

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Good morning and welcome to this special called Annual Conference of the Virginia Annual Conference. I'm Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson and I am going to guide us through our business this morning. I'm delighted you're here with us and as we approach these serious matters, we come with an attitude of prayer, an attitude of seeking the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort us and to acknowledge that this is a pivotal moment in the history of the Virginia Annual Conference.

I am delighted and have been so impressed with the work of this annual conference, the leadership, and just the excellence with which the folks in this annual conference lead. I want to thank those who were in the earlier session answering questions, and I thank them for a job well done. As always, you're welcome to send your questions. We're willing and ready to answer any questions you may have.

This whole process is going to be bathed with prayer and a sense of the peace of the Holy Spirit settling upon us all. I am delighted this morning to introduce your beloved lay leader, Martha Stokes, and I would like to thank Martha. We are working through the theology of the United Methodist Church with the lay leaders, some of the lay leaders of the annual conference, and I thank her for rich discussions and deep insights as we clarify who we are as United Methodists and how we are moving into this next chapter of our history.

I'd now like to call upon our wonderful lay leader, Mrs. Martha Stokes, to lead our opening prayer. Martha.

Martha Stokes:

Thank you Bishop Sue. Pray with me. Gracious and holy God, you know the emotions that each of us brings to this call session today. You've seen each tear, you've heard each prayer, you have been in the midst of all the discernment. As we take on this work of the Virginia Annual Conference this morning, keep us ever mindful of your presence. Give us wisdom and integrity in our judgment, in our voting.

We recognize, God, that good and faithful people have strong and differing beliefs about what it means to be the church today. Help us in all that we do to honor the legacies of forming and making disciples of Jesus Christ that have been the foundation of each church that will be named during this gathering. Even though our discussion and our actions are focused on division within our connection, our love for Jesus transcends our differences.

We ask your blessings, oh God, on each congregation and each individual member. Together, no matter what name may be on our buildings going forward, may we continue to offer hope to the hopeless, food to the hungry, and nurture to all those who need strength and encouragement. Today, we especially pray for congregations where times of discernment have led to votes that have divided your people even further. We pray for the clergy and lay leaders who guide those congregations and we ask humbly for your healing touch as they move forward.

It is more important than ever that our world sees that we are Christians treating each other with love and respect despite our differences. May our words and our actions continue to honor you. Oh God, our hearts long for an end to division and conflict. Assist us in living into the future filled with hope and joy in our individual callings as followers of Jesus and in our collective work to make disciples of all people in all places. Send your spirit to engage us in the mission in bold new ways.

May we be living examples of your love and transformational power. Strengthen our determination to proclaim your reconciling word in our congregations, our communities, and around the world until we become the United Methodist Church you need us to be in this time. All these things we pray in your most holy name, amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you so much. We awoke this morning to news from Israel and our own divisions seem minor compared to the huge strife that some of the world is experiencing now. I think of my many friends, Palestinian and Israeli over there, especially a group I know in Bethlehem, and I fear for them this morning. I've asked District Superintendent Victor Gomez to come and offer a prayer on behalf of that strife and the strife that the division that marks our world sadly. And so Victor, please offer a prayer for all of us.

Victor Gomez:

Thank you, Bishop. Let us bow our heads and let us pray. Come, Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, come. Gracious God, none of us like conflict, especially when there is nation against nation. God, we pray for your peace, the peace that only you can provide for a ceasefire, God. Especially, we lift up those who are directly affected, those who are suffering the consequences of the actions of those governments. We lift them up into your hands and care. God, what better hands to be than yours.

