leigh Anne Taylor
Dan Kim
Tim Ward
Chenda Lee
David Vaughan

Jurisdictional Conference Elected Laity

Karen McElfish
Andrew Kissell
Kim Johnson
Debbie Cali
Phillip Mohr
Deborah Angerman
Shawn Kiger

Lyndsie Blakely
Lauren Lobenhofer
Brian Johnson
Jennifer Coffey

Amanda L. Holmes
Kenn Speicher
Neal E. Wise
Richard Underwood

Clergy Alternates

Drew VanDyke Colby
Esther Nanna Agbosu
Gordon Keith Pruitt
Joshua S. King
Rachel M. Gilmore
Andrew B. Willson
M. Lynne Alley-Grant
Amy L. Crisp
Sarah Dumas Locke
Matthew Joseph Benton

Laity Alternates

Kip Robinson
Brenda Brooks
Carl Moravitz
Marie Hawks
Jane Willson
Jerry A. Taylor
Jaydee Hanson
Maureen McKay
Michelle Hettman
Carlos Liceaga

Conference Vision

Even though Bishop Sharma D. Lewis is currently on a six-month medical leave, Bishop Pete Weaver, interim bishop, kept Lewis' vision at the forefront of the conference. A clip of Lewis introducing her vision from 2017 was played during the opening session on Thursday. That vision is "Disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve."

All Virginia United Methodist churches will have a process of intentionally-forming disciples by 2020.

Conference Business

On Friday morning, six churches were discontinued in five districts. Two new faith communities and their pastors were introduced.

On Friday and Saturday, of nine submitted motions, six were discussed. Motions can be found at: www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/AC2019/AgendaMotions.pdf.

Motion 1 - "Balancing Lay and Clergy Membership of the Annual Conference" by G. Kirk Nave: Each year, there are approximately 200 more lay members attending the Virginia Annual Conference session than clergy members. - The motion prevailed.

Motion 2 - "Motion to Delay" by Joshua Blakely: I move that we, the Virginia Annual Conference, encourage Bishop Weaver and Bishop Lewis, and other members of the

Conference Leadership team to, as an act of grace, delay any inquiry of the official conduct of clergy members (§1604.4) related to chargeable offenses outlined in the Discipline (§12702.1.a-b) related to LGBTQIA+ clergy, LGBTQIA+ clergy candidates, and same-gender weddings until after the General Conference 2020. - The motion prevailed.

Motion 3 - "Removal of Incompatibility Language" by the Rev. Sara Keeling. The motion prevailed.

Motion 4 - "Removal of Incompatibility Language for Ministry" by the Rev. Sara Keeling. - The motion prevailed

Motion 5 - "Removal of Incompatibility Language for Chargeable Offenses" by the Rev. Sara Keeling. - The motion prevailed.

Motion 6 - "Amicable Separation and the Multiplication of Ministries" by the Rev. H.O. 'Tom' Thomas. - The motion failed.

Update from General Conference 2019 Delegation

Martha Stokes, 2019 General Conference delegation head, and the Rev. Tom Berlin, delegation clergy head, provided an overview of General Conference 2019 as well as the April 2019 Judicial Council decision on the afternoon of Friday, June 21. They also shared the items that will be before the 2020 delegation.

Bible Study by the Rev. Dr. Kevin Watson

The Rev. Dr. Kevin Watson, Candler School of Theology, presented the Bible Study on Friday and Saturday morning. On Saturday, Watson talked about the class meetings in early Methodism. "Methodists were required to be in a weekly class meeting, even in the United States. From 1776 to 1850 Methodism grew like a weed. It was one of the most explosive growths in Christianity with this requirement."

"I would not be here today if I was not a part of something like the class meeting," he said. "It's risky letting someone really know you. Being fully known and fully loved changed my life." Do not go it alone.

Glory Sightings video series

The "Glory Sightings" video series, which started in 2017, continued this year. These videos were shown throughout conference to highlight mission and ministry throughout the Virginia Conference. This year, each of the three videos focused on one aspect of Bishop Lewis' conference vision. A video about campus ministry displayed "lifelong learning"; a Fresh Expression, Skate Church displayed "influence"; and Ashland Circles, a mission to reduce and resolve poverty in Ashland, Va. displayed "serving." These videos can be accessed at:

<https://vimeo.com/viriniaumc>.

Mission Service

A time of worship began on Friday at 11 a.m. with guest preacher Bishop Tracy S. Malone, resident bishop of the Ohio East Area. She based her message on Matthew 28, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations... and I will be with you to the ends of the age."

