

In accordance with action by the Annual Conference body during the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference, these Minutes are the result of transcription and oversight by the Minutes Committee. Clergy Session was recorded by the Conference Secretary. In subsequent years, the official “Minutes” of the Virginia Annual Conference will be the transcription of the livestreamed event.

DAILY PROCEEDINGS

242nd Session

The Virginia Annual Conference

Hampton Convention Center

Hampton, VA

June 20-22, 2024

Thursday Morning, June 20, 2024

LAITY SESSION

The Laity Session began at 8:30 a.m. Martha Stokes, conference lay leader, and musicians, Ms. Madison Elliott and Ms. Kim Young. Ms. Stokes recognized the lay ministry during the session. When a pastoral charge is not able to be served by an ordained or licensed minister, the bishop, upon recommendation of the cabinet, may assign a qualified and trained layperson, lay minister or lay missionary to do the work of ministry in that charge. The Lay Supply class of 2024 included: Susan Ayers, Louis Joseph Berkeszi, Catherine Berry, Bonnie-Karen Byrne, Scarlett Danraj, Angela Renee Dickerson, Eric Scott Fury, Bobby Joe Gardner, Sadie Cabaniss Hawthorne, Frank Johnson, Kelly Morris, Alexis Ward Owens, Benjamin Smith, and Brandon Zobel.

A certified lay minister is called and equipped to conduct public worship, care for the congregation, assist in program leadership, develop new and existing faith communities, preach the Word, lead small groups, and establish community outreach ministries with members of the faith community. The Certified Lay Ministers, Class of 2024 included: Aurora G. Concepcion, James Arthur Granger, Gloria Jeannie Hearn,

Virginia Ruth Jones, Lauren K. Leggett, Laura Summers Maher, Tricia O'Hara, Gary Franklin Riley, Jennifer Ann Secki Shields, and Wanda Gail Von Mosch.

Amy Purdom was recognized in her ministry in the Office of Deaconess that was first authorized in the Methodist tradition in 1888.

Thursday Morning, June 20, 2024

CLERGY SESSION

At 8:33 AM, Rev. Jessie Colwell, Director, Center for Clergy Excellence, welcomed the clergy and guests to the Clergy Executive Session of the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference. Rev. Colwell invited clergy to a Clergy Day Apart on October 10, 2024, at Floris United Methodist Church.

Opening worship was led by the chairs of Orders: Rev. Lyndsie Blakely, Chair, Order of Deacons; Rev. David Edinger, Chair, Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors; and Rev. Darcey Johnson, Chair, Order of Elders; and Rev. Marcus Stallworth. Music was provided by Rev. Drew Willson. The sign language interpreters for the session were Ms. Katherine McMullen, Ms. Nancy Martin, and Ms. Virginia Bryant. Marshals were Rev. Susan Hannah, Rev. Sarah Locke, Rev. Brian Johnson, and Rev. Mikang Kim.

Rev. Edinger gave a sermon about God's dreams for us based on the Scripture Acts 2:17.

Rev. Tammy Estep, Chair, Board of Ordained Ministry, recognized the end of the quadrennium and thus also recognized the end of the term for our Chairs of Orders. Rev. Jessie Colwell recognized Rev. Tammy Estep, Chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry for her work.

Rev. Estep shared the responsibility of the clergy to help those who are hearing the call to ministry to recognize God's call on their lives. Rev. David Vaughan, Chair, Ethics Committee, encouraged the clergy of the Virginia Conference to not share their papers with those who are interviewing through the licensing, commissioning, and ordination process as this has led to ethical dilemmas of plagiarism through the process.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, Resident Bishop, Richmond Episcopal Area, has shared the relationship of the Episcopal Authority and Sacramental Authority in that the Episcopacy has always had the ability to extend sacramental authority to deacons and has now announced that in light of the recent vote of General Conference, that all Deacons will have Sacramental Authority effective this day. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson clarified that she does not have authority to allow Provisional Members or Licensed Local Pastors authority outside of their own pastoral appointments. She also thanked all Pastors for their continued ministry through the recent difficult times within the church, She encouraged all Pastors to continue to support one another.

She shared a passage from John 16 reminding all that Christ said we “will have tribulations” and encouraged the assembly to “be of good cheer” because God has overcome the world. In conclusion, she shared the focus of this annual conference is to reclaim our spiritual disciplines and encouraged each member to read:

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast, Newly Revised Edition: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.

Wheatley, Margaret. *Who Do We Choose to Be? Facing Reality, Claiming Leadership, Restoring Sanity*. Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 2017.

Rev. Tammy Estep, Chair, Board of Ordained Ministry, explained the purpose of the Board of Ordained Ministry and outlined the core values of the Board of Ordained Ministry. She began with a word of prayer and shared the purpose of the lit candle is to remind us of God’s presence.

Rev. Estep then led the Clergy Executive Session through the Minute Questions beginning by explaining who has voice and vote.

Rev. Estep moved for the voting bar of the clergy session to be Ballrooms D, E, F, and G at the Hampton Roads Convention Center.

The motion was approved.

Rev. Estep moved we admit to this session with voice and no vote: all diaconal ministers, the administrative staff in the Bishop’s Office, Terri Biggins; those on Minute Question 16; the Conference Chancellor, Heather Hays Lockerman; and American Sign Language Interpreters Ms. Katherine McMullen and Ms. Virginia Bryant. The motion was approved.

Rev. Estep led the members in the presentation of the Minute Questions. The entire printed booklet of Minute Questions, with additions and corrections distributed separately, was presented in an itemized manner. Bishop Haupt-Johnson asked the historic questions of those persons who were to be ordained. Candidates for commissioning, associate membership, recognition of orders and transfer into the conference from other denominations were presented and approved. Persons receiving their first appointment as local pastors in all categories and those who have completed the course of study were invited to the platform to be recognized by the members.

All Deacons who had received their degrees in a specialization were invited to stand and be recognized.

All full time and part time licensed local pastors were approved. Appropriate recognition was given to all persons being received into a new relationship with the Annual Conference at the current session. All retirees were asked to stand and be recognized.

All retirees were called forward. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson gave thanks for their ministry and prayed a blessing over the group for their retirement.

Rev. Denise Bates, Dean, Cabinet, was recognized and she stated,

Recognizing that ‘all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’ (Romans 3:23), and that throughout the year, areas of concern have been identified and complaints or charges filed, we the appointive cabinet, do believe that the licensed, commissioned, and ordained clergy are earnestly striving after perfection and are blameless in their life and in their official administration.

All other Minute Questions requiring a vote were passed with the required majorities as written in the Clergy Session booklet, addendum, including corrections.

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson prayed for the clergy who have left the Annual Conference and for those who have joined this Annual Conference, in addition she prayed that the fruits of the Spirit fill the clergy during this time.

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson lifted and gave thanks for the clergy members who have joined the communion of saints this previous year. A moment of silence was observed, and Bishop Hauptert-Johnson prayed a prayer of thanksgiving for these saints and prayed for comfort for those who grieve these losses.

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson encouraged the clergy to remain connected to those who are on leave and lifted them in prayer.

