

## 2023 Virginia Annual Conference: United as One in Mission



- You can view all the proceedings of AC 2023 by visiting the archived livestream of the 241<sup>st</sup> session: <https://vaumc.org/ac2023/>.
- You can view photos from the event at the [conference Flickr page](#).
- The 2023-2024 Appointments can be found here: [www.vaumc.org/2023appointments](http://www.vaumc.org/2023appointments).

The theme for the 2023 Virginia Annual Conference, held June 15-17, 2023 at the Berglund Center in Roanoke, Va., was “United as One in Mission” with Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson as the officiating bishop. The conference theme was based on Acts 1:8b. The Laity Session took place over Zoom on Sunday, June 11 and was [recorded for later viewing](#). The Clergy Session took place in person in the Performing Arts Center at the Berglund Center on Wednesday, June 14.

There was a great amount of fellowship and joy surrounding the session as each day concluded by 5 p.m. to allow for clergy and lay members to spend time together. Due to the change in schedule from years past, members took part in an Advocacy event, Mission Social, Youth and Campus Ministries Tailgate, and a Game Night during their free time.

### **Conference Business**

On Friday and Saturday, the Rev. Seungsoo “RJ” Jun, Associate Director of Serving, offered the Bible Study. He focused on mission and being a blessing to the world. A blessing, he shared, is dependent on a relationship with God and is something to be shared with other human beings.

Thirteen churches were closed:

- Ettrick UMC, Living Waters District
- Mt. Pleasant UMC, Living Waters District
- Vincent’s Grove UMC, Living Waters District
- Grace Oak Grove UMC, Mission Rivers District
- Mount Vernon UMC, Mission Rivers District
- New Town UMC, Mission Rivers District
- Bethel (Concord) UMC, Mountain View District
- Concord (Stuart) UMC, Mountain View District
- Leesville UMC, Mountain View District
- Watson Memorial UMC, Mountain View District
- Ashburn Korean UMC, Northern Virginia District
- Cedar Grove UMC, Shenandoah River District
- Saint Mark’s UMC, Shenandoah River District

Two new faith communities were announced: Provision Church , Northern Virginia District, and St. Andrew’s UMC, Three Notch’d District, will launch a Korean language faith community as a sister congregation.

It was announced that 59 new faith communities have been planted in the conference since 2008. Of these, more than 70% remain active.

Dwayne Stinson, incoming Director of Connectional Ministries for Discipleship and Congregational Vitality, said of these new faith communities, “They result in more professions of faith and reach a more diverse population than our average conference congregation.”

Kaylyn Duda and Daniel Mohr were recognized and given a prayer of blessing as Global Mission Fellows.

The Virginia Delegation did not need to vote on delegates during the 2023 AC session. The delegation brought forth their report, specifically their unanimous endorsement of the Christmas Covenant Regionalization Plan. After the body had a chance to review the delegation's FAQs and other information on the conference website, there was a time of discussion and then the Virginia Annual Conference affirmed the delegation's endorsement.

During the Equitable Compensation report, there was discussion and a motion was raised to increase the minimum salary for full-time clergy in each category by \$1,000 for 2024. The motion was approved. A motion was also made and approved to appoint a work group to analyze and give new recommendations on housing allowances.

Kathy Lutman gave a report as chair of the conference Trustees. She reminded the conference that since October 2022, the total number of churches who have disaffiliated under Paragraph 2553 is 107 churches. For these churches, the legal closing process has been completed for 70. The remaining 37 churches will be completed in the weeks following Annual Conference. Once the process for all these 107 churches is completed, the total consideration paid to the conference will be \$8.46 million.

The final called session to consider disaffiliating churches under Paragraph 2553 in the Virginia Conference will be October 7, 2023.

Following the October session, the conference trustees will update the conference with the final total consideration paid to the conference.