Bring your shalom upon the people of Palestine and Israel. Bring your shalom. Your peace may be done. Guide them, lead them and pour out your Holy Spirit on each one of those who are affected by those who are making decisions at high levels. Protect them, those the most vulnerable God. We come today as brothers and sisters in Christ to pray for peace, your peace. Your peace will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Thank you God, and be with us and forgive us and forgive those who have trespassed. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you so much, Victor. I would like to give a special thank you to Reverend Dr. Jonathan Page and Mr. Dwayne Stinson, our Co-Directors of Connectional Ministries and Ms. Madeline Pillow White, the Director of Communications for organizing this special called annual conference. We are thankful to the Reverend Brian Siegel, Mr. Chris Malak and Mr. Hunter Bryn for providing exemplary leadership and technology for this special annual conference, and you would understand better if you could see this control room. I am very grateful for their hard work and their excellence. Reverend Siegel will now provide some important instructions for all of us.

Rev. Brian Siegel:

Good morning, conference. The good news is if you are seeing this, you have done everything you need to do to vote. Voting will happen automatically on your screen and you'll be able to make your selection when that happens. If for some reason you need to make a speech of some sort, use the Q&A function that is at the bottom of your screen, type in the nature of your request and just enough information that we can forward that on to who needs to see it, at which point you'll be recognized to raise your digital hand so that we can find you to unmute you. Do not use that hand to say "I want to speak." You must use the Q&A first so that we can properly recognize the requests as they come in. Again for voting, you've already done everything you need to do so, so vote well.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Brian. Now let's have a couple of practice votes, and I know you love this part best of all. You'll have 60 seconds to vote. You can change your vote at any time and as many times as you'd like during those 60 seconds, but whichever vote you cast last will be the vote collected. Okay, here is the first practice vote. Is Die Hard a Christmas movie? Yes or no? Please vote now.

The vote is now closed. Let's see the results. It is not a Christmas movie. I think that was a matter of interpretation. How do you interpret Christmas? But anyhow, okay, it looks like you know how to vote. I'm now going to call upon Dean Bates and I thank her for her tremendous amount of work in all of this process. She's going to offer our organizing motions to properly order this call annual conference.

Let me share some general information with the body. Pursuant to paragraph 603.5 of the 2016 Book of Discipline, I as your Bishop, along with greater than the required three quarters concurrence of our district superintendents have called this special session of our annual conference. In alignment with paragraph 603.5 and Judicial Council Decision 397, a special session of the annual conference shall have only such powers as are stated in the call.

The singular reason for this called annual conference is to vote on the disaffiliation of 120 churches under paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline as amended at the 2019 Special General Conference. Any motions or other actions outside the scope of our stated reason for the call will be out of order. Dean Bates.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Thank you Bishop. I move to permit this special called session of the Virginia Annual Conference to take place in the virtual format. Bishop, this motion permits us to affirm the virtual format and will next allow us to set a virtual bar for the members.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Reverend Bates. Is there a second to the motion?

Victor Gomez:

Second.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Now, one thing we're going to focus on this morning because it concerns some people, is our rules provide that there must be three minutes between a motion being made on the floor and the actual vote. We're going to just hum along to the Jeopardy theme song for a couple of minutes and then we'll have the vote after three minutes from Dean Bates making that motion.

They're singing in here. That's good.

Of course, now they worried about copyright for... So don't sing.

Reverend King. Let me know when we're almost there.

Rev. Joshua King:

We're good.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Anybody's free to amend this rule at annual conference, just saying.

Boy, this is as bad as silent time and worship, isn't it? People get antsy.

Halfway there. I invite you to use these three minute periods as times of reflection and centering, and inviting the Holy Spirit and just bask in the love of God. That's always a good thing to do.

Second for this vote was somebody in this room. Who was it? Doug Forrester.

Okay, you'll have one minute to vote. You are voting on approval of a virtual annual conference session. Please vote now.

The results are on the screen. The motion passes. Thank you. Let's continue then. Reverend Bates.

Rev. Denise Bates:

I move that the virtual bar of the conference be set at the specific location of the sites of the members and members at the host site who have been provided with the appropriate Zoom login credentials.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Reverend Bates. Is there a second to the motion? Jonathan Page seconded. Okay, now we're going to wait so that three minutes passes between the motion and the vote. I have before us a motion to waive the three-minute requirement that is properly before the annual conference, and it does not require a second. It would require a two-thirds vote because we're amending a standing rule. Why don't we move this to a vote? Now we have to wait three minutes for this one, but anyhow, we will take that up.