Rev. Estep continued leading the body through the Minute Questions, voting upon those Minute Questions which required vote. All votes were approved. Further, elected the new Chairs of Orders for the following Quadrennium. Rev. David Edinger was elected to remain Chair, Fellowship of Associate Members and Licensed Local Pastors (2024-2028); Rev. Lisa McGehee was elected to serve as Chair, Order of Deacons (2024-2028); Rev. Jae Song was elected to serve as Chair, Order of Elders (2024-2028).

Minute Question 71.C was not voted on with the rest of the Minute Questions and was circled back to and was affirmed.

Rev. Estep recognized and thanked Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson for her leadership over the past year. She further asked the Cabinet to stand and to be recognized for sharing their gifts and so much of their time for the conference. She then asked the Board of Ordained Ministry and the District Committees on Ordained Ministry to stand and thanked the Board and Committees for their work over the past year.

Rev. Estep thanked the staff of the Center for Clergy Excellence: Rev. Jessie Colwell, Director, Rev. Crystal Sygeel, Associate Director of Call and Candidacy, and Rev. Lyn Harding, Administrative Coordinator.

Rev. Jessie Colwell then presented a commissioned stole to Rev. Crystal Sygeel who will be returning to the local church this year.

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson adjourned the Clergy Executive Session with a blessing at 10:17 AM.

Thursday Morning, June 20, 2024

WORSHIP

The Opening Worship Service began at 10:30 a.m. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson called the 242nd Annual Conference into session and invited the oldest member, Rev. Jim Godwin, and the youngest member, Benton Crigger, to lead in prayer. The worship began with interpretive dancing to Genesis 28:10-22, the story of Jacob sleeping at the well and awaking to the overwhelming presence of God.

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.

Bishop Sue reminded us that God is on the grid. Jacob wakes up at the well and realizes that God is there with him. Heaven is breaking in all around us – we are not always aware of it! She challenged us to focus on our own spiritual disciplines. She often challenges people to just sit in silence. We are on the grid, every single human being and God is beside us. 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.

The Service ended with a time of Communion presided by Bishop Sue and Deacon Rev. Lyndsie Blakely and anointing. The conference offering was also taken.

Thursday Afternoon, June 20, 2024

TEACHING SESSION

Speakers of this session include:

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, resident Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, pastor of The Nett Church and District Superintendent of the Central East District in the North Georgia Conference

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page, VAUMC Director of Connectional Ministries for Innovation & Creativity

Rev. Woo Kang, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, Associate Pastor of The Nett Church and the Lead Pastor of At The Table in the North Georgia Conference

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, pastor, professor, and author

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I am going to call this session to order because I want to make sure we're on schedule. I should have remembered this morning that when you add anointing to the service, it takes lots of time, but I think it's worth it and I hope you enjoyed it. I loved watching people be anointed. There's something that's very special about that moment and taking the time to do it.

This afternoon, I am very excited. This is an annual conference in three movements and I hope you will learn those movements by the time we're done. The first movement is the movement in the human heart from the beginning of turning to God through prevenient grace to perfection and love, and that's a lifetime journey, a long journey, but we're all on it together. That's the first movement.

The second movement is the Methodist movement that John and Charles Wesley began in the 1700s, a movement that saw that the church was too much the frozen chosen. The church was too privileged, the church was too blind to all of the ills around it, and so John Wesley cracked it open and said, "The world is my parish and I will go anywhere where people need to know Christ." The church must be open to all people, all races, all social levels, all educational levels, and we celebrate that as part of our Methodist heritage.

The third movement is the movement from inside your church to outside to the community, and that's what we celebrate. That's our Methodist heritage, that we are a vital force in our communities to introduce people to Christ and introduce change and changed lives on their behalf.

I have three great teachers for you. I'm so delighted. Two of the three I have worked closely with, and the third one I can't wait to hear, but today we'll first hear from Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz. Rodrigo was on my cabinet in north Georgia. He started the Nett Church, which is one of the truly multi-ethnic, multi-racial,

multi-national churches I've ever seen. And it's like playing risk with Rodrigo. He just keeps taking churches. If there's a church around, he'll ask you for it because he'll open and he'll make it vibrant. He just has the gift of creating fantastic churches. And sadly now, he's going to be the assistant to the bishop, so we pulled him out of the church. But he will be directing all of North Georgia's movement across the annual conference to new vitality and new growth in his churches. So he will explore the first movement with us.

The second person is Dr. Michael Beck, who I've known even longer than Rodrigo. Michael and I served in Florida together and I saw him from his very beginnings in ministry. I got him through the DCOM. I think we could say that. Can't we say that? Yeah. I got him through the District Committee on Ministry. He has a life story you won't believe, and I'm sure he'll share some of that with you. But he also has started vibrant churches in Florida, churches that really, a lot of churches, we want our folks cleaned already when they come, and Rodrigo (Michael) will take anybody where they are, whatever status of life they find them in, and he will help them know Christ and move them toward perfection and love.

So Woo Kang is also a great leader in the fresh Expressions movement and I can't wait to hear from him, as well. Jonathan Page, our Director of Connectional Ministries for Innovation and something else, I can't even remember the title, but he's the King of Innovation, that's what I call him. But he saw these three teaching and said, "We need to share this with all of you." So it is my great joy to introduce to you Rodrigo Cruz, Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz as he comes to teach us today.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Thank you, Bishop. Bishop Sue told me I could do this in Spanish. Is that correct with you guys? Well, let us start with a prayer.

"Dios que las palabras de mi boca que la meditación de nuestros corazones sean gratas delante de ti. Que yo decrezca para que tú crezcas en esta mañana en el hombre Jesús a. (God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. May I decrease so that you may increase this morning in the man Jesus. Amen)"

If it's okay with you, Bishop, I'll just move a little bit away from the stage. April 9th of 2007, the day that in the Methodist world, or in the church life we call Easter Monday, the Monday that follows Easter, and I remember that day because that was the Easter Monday after I preached, for the first time ever, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

You see, I moved from Mexico with my wife and my six-month-old baby in the fall of 2006. We moved so I could go to seminary, but before I was able to do that, before I was able to go to licensing school, a United Methodist church in north Georgia that was trying to reach the Hispanic Latino community, they offered me a job. I have no qualification or theological training outside of being Mexican-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

He's a lawyer.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Which speaks to some of the systematic issues that we have, but that's a story for another day.

So I joined the staff in November. In December, we start gathering people, and on Easter we launch worship in that church. So Easter Sunday was my first time preaching. Some people claimed that was my best sermon, some people claimed that was my worst sermon, and it was probably truth in both cases.

26, maybe 27 hours later, I was at home on that Monday around three o'clock and my phone rings. As I pick up the phone on the other side of that phone, there was a lady screaming, crying in complete panic, trying to get me to her house. "Can you find a way to come to my home?" She said. I got in my car. I drove towards that apartment complex. I pull into the parking lot, which was already full, perhaps with 200, maybe 300 people right there. Parked my car. I found myself making a way through the body to the apartment where she was. The door was open, there were people in and out. Through the bodys, I make myself away to the room in the back where she was. And as I walk into that room full of people there she was on her knees with her hands on her head on her bed.