The youth delegation asked for a moment of personal privilege. They welcomed Bishop Sue to the Virginia Conference and they brought items up to celebrate the moment including party hats to commemorate her opening sermon at her installation service. The youth shared to the Annual Conference body that they hoped their voices would also be heard as well as their beliefs, identities, and passions heard, honored, and validated. They shared they believe the

best days of the Virginia Conference are ahead. And in the words of the popular *Ted Lasso* show, they asked if the Virginia Conference body also believed.

### **Opening Worship**

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson preached on “Going Beyond the Walls of the City.” She reflected on the pressures in the world in light of Covid, war, and more as it creates exhaustion for individuals and the Church.

She said as followers of Jesus, it is our job to follow him outside the walls, where he waits for us. The early Methodists, Bishop Sue reflected “were disliked, they were rabble-rousers, they spoke out, they started orphanages, and schools. They cried out against the poverty and debt prisons. They were a force. They were not especially attractive or put together people. They were working class , but they desperately wanted compassion extended to those who didn’t have it.”

She reminded the body that Jesus is waiting outside the walls for us to join him. “If you want to find Jesus don’t look in your churches, don’t look inside the walls, go out to those who are suffering and burdened and you will find him there.”

She shared that we gather Sunday after Sunday to imagine the city on the hill. “That vision fuels us. But until that day, we don’t look for a city here. We aren’t going to find comfort here. We aren’t going to find ease here. I feel like the church in many places is circling the wagons: Let’s build our own schools so we don’t have to mingle with those who are outside our churches, let’s insulate ourselves from evil and those we disagree with , let’s insulate ourselves and circle the wagons. The problem is when we circle the wagons, we aren’t going anywhere. Christ is waiting for us outside the walls to be salt, and light, and yeast. And the beauty of those images is it only takes a little bit to change the whole thing. So go find Jesus outside the walls.”

### **Service of Remembrance**

The Rev. Gary Miller, retired associate member, Coastal Virginia District, preached for the Service of Remembrance with the sermon “Can These Bones Live” based on Ezekiel 37: 1-14. He reflected that the prophet Ezekiel was set in a valley of dried bones. Just like him, we might

look around at our lives, at our churches, and wonder can the bones of our lives and these institutions have new life?

“And I want to leave you with that this afternoon. You ought to touch somebody. It is time to rise. It's time for us to get up. It's time for us to know we can have life. It's time to celebrate who we are. God is not through with us yet. God has a mighty work for us to do as a people.”

Seventy-five conference clergy and laity who died since the last Annual Conference were remembered.

### **Retirement Service**

Fifty-eight persons were part of the 2023 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 1,210.25 years of service.

### **5K Walk/ Run**

The conference hosted a 5K Walk/Run on Saturday, June 17. #BeingTogether encouraged members to be intentional in their well-being by attending to their spiritual, emotional, and physical health. All proceeds of this event were donated to the Annual Conference offering.

### **Awards**

The One Matters Award, given to a church with significant improvement of baptisms and professions of faith, was presented to Glen Walton UMC, Valley Ridge District.

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 whose exceptional ministry of evangelism – expressed in Word, Sign, and Deed and bring people into a life-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Laity Award went to Gerry Fuss and Clergy Award went to Rev. Bruce Johnson.

The Creation Justice Ministries Team presented: The Green Church Award to Burke UMC, Northern Virginia District; Second Green Church Award to St. Stephen's UMC, Northern Virginia

District; Sustaining Green Church Awards to Bethlehem (Moneta) UMC, Mountain View District, Ivey Memorial UMC, Living Waters District, Warsaw UMC, Mission Rivers District.

The Francis Asbury Award, named for early American Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury and honors his call to establish a school in the vicinity of every church, was presented to John Dunning, former chair of Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries.

### **Closing Worship: A Service for the Ordering of Ministry**

A Service for the Ordering of Ministry closed the 2023 Annual Conference session. Bishop Sue reflected on Luke 10:1-12 in her sermon. She told those gathered that ministry may take you to appointments you don't expect or understand at first but knowing that Jesus has already gone ahead of you can relieve that pressure.