How are we Reverend King? Okay, go get your coffee. Have some more breakfast. I think they've got it. The motion before us is a motion to waive the three-minute requirement between the making of the motion and the vote. If you would approve that, vote yes. If you would not, vote no. Voting is open.

Okay, voting is closed would you... Okay. We have by 96%, so that rule is waived. I think they're tired of those three minute breaks already. Now we will return to the motion on the floor before the motion for the rule amendment. I'm going to return to Dean Bates, if you will read that as we move toward a vote on that motion.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Certainly. I move that the virtual bar of the conference be set at the specific locations of the sites of the members and members at the host site who have been provided with the appropriate Zoom login credentials.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, that motion is before us for a vote. If you would approve, vote yes. If you would disapprove, vote no. You have one minute to vote.

The vote is closed if you'll post the results. The bar is set, and you're free to vote from your homes. Thank you for approving this virtual annual conference. Thank you, Dean Bates. And now, I introduce Reverend Joshua King, our conference Secretary to speak on behalf of the Committee on Minutes.

Rev. Joshua King:

The Committee on Minutes will meet on Thursday, October 12, 2023 to review and certify the minutes of the special annual conference session. I move that the minutes for the special annual conference session be approved in advance.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

You'll have one minute to vote. You're voting to approve and advance the minutes of this special annual conference. Please vote now. You'll have one minute to vote.

The vote is closed if you'll post the results. The minutes are approved to have... You have approved the minutes in advance. Now I would like to call on the President of our conference's Board of Trustees, Mrs. Kathy Lutman, and I thank her in advance for tremendous work and excellent leadership with our trustees. Okay Kathy, go ahead.

Kathy Lutman:

Bishop Hopper Johnson, members of the Virginia Annual Conference, this morning, the conference Board of Trustees brings before you 120 churches that propose to disaffiliate pursuant to paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline as amended at the 2019 Special General Conference. Whereas, with respect to each of the churches listed on Attachment A as currently shown on the screen, which will be referred to here as Attachment A namely from the coastal Virginia District, Good Hope United Methodist Church, Guilford United Methodist Church, Market Street United Methodist Church Onancock, Smith's Chapel United Methodist Church, Snead Memorial United Methodist Church, from the Living Waters District, Antioch United Methodist Church Lunenburg, Asbury, United Methodist Church McKenney, Barnes United Methodist Church Newsoms Charge, Bethany United Methodist Church Brunswick, Bethel United Methodist Church Blackstone-Nottoway, Boydton United Methodist Church, Capron United Methodist Church, Charlotte Courthouse United Methodist Church. Corinth United Methodist Church West Dinwiddie Charge, Courtland United Methodist Church.

Ebenezer United Methodist Church Philadelphia Charge, Hebron United Methodist Church Charlotte Courthouse Charge, Ivey Memorial United Methodist Church. Jetersville Methodist Church, Joyner United Methodist Church, Kingswood United Methodist Church Lakeland Charge, LaCrosse United Methodist Church, Matthews Chapel United Methodist Church Philadelphia Charge, Philadelphia United Methodist Church, Rehoboth United Methodist Church Boydton, Rehoboth United Methodist Church Mecklenburg-Lakeland Charge, Rocky Hock United Methodist Church, Salem United Methodist Church Buckingham-Dillwyn Charge, Salem United Methodist Church North Amelia Charge, Salem United Methodist Church Petersburg Prince George Cooperative, Somerton United Methodist Church.