I approached her, I touched her shoulder, and before a word came out of my mouth, she looked at me as a preacher. "Did you believe what you preached yesterday?" I told you that was my first time preaching ever. And if there is something that I learned as a preacher is that by Monday, I have no idea what I say on Sunday.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Exactly. That's so true.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

I wasn't going to tell her that, so I just simply ask her, "Ma'am, are you okay?" And in her crying, in her desperation with a broken voice, she said, "You said yesterday that Jesus rose from the dead." I said, "Yes ma'am." "And then you said that those who believe in Jesus can experience the same." You see, it was in that moment where I learned that a couple of hours earlier, her twelve-year-old son was riding his bicycle in the parking lot of the apartment complex, and as the rain was coming down and he found or tried to found his way back to his apartment, he was struck by lightning and was killed instantly.

So she was on her knees, her hands went over the bed, and on top of that bed was the body of a twelve-year-old boy without breathing. And then she asked me the question that, to be honest, I was dreading she was going to ask and she said, "Pastor, can you pray for my son to come back to life?" There has nothing that I have experienced in life before that had me ready for that moment. That was before ordination, that was before seminary, that was before working in the church. And I tell you that after doing all those things, I'm still not sure if I'd be able to answer that question. But when she asked, "Can you pray for my son to come back to life to rise?" I said, "Yes, ma'am." And I prayed for that boy and I put every ounce of faith that I had in those words.

And I wish I can tell you here that after my words of that prayer, that boy opened his eyes that lung fill, that air fill his lung, that he wake up and he was able to hug his mom. But that was not the case. And three days later, I found myself officiating my first funeral ever. You see, during those three days between the moment of his passing and his funeral, my conversations with mom were full of questions. Probably the

question that you anticipate and you expect. Why did God do this? You saying God, the one who controls the weather and the lightning and the storms. And as I was trying to explain her in a raw way that I didn't think was God who did it, then her question shifted to, "Well, if God didn't do it, why did God allow this to take place?" And as I was one more time trying to explain her why I didn't think it was that simple, then she raised the question that was eating her alive the most. "What happen to my son now?"

She went to told me that she grew up in Guatemala and she went to church for several years, but when she was seven years old, she stopped attending church. She had been in the United States for 20 years and she had never been in church before, but once, 24 hours ago. And that son was 12 years old, he had never been in church but once, 24 hours before. And she went and said, "I don't think me or my son believe in God. I don't think we fully understand Jesus and everything that you said. So what happen to my son? Where is my child right now?"

You see, without the seminary training, without writing questions for the Board of Ordained Ministry, somehow in that moment, I found myself having to explain to her what eventually I learned, it was called prevenient grace. Telling this mom that God's love for your child goes beyond the fact that he may have acknowledged that or not. The fact that he was able to understand that or not, or the fact that he was able to believe it or not, that God's love was there, that he didn't have to go to church to experience God's love, that he didn't have to go to Sunday school class to experience God's grace, that he didn't have to read the Bible in Hebrew or Greek or English to experience God's grace. That's what God's love is.

And it was also in that moment that I started wrestling with what the role of the church is when it comes down to prevenient grace, because it was in that moment that I acknowledged that, as a church, we have two roles; either we can be an instrument for them to acknowledge that God's love is there, or might as well we just get out of the way.

I told you, I was born and raised in Monterrey, Mexico, and one of the things that I appreciate about Mexico was every time that short-term mission teams will come to Monterrey, and I'm thankful for them, they brought my wife to me, and I'm sure she's thankful for that. But every once in a while, there will be that mission team that will claim that they were there to bring us Jesus.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Who claim that they were there to bring us Jesus. And I remember, as a child and as a teenager, hearing those words and thinking, so does that mean that God wasn't here before? So if I don't do the Vacation Bible School song that you want me to do, if I don't play with that sacky ball that you want me to play, if I don't drink the Kool-Aid that you're making or eat the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, which I still don't eat, does that mean that God is not there? The role of the church when it comes down to God's grace, to the movement of the Holy Spirit with God's prevenient grace, is to allow God to use us, to work in us or through us. And God will work despite of us, and might as well we get out of the way.

But the beauty of our understanding of grace as Wesleyans is not that God's love is just limited to that prevenient moment, but it actually moves us to that moment when we could recognize that we need Jesus Christ in our lives, that we are sinners, that we are separated from God. John Wesley uses the word like justifying grace, that moment when you acknowledge your sins. And there's a role for the church in that type of grace as well.

You see, this past Easter, I preached my 18th year of preaching Easter sermons. And this is the first time that I actually preached this story a little bit different. I just simply did not tell the story of what happened with Jesus on the cross and on the tomb and how that impacts everyone. I actually told that story from Judas' and Peter's perspective. And you know that story, Judas was the one that betrayed Jesus. Peter was the one that denied Jesus. And you remember the story of Judas, right? He goes to the religious leaders, they gave him some money. He goes and betrays Jesus.

But if you read right between that and Easter Sunday, there is those moments where you get a glimpse that Judas regrets what took place when Jesus found himself with the weight perhaps of sin in his life. And where did he go? He went back to church. He went back to these religious leaders, with the weight in his heart of what I did was wrong. And what did he find in there? Judgment. They threw the coins back to the floor and they said, "That's your problem what you're dealing with. That's not our problem." You see, on the other hand, Peter, who denied Jesus one, two, and three times. He found himself also with the weight of what he did. And in that case, where did he go? He went straight to the empty tomb when he met Jesus, and he went and changed the course of history. You see, the role of the church matters when people are looking for Jesus. It's not that complicated when it comes down in pointing people to Christ. It's about creating this credible witness of God's love.

Me and my wife, we have five kids. I think there may be a picture here on the screen. The younger two, which is the blonde one that is feral, fighting my wife, and Benjamin who is adopted from China. So the younger two are adopted. And adoption is part of their story and they know that. And we tell them that. In January, Ben, who is nine, came home one day and he was visibly upset about something that happened at school. We were having dinner at the table. And after several attempts to try to get out of him whatever it was that was bothering him, I said, "Ben, what's wrong?" And then he finally broke crying. He said, "Do you know my friend Johnny from school?" I said, "Yeah, I know Johnny." "Well, he said that you guys are not my real family, that you guys are my fake family, that my real family is in China."

So in that moment, all I'm thinking is, how do I get to school and have a one-on-one meeting with Johnny? I know there are rules and laws about that, but how do I have a meeting with Johnny? So I told Ben, "Ben, I'm going to go and have lunch with you tomorrow." And I told the older three, his three older three siblings, I said, "Guys, you're not going to school tomorrow. You're coming with me." And I was telling Gabe, who is the 12-year-old, who is the closest in age. I said, "We're going to go and meet with Ben and you better look for Johnny."

And before I finished the statement, I have my wife looking at me saying, "Dude, remember you're a pastor and I'm a teacher? Watch out what you said." And before I finished my sentence, Ben who was sitting in a bench that we have, he pulled off the bench and said, "Dad, you don't understand." He stood up and started telling me this, "I told Johnny that there is no way that you guys are not my real family." And then he goes, "Because I was telling Johnny that if I'm all the way here in China, and that you guys are all the way here in America, that somebody that doesn't love me for real will not go all the way over there to come and get me." Still gives me goosebumps.