She told the clergy gathered, "So my next word to you is never do ministry alone. Look at this crowd of witnesses. All these people with red on, all these people gathered. All these people who are your orders and your fellowship. All of these who are in ministry with you. That is the beauty of our connection."

She continued, "If you want to have a real short time in ministry, do it alone because it will crush you. Our burdens are too large and too heavy to bear alone."

She shared that it's easy to not appreciate your current appointment because you think there is a better, easier appointment up ahead.

She said if your church where you are appointed is not one you would attend if given the choice, it is up to you as the pastor to labor and change that.

She said there are wolves inside and outside every church. It is important for a pastor when they come to a church to find seven saints to pray with, spend time with, and develop mission with inside the church.

“So don't give your peace away. [...] Lead who will follow you. Don't worry about the people who won't follow you. Don't give peace away. If people try to take it from you, take it back. You have got to be grounded spiritually.”

“You have to be good Methodists. You have to have your spiritual disciplines in order or the wolves will tear you apart. You must hear the voice of the peace maker, the voice of Christ. The Holy Spirit must fill you and fortify you and build you up. So never neglect your prayer, never neglect your worship, never neglect your study, never neglect your accountability to each other, never neglect that.”

Bishop Sue encouraged those being licensed, commissioned, and ordained to fill their churches with joy, fill their days with health, and fill their days with people who will gird and reinforce their life and their call.

“Jesus calls us to be new creations, and your work is to create newness and aliveness and vitality in your churches. You are equipped and ready. You have been examined and set free. You are God's chosen and called ones. And we rejoice today that we can send you out, send you out to be in teams with the laity, to transform the world, to go outside the walls of your church and to spread Christ's joy in a world of despair. Go forth and tell everyone that the Kingdom of God has come near, and it is as real to us as if it was here.”

One certified lay minister and 23 lay supply pastors were recognized. Sixteen local pastors were licensed, one provisional deacon and 12 provisional elders were commissioned. One associate member was recognized and one individual received recognition of orders. Five elders were ordained.

All the district superintendents and their lay leaders as well as clergy moving within all the districts were prayed over after the fixing of the appointments.

### **Wrap-up stats**

The number of UMCOR kits collected was 14,745, an estimated value of \$238,587. UMCOR Menstrual Hygiene Kits totals as of Friday, June 16 were 3,170 total kits valued at \$76,080.

Twenty thousand kits were created for Rise Against Hunger, meeting the conference goal for the conference session. Seventy-three blood products were donated, saving 231 lives with the Red Cross Blood Drive. Some 1,000 pounds have also been collected for food banks across the conference.

The Conference Statistician and Treasurer David Dommissie reported the statistics for 2022: there were 95,239 in average worship attendance, 1,950 professions of faith, 1,157 baptisms, and 44,000 small group participants. He also reported, 40,000 served in missions (reaching over 1,200,000) and 6.1 % of church revenue was used in missions.

Related to disaffiliation within the Virginia Conference, Dommissie reported 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

He projected by year-end, the Virginia Conference would stand at 900 churches with 268,000 members.

Dommissie then brought the report of the conference treasurer. Apportionment receipts were \$23,398,006, a 3.75% increase from 2021. 2nd-mile benevolences increased \$550,00 from 2021.

The 2024 budget was approved for \$27,362,000, a 1.33 % reduction from the 2023 budget.

As of Saturday morning, over \$77,000 was collected for the conference offering. The offering benefits: Food Insecurity (25% of goal) will benefit food banks around the Commonwealth; Refugee Response (25% of goal) supports ministries engaged in refugee resettlement; and



Partnerships of Hope Countries (50% of goal) supports Brazil, Cambodia, Mozambique, Native Americans, Haiti, and Vietnam.