Thomas Chapel United Methodist Church, Trinity United Methodist Church West Dinwiddie Charge, Whitehall United Methodist Church White Oak United Methodist Church West Dinwiddie Charge, Williams United Methodist Church, Zion United Methodist Church Mecklenburg. From the Mission Rivers District, Bethel United Methodist Church Matthews, Beulah United Methodist Church, Clarksbury United Methodist Church, Epworth United Methodist Church Aylett, McKendree United Methodist Church, Melrose United Methodist Church, Olivet United Methodist Church, Pamunkey United Methodist Church, Parkview United Methodist Church, Saint Mark's United Methodist Church Hampton City. Saint Paul United Methodist Church Susan, Salem United Methodist Church Matthews, Tabernacle United Methodist Church New Kent, White Stone United Methodist Church.

From the Mountain View District, Anderson Memorial United Methodist Church Gretna, Bethesda United Methodist Church Huddleston, Calvary United Methodist Church Campbell, Crafts, United Methodist Church, Ebenezer United Methodist Church Bedford, Epworth United Methodist Church Thaxton, Flint Hill United Methodist Church, Indian Hill United Methodist Church, Marsh Memorial United Methodist Church, Motley United Methodist Church, Mount Hermon United Methodist Church, New Bethel United Methodist Church Campbell, New Bethel United Methodist Church Pennsylvania, Otterville. United Methodist Church, Penhook United Methodist Church, Providence United Methodist Church Campbell, Salem United Methodist Church Bedford, Salem United Methodist Church Campbell, Tyreeanna United Methodist Church, Union United Methodist Church Bedford, Whites United Methodist Church.

From the Northern Virginia District. First Korean United Methodist Church, Smith Chapel United Methodist Church. From the Shenandoah River District Annex United Methodist Church, Bethel United Methodist Church Loudoun, Burnt Factory United Methodist Church, Clover Hill United Methodist Church, Crimora United Methodist Church, East Point United Methodist Church, Evangelical United Methodist Church, Fellowship United Methodist Church, Gainesboro United Methodist Church, Grove Hill United Methodist Church, Hawkinstown United Methodist Church, Limeton United Methodist Church, Linden United Methodist Church, Little Mountain United Methodist Church, Mount Bethel United Methodist Church, Mount Pisgah United Methodist Church, Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church Lovettesville.

Oak Grove United Methodist Church, Otterbein Chapel United Methodist Church, Parnassus United Methodist Church, Riverside United Methodist Church, Riverton United Methodist Church, Saint Peter's United Methodist Church, Saint John's United Methodist Church Shenandoah, Trinity United Methodist Church Rockingham, Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church Edinburgh, Wesley Chapel United Methodist Church Cross Junction, Wesley United Methodist Church Winchester, White Hall United Methodist Church.

From the Three Notch District, Bethlehem United Methodist Church Nelson, Beulah United Methodist Church, Calvary United Methodist Church, Mount Olivet United Methodist Church Syria, Oak Grove United Methodist Church Madison. From Valley Ridge. Bethlehem United Methodist Church, Burnsville United Methodist Church, Eden United Methodist Church Bath County, Iron Gate United Methodist Church, Lyndhurst United Methodist Church, Mount Carmel United Methodist Church, Prices Forks United Methodist Church, Saint Paul's United Methodist Church Craigsville, St. Paul's United Methodist Church Stanton, Sherando United Methodist Church, Virginia Chapel United Methodist Church. Walton Memorial United Methodist Church.

Following a meeting between the pastor and/or a group of [inaudible 00:34:55] of the subject church and the district superintendent of the district of the Virginia Annual Conference in which the subject church is located, the district superintendent called a congregational information meeting for the members of the subject church to discuss the interest of the subject church in disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church. The members of the subject church engaged in a process of discernment in the manner prescribed by the Cabinet of the conference regarding the possibility of the subject church's disaffiliating from the United Methodist Church pursuant to paragraph 2553 of the Book of Discipline.

Following such discernment, the members elected by majority vote to proceed with the disaffiliation process at a church conference called by the district superintendent and conducted in accordance with paragraph 248 of the Discipline with prior notice having been given. In accordance with paragraph 246.8 of the Discipline, the members of the subject church elected by a two-thirds or greater vote to approve the Disaffiliation Agreement dated October 7, 2023 between the subject church and the conference, which agreement contains the terms and conditions established by the conference Board of Trustees with the advice of the Cabinet, Treasurer, Benefits Officer, Director of Connectional Ministries and Chancellor of the conference.