That's the role of the church. That somebody, as they're going through whatever it is that they're going through, that they can acknowledge that they're over here loving God, that sent not only his son, Jesus Christ, but the church to create a credible love for them. That there is no way that the love of God is

nothing but real because of the way that church loves me. That's the role of the church when it comes down to justifying grace.

But one more time, one of the things that I love about our Wesleyan theology is that we believe grace not only moves right in the convenient ways and in a justifying way, but it actually moves us towards perfection. John Wesley used this term of sanctifying grace. In a way that moves us for us to be able to respond to God's love back by loving him and loving others, by moving into personal and social holiness. And my friends, that grace in the church, it gets lived out not on Sunday mornings. It gets lived out from Monday to Saturday. I mean, on Sunday mornings it's easy. We as pastors, we tell you where to stand, when to sit, what to read, what to pray, what to sing. We make it really easy for you. Living your faith on Sunday morning, that ain't hard. Living your faith from Monday to Saturday, that's when it becomes real. Showing your true identity, how you walk the talk, that's when things matter.

My oldest son, he just finished high school. Gosh, thank you Jesus for that. He's a good kid, and we're grateful for who he is. But he was this close not to finish high school. There was one particular class that he struggled the most. And no, it wasn't physics. No, it wasn't biology. No, it wasn't math, common core, or old math, or whatever math you want to say. It was Spanish. And I'm like, "Dude, are you kidding me? I can't help you with biology. I can't pronounce half the stuff that they teach you in school. Can't help you with math. They're teaching new ways of doing math that make no sense. But I can't help you with that. But Spanish?"

All year long, he was between 60 and 65. And we're just praying for that boy to finish high school. So we sent him to school on his last day of school. And then he comes back that day, said, "Dad, I passed the test." He put his hand up for a high five. He says, "I got a hundred in my test." My first reaction was, "Boy, you cheated." There's no way you are failing the whole year. And all of a sudden you got a hundred in a test. I said, "Boy, you cheated on that test." He said, "No, dad, I didn't. I promise you." He goes and said, "At the end of the day, my Mexican just kicked in." And I'm like, "Dude, I'm Mexican, and I don't even know how that works." But he was right about something. At the end of the day, who you are shows in life. Integrity comes into place. Moving into perfection shows who we are as a church.

Let me finish with this. April 18th of 2008, there was 53 Mondays later. For 53 straight weeks, I went to this mom's house and met with her. Sometimes we pray, sometimes we read the Bible, sometimes we just cry, sometimes we laugh. Sometimes we just sat in silence. And as, that week, I was getting up to go home and I said, "I will see you next week." She grabbed my arm, and said, "Pastor, I don't need you to come back." I said, "Ma'am, it is my privilege to be here with you." She said, "No, you don't understand. Remember I asked you where my son was? I know where my son is. He's risen in glory with Jesus Christ. I don't need you to come back. But what I need from you," she said, "is that you go and find somebody else that doesn't know that. And you tell them that."

I have those words in my mind and in my heart, as loud as I had the bishop's hands in my shoulders saying, "Take thou authority," when I was ordained. Being in the church is not that complicated. Being part of what the Holy Spirit is doing, moving through grace, it's not that hard. Most of the times, all's required from us is just to show up. Sometimes to shut up and to let God show off. That's the role of the church in this movement of grace.

Let me pray. God, we just give you thanks for the way You invite us to be part of this movement of grace in this world. God, for us individually, as we recognize what you're doing in our lives, as we recognize your love for us, before we can respond to it, God we give you thanks for the fact that you enable us to acknowledge our sinful nature. But God, we also give you thanks for the possibility to be part of your redeeming plan for this world. God, I pray for the Virginia Annual Conference that you'll continue to let them be used by you and by your Holy Spirit as you reach every single human being that exists within the boundaries or the state of Virginia and beyond. We pray that in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Congregation:

Amen.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Friends, would you join me in offering Rodrigo a word of gratitude for his wise words?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Thank you, man.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Rodrigo, I think we're all blessed by the words you've just shared with us. And the prevailing word that comes to my mind is the word grace. And so much of what you had to share is really about the fluid movement of grace, and that it's not something that's just stagnant or where you've kind of accomplished this one thing and move to the next thing. That there's this constant motion.

And so what I wonder for all of us who are here, is if you might take a moment to just reach out to a neighbor. It doesn't matter if you've known that person for a decade or a decimal of a second, I want you to just take a moment to talk to your neighbor about how have you experienced the fluidity of grace? In other words, how have you maybe experienced God's grace in your life in a way that maybe it's moved from one understanding to another? So we're going to take about two minutes. This isn't going to be a long time. One minute for one partner, one minute for the other, and just talk about how have you seen God's grace at work in your life? Let's take a moment to do that together.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

I hope that was [inaudible 00:48:21]. And I think we sometimes look at grace like, okay, I achieve one level. I go to the next one. [inaudible 00:48:45].

Rev. Jonathan Page:

All right. So take just about 20 seconds to finish up those last conversations, if you would. And then we're going to come back together so that we can have a couple of questions for Rodrigo and bring the rest of our panel up. All right, so as you're wrapping up, I'll tell you one thing that we talked about that I thought was funny, was that sometimes we can treat grace like a video game, where you have to beat a boss to get

to the next level. And then you just kind of progress forward. And that so often the way that grace really works is that there's this fluid motion and there's this beautiful fluidity that's present.

Rodrigo, when you were speaking to us, one of the things that you talked about is the idea of the role of the church being to sometimes show up and sometimes shut up, and that we are called to create a credible witness of God's love. I wonder, just as folks here are representing a lot of different churches from a lot of different contexts, if somebody hears that and says, "Hey, what does it mean to establish that credibility of witness of God's love?" Do you have thoughts about how folks could go about that?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah, I will start by saying, as a church, I believe we don't have the spiritual authority to tell people what to do with their lives if we cannot even call them by name. But if we don't even have a relationship with them, if we don't even try to find a way, what their journey of life is, I believe perhaps the 90% role of the church when it comes down to meeting people where they are, is just to go and hear people's stories. It is just to go and find out what their journey of life has been. It is actually doing more of the listening than the talking. And often, it isn't in them telling their own story. In us listening that God gives us what we need to say, versus we just running in to tell them what we want to say.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Well, and within that, there's probably a little bit of an importance that we're listening and not hearing, right? Because if all we're doing is hearing, it might be just that we're waiting for our chance to speak.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Absolutely.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

And so I wonder, have you seen examples, whether it's at The Nett or in other places in your ministry existence, of what the transformative power of that true listening and that true embodied presence can be with persons in your community?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah. One of the things that we do at The Nettis we are a multiethnic church. We believe in the biblical mandate to reflect here on earth the diversity that we believe exists in heaven. And we believe it's not optional. And we tell people in the church, "We're just trying to give you a glimpse of heaven so when you show up there you know what to do, and not be surprised at anybody that looks like you." And we point people, school systems, sports associations, recreational parks, the business world, they're doing life with one another. It is just in the church where we choose literally not to do life with people that don't look like us so we can be surrounded by people that look like us.