"We see a conferring of power and authority," she said. This power that God gave to Christ has also been given to everyone. "As disciples of Christ we are given a charge and commission to go and teach EVERYONE we meet in the way of Christ." She said that "God has given us everything we need to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world."

"Your faith journey matters," she said. "Your testimony, your faith story matters. How are we doing in making disciples? Who are the new people among us? How are we doing in moving forward in God's mission?" It matters how we show up, she said. "Do we show up in judgment or do we show up in love?" she asked. "If we are going to create spaces in our beloved and broken church, it matters how we go and it matters how we show up. We know we are living in some anxious and desperate times in the church and the world. In the midst of this web of confusion, there is the church of Jesus Christ."

Service of Remembrance

The Rev. Seungsoo “RJ” Jun, pastor of Raleigh Court UMC, Roanoke District, preached for the Service of Remembrance in which 63 conference clergy and laity who died since the last Annual Conference were remembered.

A Service for the Ordering of Ministry

Sixteen people were ordained elders, three were ordained deacons, 13 were commissioned as provisional members, one was recognized for orders, one associate member was recognized and 24 were licensed as local pastors in the Friday evening Ordering of Ministry service.

Bishop Tracy S. Malone delivered the sermon preached on the topic of “From Start to Finish” based on Hebrews 11:29-12:3. Jesus finished the race set before him and now he is at the place of honor next to God.

She shared three significant convictions: you must keep alive the gift, be bold in your witness and keep at your work to let God do what He can do and will do.

Only you can bring forward the race that God has set for you. “When you find yourself flagging in your faith, you will want to remember that God has already deposited something within you that is growing in you and only you can bring forth what God has given you. What God has for you!”

Paul shows us in Hebrews 11, she said, that having strong faith and strong convictions will give us the ability to lead courageously and to lead with boldness. We are also not alone in this race are we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses that God has placed around us.

Malone called the service a sacred occasion. “We are affirming and celebrating what God has been doing, not just this night, but all of the preparation and all of the fertilizing and all of the equipping and empowering in getting ready for this day.”

“Ministry calls us to the mission field. Ministry calls us to the margins. Ministry calls us to the borders. Ministry calls us to the prisons. Ministry calls us to the hospitals, to the drug houses, to the schools, to the homes, to the White House and to the court house. Ministry calls

us, does it not? Ministry calls us into places where we thought we would never, ever go. To be in ministry with people we never even imagined. Ministry calls us."

You will get discouraged, distracted and disillusioned in ministry, Bishop Malone shared. You will have to keep alive the gift and fan the flame that is within you.

"It is not popular to be bold. It is not popular to be prophetic. And yet that is who and what we are called to be and to do."

She mentioned that there is fear driving the divisions in the world and church today. She talked about racism, suicide rates increasing, unjust immigration policies, hateful rhetoric.

"We have to be bold in our witness. Don't be afraid to use God's gifts in you. It ain't about you. It's about God and what God wants to do in and through you."

"Don't be apologetic about how your prophetic witness and presence will shift the atmosphere. When you're speaking love, when you're speaking hope, when you're speaking justice, when you're speaking reconciliation, when you're modeling grace, when you're modeling love, you ought to shift the atmosphere. Something ought to be different because you're in the room. Something ought to shift because you are at the table. Don't be apologetic."

5K Walk, Run, Bike, and Yoga event

To live out the vision of Bishop Sharma D. Lewis and support the Annual Conference theme, Moving Forward in God's Mission, clergy and laity participated in the 2019 Annual Conference 5K Walk, Run, Bike, and Yoga event on Saturday, June 22 at 6:15 a.m. Over 300 people registered for the event.

The Moving Forward in God's Mission 5K raised funds for KIDS SOAR (formerly Community Outreach Program of Roanoke), a Virginia Conference Advance Special and a direct service provider for children, youth and families of poverty in inner-city Roanoke. The 5K took place in two locations -- first, outside (walking, running and biking,) on a part of the Roanoke Greenway. The second was inside (chair yoga) in a hotel event space. At last count, 1,324 books were received from Kids Soar from the event.

Awards

The Harry Denman Awards, the One Matters Discipleship Award and the Green Church Award were shared on Saturday morning.

The Harry Denman Awards are named for Dr. Harry Denman, founder of The Foundation for Evangelism. The Board of Discipleship presents this award to individuals who impact their lives and ministries have on those around them.