The subject church has delivered to the conference Board of Trustees the Disaffiliation Agreement signed by the trustees of the subject church and the \$5,000 deposit as required under the terms of the Disaffiliation Agreement. Now therefore, be it resolved that the recitals contained in the whereas paragraphs above are incorporated into this resolution by this reference. The Disaffiliation Agreement between each of the subject churches listed on Attachment A and the conference is hereby ratified. The Treasurer of the conference is authorized to execute the Disaffiliation Agreement on behalf of the conference.

The disaffiliation of each of the subject churches listed in Attachment A from the denomination under paragraph 2553 of the Discipline and the transfer of certain properties pursuant to the Disaffiliation Agreement to the successor to each subject church free of the trust clause as provided for under paragraph 2501 of the Discipline and other transactions and agreements described in the Disaffiliation Agreement shall be effective in each case as of the closing as that term is defined in the Disaffiliation Agreement subject to the terms and conditions set forth in the Disaffiliation Agreement.

Any members of the subject churches that desire to remain a member of a church within the United Methodist Church shall be invited to become a member of their pre-designated churches as previously communicated by their district superintendent.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Mrs. Lutman. This motion comes before us directly from the conference Board of Trustees. We have before us a vote to ratify these 120 churches pursuant in paragraph 2553 of the Discipline. The motion is before us for discussion and the floor is open for debate on this motion.

If you'd like to speak in favor of or against the motion, please let us know.

Reverend King, I'm going to give this one three minutes because it's a little more at stake than [inaudible 00:40:10] the conference. As we wait, I invite you to be in silent prayer for each of these churches and for our annual conference.

Debate on the motion. I'm going to bring it before the annual conference for a vote. The motion before you is the one made to vote to ratify 120 churches pursuant to 2553 of the Discipline. A vote yes to ratify, a vote no to not ratify. The vote is now open. You'll have a minute to vote.

The vote is now closed, if you'll post the results. By 92% the ratification for the disaffiliation of these churches has passed. I thank you for your attendance today. I hope you join with me. Looking at those pictures of all those churches, I felt such profound sadness. The total, and I know there's a lot of question about how this affects the annual conference, our total disaffiliation is 220 churches. We have 875 left. It marks 20.3% of the churches in the annual conference and 10.58% of the membership of the annual conference.

I expect some of that 10.58, almost 11%, will remain with the United Methodist Church because we haven't discerned who's staying and who's going. Regardless, to lose 10% of the membership of our body, and I love how the Apostle Paul talks about the body of Christ and it is our body, and I feel a profound sense of severance and amputation and loss. I watch those churches and the pictures and I think of the baptisms, and the weddings, and the memorial services and the saints in the church who knew Christ there, who were taught about him, who have entered into our hope of the resurrection already.

I think of the labor and the time and the energy, the evangelism, the joy, the potluck dinners, how many calories went through those churches and it's just sad to me that we have lost that part of our body. I wish them well. I wish them tremendous mission and bigger. I wish that all of us will have a new sense of what's urgent about our ministry, that we will all move outside of our churches, that we will reconnect with our communities and that we will truly do, as John Wesley said, I love his sermon. He says, "Your only mission, your only work is to save souls."

We have gotten sidetracked in many ways. We have lost our focus and I hope for all of us we refocus. I'm well aware that after every amputation there's phantom pain and we will have pain in our body for years to come because of this. I mourn the loss of relationships. I mourn the division. I mourn that we could not come to some way to hold this body of Christ together, but I pray that the Holy Spirit will be

powerfully with each of us doing its comforting work, doing its renewing, work doing its uniting work because I've always understood where the Holy Spirit is, there is unity.