And I know there's fear, and I know there's so many biases that we may have and prejudices that we may have, but what breaks most of those things is just the ability to hear somebody's story. And it's just the ability to go from putting somebody in a giant demographic number, like, oh, you are just one of the

million Hispanics that are here. Or Actually, "Your name is Rodrigo. Can you tell me your story?" And I'll tell you how hard it is as an immigrant to be in this country. And I'll tell you some of my story. And I'm not telling you to agree with my story or not, but I do believe, in the telling of stories, that's where we let God move.

Now, you may be in a place that is racially diverse around you. You may be in a place that is maybe more homogeneous, but socioeconomically is different or politically is different, or there's a reason why people don't come to church. So what it would look like for them to see you meeting them where they are, instead of you keep trying to tell them to come where you are so they can hear you? I love preaching and I love people coming to hear me speak. But I'm thankful that I only get to do it one day of the week, and I have six days that I just get to go and hear people's stories. Somehow we put a lot of energy into this one day that is, come and listen to us. What it would look like if we put all of our energy into the other six days of the week to go and listen to people's stories?

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Sounds a little bit like church to me. Amen. Rodrigo, one of the things that grace does, you talk about this sort of work of the Holy Spirit and the human heart is, for it to happen, well, oftentimes it means that we have to surrender control. I appreciated Bishop Sue calling me the king of innovation. I'd actually say, my wife and others would probably tell you I'm the king of being a control freak. So this question's for me, and probably nobody else in the room. I don't think anybody else here is probably a controller. Do you have any practical tips for how people can surrender control over outcomes in their faith journeys to the movement of the spirit?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Man, that's a great question. And I agree with you. I'm a big believer that you can either have surrender or you can have control. You can't have both. In my former life I was a criminal attorney. So I was trained and raised to walk into every situation having a plan A, B, C, D, and E, and an F in the back of my pocket. And I still do that in my life, in my faith journey. And I found myself often turning something to God in prayer, say, "God, I'm going to put this in your lap." And two minutes later was like, "Dude, you don't know what you're doing. I'm going to take it back and I'm going to go and do it myself."

And I found myself doing that so often. So one day I was just getting tired of that wrestling because it was exhausting. I grabbed one of the pillows in my bed. I took the pillow out so I have the cover of the pillow. And I got a Sharpie, and I wrote on that pillow and I put, "God or Rodrigo?" And I put it underneath my bed with my journal. And every time that I have something heavy in my heart, I will write it in my journal. And when I'm going to give it to God, I will put it in the pillowcase and put it underneath my bed.

Now what that does is I'm not just able to grab it. I have five kids, so there's Cheetos and Cheez-its and all kind of random stuff. I literally have to go and get on my knees, sneak my arms under my bed to drag that pillowcase and physically take it away from God. And I'll tell you that nine out of ten times, when I'm doing that process, I just put it back. And for me, I need that physical reminder to, "Okay, God, you have it. I'm going to give it to you, and I'm going to wait."

Rev. Jonathan Page:

That's beautiful. I think that's so, so beautiful. Well, hey, I'm going to ask you a question, but I'm also wanting to invite Michael and Woo to come up. I'm going to ask them this question too, and they're going to be teaching us later in our annual conference session. So Rodrigo, I'm curious, one of the things, so when we get to that point in the listening space with folks who may be in our community or outside our church and we want to talk theologically with them. Let's say we've done the work of listening. We want to be able to talk about something like grace. How do you see the ability to tackle those deeper theological conversations in non-intimidating or non-threatening ways? And then we'll point to you all to answer the same question.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah, I'll start with this. I like to use words that I can pronounce. So that eliminates a lot of heavy theological words out of my dictionary. But I really see theological understanding of God, the way I draw closer to God. And I relate that a lot in the way I draw closer to my kids. It doesn't matter what I read in a book to be a good father. It doesn't matter how many DVDs, well, nobody watches DVDs anymore, but how many things I stream to be a good father? It doesn't matter how many professionals I see on TV telling you this is how you do it. It is really until you do it.

And the way I do it is I have to be intentional to care about the things that they care. Because when I care about the things that they care, all of a sudden I draw closer with them. One of them cares about football. Makes no sense to me, but they care about football. So I have to care about football when I relate to him. Another one cares about lacrosse. Well, I have to care about lacrosse if I want to relate to him. One other one cares about softball. So I have to show an interest into softball if I want to draw closer to my kid. The same thing with God. I mean, if you start showing an interest in the things that God cares the most, and what is that? It's God's creation. If you start caring for the things that God cares the most, and that's people, those are the margins, that's those that are the least, the last, the lost. You'll draw closer to God by having that than by any book that you can read, in my humble opinion.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Absolutely. I think that's helpful. Michael, Woo, any thoughts about how do you be non-intimidating in community presence?

Rev. Woo Kang:

So you guys will learn more tomorrow. But my context as in The Nett, but also leading one of our campus is called At the Table, which is specifically trying to serve young people, twenties, thirties, or young at heart that have been hurt by the church, don't want anything to do with the church. And we find ourselves in a lot of these conversations. And something that I have found helpful is, do not go into these conversations with answers, but be able to go into these conversations with the heart of, I'm here to walk with you.

And the biggest thing that I found was being able to say, "I don't know". And I think as pastors, we want to be controlling and we have to have all the answers. But if they ask me something that I'm still wrestling

with, and I'll humbly say, "I'm still wrestling with a lot." I can say, "You know what? I don't know. But how about we go with this together?" And that has been the biggest advice that I can give myself if, Woo, it's okay. You have to do your work, but it is okay to say, I don't know. Because the moment I say, I don't know, it's not showing that I am weak. Instead, it's showing that I'm being vulnerable with you, and that allows you to be vulnerable with me.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck:

As Rodrigo was sharing, I was thinking about, historically, Methodist, these waves of grace, they happen in community. So there were these social constructs, societies, classes, and bands where people were working through grace together. And the inclusive nature of the society, the only requirement for membership was a desire to flee their wrath to come. Probably not helpful language in the 21st century, that we want to scare the hell out of people into church. But that was inclusive language in the 1700s, right? The only requirement is some desire to move towards God.

So let me, to get in a practical space. So we're sitting around in a tattoo parlor. We have a thing called Tattoo Talk. We go around the circle, and everybody shares the story behind their tattoo. So sometimes that's, "I got this hummingbird on my arm from when my mother passed away because I saw a hummingbird that morning." Sometimes it's, "I got this rainbow Jesus fish tattooed over the scars on my wrist to remind me that there's hope from darker seasons of my life, to remind me I'm made in the image of God." Sometimes it's, "I got my child who died of overdose, their handwriting on my forearm, the last note that they wrote to me." And sometimes that's, "I got this poop emoji on my butt cheek when I was drunk at spring break." But there's some spirituality there too, right? There's a conversation there. But people are opening themselves, and the spirit is moving through that conversation-

Rev.... opening themselves and the spirit is moving through that conversation. Then it's not the responsibility of my team to now suddenly do a Romans road prayer or that, it's to follow that spirituality that's opening itself in that room, following that conversation. Then I, as a follower of Jesus, I'm throwing in things like, "Hey, when I went through this in my life, prayer and meditation was really, it's one of my spiritual practices that helps." I'm just throwing that into the conversation as a community of equals. It's like Woo said, we're not trying to answer questions that nobody's asking.