The clergy Denman award went to the Rev. Robert E. Talbott, pastor of Asbury UMC, Harrisonburg District. Laity award went to Artie Frederick, member of McGayheysville UMC, Harrisonburg District. Youth award went to Christopher Bryan Ganoe, member of Ivey Memorial UMC in Mechanicville, James River District.

The One Matters Discipleship Award was created in 2015 to lift up churches who are focusing on intentional discipleship as they move to positive numbers from 0 baptisms and 0 professions of faith. The 2019 award went to Waverly UMC in the James River District.

The Green Church Award is presented by the Caretakers of God's Creation team, a branch of the conference Board of Church and Society, for a church or churches who are answering God's call to be caretakers of God's creation. This award was presented to two churches this year: Bethlehem UMC in Moneta and Oaklette UMC in Chesapeake.

Closing Worship

Bishop Weaver based his sermon on Matthew 28 with a sermon titled "Go, Glow, Grow."

"I want to talk just briefly about what it means to go, to glow, and to grow," the bishop said. "Go out far and near. The last place I served was New England. But United Methodism in New England owes its life to Virginia. Jesse Lee was born in Prince George County. In 1784 Jesse Lee went to annual conference at Ellis Chapel in Virginia. According to the record it lasted a month. At the close of conference, Francis Asbury, about to do appointments, was short a preacher or two. Asbury spotted Lee and he yelled to everyone, 'I'm going to enlist Brother

Lee.' Someone yelled out to Asbury, 'What bounty to you give?' Asbury responded, 'Grace here, and glory hereafter.' That was all Jesse Lee needed." He first went to North Carolina and then Asbury sent him to New England where he started the first Methodist circuit.

"So when you get your appointment a little later this morning, Go!"

Lee said he had to labor and suffer alone among the strange people. The Methodists were accused of being pickpockets but they went any way. Lee preached under an apple tree on the highway on, "Ye must be born again." It took six months for three women to sign up for a class.

"But wasn't that where Jesus went?" asked the bishop, "the highways and the byways? Wasn't that Wesley, who went to the coalfields? Where do you and I spend most of our church time? Those old buildings. The command is 'To go!'"

The building isn't to be worshiped or developed. Souls are to be developed, the bishop shared.

The bishop continued, "The word 'go' means also to travel spiritually and attitudinally. Sometimes we have to go and look at what is right in front of us. But we need to go and build relationships and stand with those who are in drugs and impoverished."

"We started to make the decisions that Jesus wanted," Bishop Weaver said after relating stories of churches that had changed their ways of ministry, even if it was "messy."

We begin to glow "when we are willing to go and God is with us," he said. "So fear not. Go with God. Christ will be with you."

Wrap-up stats

This year's kit collection required the addition of a third tractor trailer due to the influx of kits. These kits will be transferred to Mission Central warehouse in Pennsylvania for distribution by UMCOR (United Methodist Committee on Relief). Annual Conference members brought 51,202 disaster relief kits for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to Annual Conference. Kits included: 36,296 Hygiene kits; 14,243 School kits and 663 Flood buckets.

At the Friday afternoon retirement service, 60 pastors retired. This year's retiring class has a combined total of 1,288.75 years of service.

Attendees of conference contributed almost 10,000 pounds of canned goods and boxed dry foods as part of the "4 Cans 4 Conference" drive.

The Conference Statistician and Treasurer David Dommissse reported that membership stood at 318,000. Worship attendance stood at 101,000. Engaged in small groups were at 90,000. He shared there were 3,000 professions of faith and 2,100 baptisms. Some 80,000 serve in mission reaching over 1 million in their communities and around the world. Financial resources are good. Virginia Conference church members tithed \$200 million. Other church owned assets generated \$27 million. The conference has \$130 million in cash reserves, \$140 million in investments and \$2.6 billion in real estate. The conference has 996 active clergy serving.

The 2020 budget was approved for \$31,450,000, a reduction from the 2019 budget.

At last count, \$90,000 was collected for the conference offering. The offering was divided between the following: Africa University Student Scholarships, Cambodia Pastors Leadership Training, Mozambique Lay Leadership Training, Brazil "Shade and Fresh Water" children's program and Just Neighbors Matching Funds Grant for Immigrant Legal Counsel.

Three new district superintendents were introduced at Annual Conference and the appointments for the 16 districts were approved. Appointments are posted at:

<http://www.vaumc.org/ncfilerepository/AC2019/2019-2020Appointments.pdf>.