As we move toward annual conference next year, we have discerned together, the leaders of the Worship Team and I, that our annual conference theme this year will be called our annual conference, A Conference in Three Movements, much like music. Sonatas, concertos, all of them have movements. We're going to focus and I hope you in our remaining United Methodist Churches, all 875 of you, I hope you'll focus on these three movements. The first movement is the movement of the Holy Spirit, the movement of the Holy Spirit whose work in us is to transform us to perfection and love.

The movement of the Holy Spirit in our body is to spread scriptural holiness and powerful compassionate love throughout our entire land. That's the first movement, the work of the Holy Spirit. The second movement is our United Methodist heritage. The early Methodist, the Methodist Movement. Those early Methodists saw that the church needed to be renewed and went outside the walls of the church with renewed vigor and passion to reach those who nobody else was reaching to focus on who had no voice and no presence in the church. I ask that we consider that our mandate in this next chapter of Unit United Methodism.

The third movement is movement outside our walls as the early Methodists did. I want you to become experts on your community. I want you to know whose hearts are breaking and who needs the love of Christ in special ways all throughout your community. Too many of our churches have become private chapels, social clubs, and places where the mission of the church has been largely left to others. And so, let's renew ourselves. We have a new chapter. We are going strong. Our best days are before us. 875 churches, we can wreak a lot of havoc. That's probably not what I should say, but we can foment a lot of change in our communities, change in communities who are just aching in our own annual conference, opioid abuse, addiction.

Let's go down the list. Single parents, homeless. It's just vast. I've said many times that I wish I had a small church in the 1950s. Of course, I wouldn't have been ordained in the 1950s, but then I think a small church in these small communities could handle the problems. But now, the problems are too complex. We need to partner with other United Methodist Churches. The connection is desperately needed as it's never been needed before, to partner with other faith communities, other churches, other groups to partner with law enforcement and education to partner with political systems. It was going to be an all hands on deck time because of the division and the agony and the misery in our communities demands a holistic approach and the church has never been so needed.

I pray that you'll stir up within you again the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which I have not seen as much as I'd like to. Love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, generosity and self-control, those are the marks of a follower of Christ. Those are the marks of a person who is yielding to the loving power of the Holy Spirit. We need the fruits now in all of our relationships, in all of our time together. Let's focus on that. If you can't do the fruits of the spirit. My dad, I was thinking of my dad today, and he was a faithful Rotarian most of his life. This was posted in our house since I was a small child and it's called the Four-Way test.

And before you think or say or do anything, you ask these four questions, is it the truth? Is it fair to all concerned? Will it build goodwill and better friendships? Will it be beneficial to all concerned? If you're weak on the fruits of the spirit, this four-way test would be a good place to start. I'm going to close with the words of the Apostle Paul before I offer prayer. Let me offer prayer and then I will close with the words of Apostle Paul. So let's pray together. Oh Lord, we are hurting. We are hurting from loss and division. We are hurting from frayed relationship and mean-spirited words. We are hurting because we the church who are supposed to be the agents of reconciliation in the world to model your reconciliation to us, oh God, we have failed in our vital task.

Oh Lord, we grieve this and we ask for your power, the power of your Holy Spirit, which is the only hope we have to do better. Pour out your Holy Spirit afresh on the United Methodists of the Virginia Annual Conference, on all United Methodists, on all who follow and call themselves by the name of Christ that we may be a force of love, a force of unity, a force of joy. Stir up in us a new desire to extend your love to others and to save souls. We thank you oh Lord, for your presence along the way. We thank you, oh Lord, for bearing with your church through centuries of disagreement and schism. By your power, help us to do better. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

I'll read these words. Paul was always writing to churches in conflict. In some odd ways, it's comforting that churches have been in conflict since day one, but this is what he wrote to the church at Philippi. And this is my benediction to you. May it be so. "Finally, dear ones, dear ones in Christ, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." May the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the binding, unity and fellowship of the Holy Spirit be here now and forever. Amen. (silence)