I feel like we've totally failed in our Evangelism kind of models, because we like to answer questions that people aren't asking. Nobody that I know, my generation, younger, is asking the question, how do I not go to hell when I die? When's the last time a young person walked up into you and said, "How do I not go to hell when I die?" But that seems to be like the answer to every question that we have as the church. But what people are really asking is, "How do I not be alone? How do I have meaning and depth and community? How do I have a spirituality that works?" So in dialogical kind of creating community and creating conversation, we just follow the traces of the spirit through those conversations.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I think that's really wise. One thing that emerges as we're talking about this is the concept that so much of what grace does, is it creates the space for invitation. When you think about especially being in community with folks who maybe aren't a part of an existing church or existing faith community or movement, what does that word invitation mean and how do you do that in a way that's not... I think of, I

grew up in Virginia Beach and I can remember going on the boardwalk and there'd be guys with megaphones with the, "Yeah, you're going to hell," repent, all that sort of thing. That doesn't seem like the maybe most effective modality of evangelism or invitation. What are some practical ways to engage that sort of invitational mindset when you have that entry point that's crafted by listening and all of that sort of space with folks in your community?

Rev. Woo Kang:

Breaking bread is really important. Being able to have a space where you can eat together. I joke about this, but if you like someone, you'll grab coffee with them. If they're all right, you'll grab them lunch. If you love them, you're going to have dinner with them. I think having that sense of invitation is inviting people into your home, literally. Creating spaces where you can eat together and spend time together and serve one another.

Just a quick story is at the table, we had a young lady, early thirties who was really burnt and hurt by the church going to a homogenous church. She came to us, she was very committed, and one day she comes in and we're having service and she starts crying and just bawling for no... It wasn't like that time that you should be crying, but she was just crying. Nothing profound was said. I was like, "Hey, why are you crying?" She said, "This is the first time in my life that I was able to come to church with no makeup on and my glasses and with just a T-shirt because I felt safe enough to just be the way that I am." I was like, "Man, we have failed as a church if that is something that moves someone so much that we have made it that you have to be suit and tied up, that you have to look perfect and be perfect and act perfect and everything needs to be perfect for you to come to church."

And for us was just creating a space where you can be broken and it is okay because the prevenient grace and God's love will meet you where you are. How do we do that? It's for me to be broken too. I said it earlier, but I am okay with coming up to the pulpit to the stage and letting you know what I'm dealing with. They said, "You know what? That's why I'm allowed to be the way that I am, because you have taught me." I'm not saying I'm perfect, but that's something I've learned. Woo, it's okay to be broken. It's okay, and I learned this from you, to drop a couple cuss words in your sermon and just be the way that you are and just to show that you can be the way that you are.

Rev., Dr. Michael Beck:

Yeah. I was going to jump in, because I wonder if the whole concept of invitation and being invitational is one of those listening to respond versus listening to understand posture shifts we need to make. That it shouldn't be that we are waiting to give the invitation, it should be that we're watching for the invitations when people invite us deeper into their life, switching that where it's always been about come to us. We do hospitality classes and that's great, but I don't find it in Jesus' teaching where he was doing hospitality teaching. I think he was teaching his disciples to be good guests. At no point did he say, "Hey, I want you... Here's how you do it, form a hospitality committee." No offense to the hospitality committees. But he said, "Go out, trust me, travel light. Find the person at peace." Luke 10. "When they give you the invitation, let your peace rest on them. Do life together. Proclaim the kingdom. Heal." Looking for those little invitations when we're in relationship inviting us into deeper levels of relationship.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Rodrigo, anything you want to add?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah, I will add. Jesus said, "The way people will know you're my disciples..." Is what?

Body:

Love.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

That's it. Everything else, it doesn't matter. We can overcomplicate it as much as we want to. If we find a way to love people the same way that Jesus did. People will experience what we want them to experience. For us, that's the only thing that [inaudible 01:10:35] that is not negotiable. Everything else, as long as it's not illegal or immoral, we're going to give it a try. We're not committed to a way of doing church because there's no way to doing church. We're just committed to finding a way that people can experience God's love. So in whatever context you may have, either whether it is you by yourself or there's two of you or there's a hundred of you, what it would look like to love the people in your community.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Love it. Michael and Woos you were listening to Rodrigo, I wonder was there anything that he said that you would say, "Hey, folks out there, make sure you paid attention to this." Or anything that maybe made you take a beat and say, "Wow, I have maybe another question about this." Anything like that for you?

Rev., Dr. Michael Beck:

It came more emerging out of year two conversations around this idea of control verse releasing and submitting, surrendering to God. I think that's such a valuable thing that y'all brought out. There's some really interesting sociological studies on entrepreneurs. Saras Sarasvathy is a researcher who does work on entrepreneurs in the different kind of logic system that an entrepreneur brings. There's like a causal logic system, which is, I have a goal, three steps, fulfill the goal. We are going to have a long-range vision committee plan, and we're going to carry this out. Benchmarks. Entrepreneurs don't think like that. They employ effectual reasoning. They cobble together and they iterate, they take relationships and things as they emerge, so they're a lot more comfortable just kind of following where things go and creating something new out of that.

But we've essentially exiled that kind of thinking from the inherited church. All of our seminary training, all of that is causal logic to the extreme, and so control, making yourself indispensable in the congregational system if you're a clergy person, all those things. That kind of is at war sometimes with this effectual, just follow the spirit where it goes and be okay with wherever that ends up and then adapt and respond as it emerges. I wonder if there's a way that we can... I think that's what Methodism did historically within the Anglican system, it created a way for that, the apostolic incarnational impulse kind of live together. I wonder if we can do that again right now in this moment as a denomination.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

That's cool. That's really cool.

Rev. Woo Kang:

That's good. I think for me it's a privilege serving with you. I hear this all the time, so it's good. It is all great stuff and that's what we try to do. But one of the things that always sticks out is knowing when to let God show up and for us to shut up. For me, I'm reminded of the story of the Daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers. Sometimes we think as pastors and leaders, if we're like Moses, we should have all the answers. We should know what to do. But God spoke through these five daughters and Moses had to really just shut up and let them speak and God spoke through them and made crazy changes.

My encouragement for you, as well as for me, is that especially as leaders, we got to let our people speak sometimes, because God speaks through people and we need to be able to listen to people. We do that through what you said is relationship. And through the relationships we have, we don't just form bonds and see people in a better way, we see more of who God is through different people. That's my encouragement for us.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Amen. That's beautiful. Rodrigo, you shared some great stuff with us. We want to give you the closing word. Any kind of closing thought you'd want to leave us with?

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah. I start relating getting closer to God in your theological understanding as parenting. Let me say this. I did not become a father because I like to change diapers. Dealing with crap, pardon me Bishop, for the word, that just comes with the territory. It's part of the byproduct of enjoying so many great moments that the life of a little kid can provide to you. That's the same thing with the church. We're going to deal with crap, but we did not join the church because of that. Don't let the brokenness of the church steal the moments and steal the joy of the beauty of the church.

We just have gone to this pandemic that exposed our mortality as people, and we just went through this disaffiliation that exposed our mortality as a denomination. We are on the other side of that, and we have the opportunity to transform people's lives in the name of Jesus Christ. Is it going to be perfect? It ain't going to be perfect, but it doesn't have to be perfect. We're striving towards perfection, we serve a perfect Savior, and we have the opportunity to give it our best shot. So go and draw closer to God by drawing closer to people and just give it your best expression of that church.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

And let all God's people say, amen.

Body:

Amen.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Would you join me in thanking our panel.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you all. What a great word. All you control freaks. It's a good word for all of us. Why don't we take a five minute, 10 minute... Let's take a 10-minute stretch break. If you really have major biological issues, go take care of that, but it'd be helpful just to stretch. We'll take 10 minutes and we'll reconvene at 03:15.

Thursday Afternoon, June 20, 2024

BUSINESS SESSION

Major Speakers of this session include:

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, resident Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates, Mission Rivers District Superintendent

Martha Stokes, Conference Lay Leader

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, I am going to call us to order. I would like to invite the Rev. Tim Ward from the Northern Virginia District to come and give us our opening prayer for this business session.

Rev. Tim Ward:

Let us pray. God of grace, God of movement. We thank you for the gift of this space today. God, we thank you for all of these incredible people who represent a piece of your church. God, I pray for this day that we wouldn't get in the way. God, that as we do this work, we would show grace and love to one another. God, I pray for Bishop Sue as she leads us for Martha, and her leadership and for all who come to this platform, God. Might we walk away from this session this afternoon saying we have loved one another more and we have moved more towards who you are calling us to be as a church. Come Holy Spirit, do what you do. In Jesus' name, amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you Tim. Appreciate it. Now we will have our district welcome and organizing motions. I invite the Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates to come. He is our host, district superintendent. Charles.

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates:

Thank you. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, sisters and brothers in Christ. On behalf of the board of directors, the trustees, lady and clergy of the Mission Rivers District, we welcome you to the great independent city of Hampton, Virginia.

Hampton is a place where hospitality is the core of what we do here. It is no doubt, we have no doubt that if you have not already enjoyed and or experienced the hospitality, wait, see and experience a little more and tell us about what you think a few days from today. I would like to recognize district and co-district lay leaders, Ms. Judy Cron. She's right there on the floor. Judy, thank you for all of what you do for us in the district.

Ms. Nancy Yarborough, she's somewhere here perhaps at the table outside. Nancy is actually celebrating her birthday today, and she did not think it [inaudible 01:31:43], but to come and help us with all of the

work that we're doing, and so we're grateful to Nancy as she celebrates her birthday and as she helps with all of what we're trying to accomplish.

I would like to recognize our retired bishops and their spouses. Bishop Ray Chamberlain and his wife Martha and Bishop Hasbrouck Hughes and his wife Mira, who is unable to be here with us today. Also, a son of Virginia Bishop Tom Berlin and his wife Karen of the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church. I'd also like to recognize our Episcopal spouse, the most Rev. Allen Johnson. He is somewhere here. There he is. We thank you.

So now Bishop, I would like to turn my attention to our organizing motions. I move that the bar of the conference be established as consisting of the platform and the floor, be it further resolved that the technical and camera platforms be part of the ball.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Do I hear a second on that?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I'm hearing a second. I invite you, if you would recognize the bar of the conference as described, please lift your hand. And it is so established. Thank you, Charles.

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates:

Bishop, I also move that the agenda be approved as printed on pages four and five of the digital book of reports.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, is there a second?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If you had approve the agenda, would you lift your hand as well? And that is approved. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates:

I further move that the election of Rev. Claire Miller to be the Virginia Annual Conference Secretary for the 2024-2028 quadrennium, effective July 1st, 2024.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If you would approve Rev. Claire Miller to be our new secretary, would you lift your hand?

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates:

Okay, Bishop, that is the end of the motion, but I will request for a moment of special privilege. The Deputy speaker of the House of Representatives of the Philippines Gloria Arroyo said, and I quote, "The

power of one, if fearless and focused, is formidable, but the power of many working together is better." These words serve as great reminder of the importance of teamwork. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, I will be remiss if I did not thank you for your commitment and dedication to the team that you have formed and the teams that you continue to form throughout the Virginia Annual Conference to ensure stability in our work of mission and ministry, including everybody.

Today, we celebrate the collective accomplishments of the Virginia Annual Conference as a team. For those persons who recall, most of the time when we come to annual conference, we just see the place all set up, and we do not know how it all began. But from scratch, there were teams formulating plans and doing things to ensure what you now see today. That is the vision and wisdom of our Bishop, to ensure that everybody is involved, to ensure that we have interest in, and that we have agency for the things that we do as a conference. So Bishop, your hard work is a manifestation of what we are experiencing here in Hampton this week. Your leadership is inspiring, and as we celebrate-

God's goodness, we also recognize your leadership and your inclusiveness. While I do not speak for the cabinet, I can say that we have embraced the concept of a team. You have incorporated us in major discussions and decision-making as a conference. You have embraced our diversity and value our opinions. You came to us at an unusual time in the history of our denomination in January, and you have been here just about a year and a half. And already we have seen and we have felt the shift and the things that you are aspiring to accomplish. Together we have persevered. Our outgoing Dean, Dean Bates, has been amazingly wonderful. She brought us together at a very crucial point during our time together. We say farewell to Dean Bates and our colleague, Dr. Brooks. You all have been wonderful colleagues and we celebrate you in your next steps.

There are two famous African Proverbs that I would like to quote that form the core of why I'm saying and what I'm saying today. The first is, and I quote, "A person is a person because of other people. A person is a person because of other people." The second is, "If you want to go fast, go alone. But if you want to go far, go together." Bishop, you have brought us together and we are on the journey together.

Amidst the spiritual confusion of BSA, Covid, disaffiliation, and division, this cabinet and this conference have chosen to remain together. This reminds me of the famous family rally cry that we have embraced, my family. When we had nothing, we had each other. The cabinet had each other and we still do. And so, Bishop, General Conference, the long-awaited General Conference is behind us. This disaffiliation is behind us.

But we have other pressure points in the Virginia Annual Conference. Yesterday's presentation on Juneteenth should be a reminder of some of the things that we have to do together. Our clergy, our laity are grieving, believing of our colleagues. We must pay attention to that particular pressure point, because some are traumatized by the deception and others are grieving the longstanding collegiality with those brothers and sisters who have left us. With this team that has been established, that you have built Bishop and you continue to build, we have no doubt that the Virginia Annual Conference will take its rightful place in our connection.

Matthew 18:18 and I will close, "What we bind on earth will be bound in heaven. And what we loose on earth will be loose in heaven." That is a rally cry also that my family used, and it was personified even in

our culture in Liberia. And we will cry out, "If you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit will come down..." and then we fill in the blank with whatever we were talking about.

And so, the Virginia Annual Conference, I say to you, if you believe and I believe and we together pray, the Virginia Annual Conference will persevere. If you believe and I believe and we together pray, we all will return to civility. If you believe and I believe and we together pray, we will embrace diversity and not just speak it. If you believe and I believe and we together pray, we'll free ourselves for mission and ministry throughout the conference. If you believe and I believe and we together pray, we believe that unity will prevail. We will put an end to the vision and live out the mission and ministry of the United Methodist Church, only if you believe and I believe. Because a person is only a person because of others. And if we want to go far, we can choose to go fast if we want to go alone. But if we want to go far, let us choose to go together. Thank you, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Charles. I appreciate it.

Well, sometimes you're always disturbed when some tenure comes to an end, and Joshua King, you have been a tremendous secretary. And when we were setting up here, I said, "I need Joshua next to me because he can keep track of motions and procedure as well as anybody." So I have valued him; always a positive force, always a spiritual presence, always willing to help, and always available. And I thank you for that, Joshua. And all of us need to show us our appreciation for this quadrennium's work. I'm going to turn it over to Joshua now to introduce his successor who you've elected, Rev. Claire Miller, and to have a couple of other elections that we need to have. Joshua.

Rev. Joshua King:

Bishop, thank you. And Virginia Conference, thank you all for putting your faith in me to be able to lead these last four years with you all. It has been a joy. And I know that I've been working with Claire over the last couple of weeks, the last couple of months, last couple of years, and preparing her for this. And I know that she is ready and prepared and is going to do a wonderful job. With that being said, I move that for this Annual Conference session, not next, but for this session, Rev. Claire Miller and Mrs. Katie Mueller be Assistant Secretaries and Mrs. Madeline White to be the Editor of the Journal.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

There's a second. Okay. If you would approve these elections, please lift your hand. They are approved. Thank you.

Rev. Joshua King:

I also have the following announcements to make. I want to let you all know that Room 202 here in the Hampton Convention Center has been designated as a prayer room throughout the annual conference. I would also like to recognize that Room 201 has been designated as a chapel where the Eucharist will be celebrated on Friday and Saturday mornings at 7:30 AM. Also, I would like to mention that of any amendments to the agenda must be submitted before the end of the session today, Thursday, June 20th.

Also, I would like to ask that if you all have your hotspots turned on on your cell phones to please turn those off, as they have the potential to interfere with the building systems. And so, we invite you to please do that if you could.

Finally, I would like to mention that if you are making a motion, there are motion forms up here on this stage. We also are collecting motions digitally, and so at each microphone there is a QR code that you can go to and follow. And that QR code will take you to the website vaumc.org/ac2024, where there is a link to be able to fill out your digital form for a motion, an amendment, or a point of order. Those actually, I'm going to encourage you to use those because it will help us to be able to get those quicker up on the screen if possible.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. King. The devil is in the details, they say. I need to have a vote on the agenda as it appears in the official packet. So to clarify that, if you would approve the agenda as it appears in the official packet, would you lift your hand? Okay. Now we can all sleep better tonight.

Well, I've been looking forward to this so much. I look forward, I know you do too, anytime we can hear our lay leader Martha Stokes. And now we call upon Martha to give her laity address. Martha.

Martha Stokes:

Bishop Sue and Annual Conference, at the spring meeting of our Board of Laity, one of our associate district lay leaders powerfully reminded us that we must see ourselves as equipped by the Holy Spirit to transform individual lives, our local churches, our communities, and our world. We did that in a powerful way this morning during the laity session, recognizing the movement of the Holy Spirit and those responding to God's call to serve as lay supply, certified lay ministers and deaconess and home missionaries.

We were led in a time of centering during the laity session by our first cohort of our own Virginia Conference Certified Lay Ministry Program. The first CLM cohort designed and planned that opening time of centering that we were able to participate in this morning. We also remembered the call to ministry that each one of us has by virtue of our baptism. We were reminded of our call to lead in renewal and revival in this new expression of United Methodism.

And now that we're all gathered together, I need to express my appreciation and the appreciation of the Board of Laity to several members of our Board of Laity who are also finishing their quadrennial terms, those who hold conference wide roles and will be transitioning to new leadership opportunities and responsibilities later this summer and fall.

Nancy Walsh, our President of the Conference, United Women in Faith, will be completing her term. And Nancy, we thank you for your leadership, especially in this period of renewed focus and rebranding of the United Women in Faith. Albert Weal, our Conference President of the United Methodist Men, will be transitioning from his conference role to become the President of the Southeastern Jurisdiction, United Methodist Men. Albert, we thank you for your service, for your conference-level work and beyond. And

Bill Chaffin, who will complete 12 years of service as our Conference Scouting Coordinator at the end of this month. Bill, we thank you for the length and the breadth of your service and commitment.

And now, just as I was able to make introductions of our lay supply, certified lay minister and our Deaconess this morning, I need to make two additional introductions. I'm going to invite Alan Webber to come and join me here.

I am excited to introduce to you Alan Webber as our new Scouting Coordinator for the Virginia Conference as of July 1st. Alan has long participated and served in scouting. He is an Eagle Scout and Brotherhood Member of the Order of the Arrow. He has served in a variety of roles as an adult volunteer, and currently serves as a District Commissioner and a member of the executive committee of the Tidewater Council. Alan is also deeply tied to the United Methodist Church and to his faith. He's currently a member of Oak Grove United Methodist Church in Chesapeake, where his wife Amanda is a pastor. Professionally, Alan is Vice President and Technology Market Analyst, serves as an Adjunct Assistant Professor and Program Manager on Emerging Technology at the Naval Postgraduate School, and is an Army combat veteran.

The job description for the scouting ministry coordinator notes that the coordinator should have one or more of the following spiritual gifts: servanthood, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, and administration. Alan possesses all of those gifts.

Alan Webber:

Thank you.

Martha Stokes:

You're welcome.

Alan Webber:

Bishop, Martha, thank you everybody for this opportunity. I look forward to working with you all and building on the great work that Bill's done, and as we move forward with all the changes in scouting and within the Methodist Church, what we can do to revive and go back to that little part about being reverent as a scout. And I'm looking forward to that. Thank you.

Martha Stokes:

Thank you. Bishop Sue and I look forward to working with Alan to enhance our mutual support for scouting ministries and civic youth agency connections in the years to come.

The second introduction I need to make is Amelia Mickelson, who is sitting in the Lay Leader chair. Amelia was born into the United Methodist Church and has been active in church all of her life. She's a member of Centerville United Methodist Church in the Northern Virginia District, where her mother currently serves as Associate Pastor. Amelia serves in many ways at Centerville, including on the Youth Council and participates in youth group, youth choir, and Teens Opposing Poverty. She's also a volunteer with Vacation Bible School and participates in multiple mission trips.

Amelia has attended many annual conferences but began serving as a Youth Cohort Member last year, and since then she has joined the Revitalized Conference Youth Council. She just graduated from South Lakes High School in Reston, Virginia, and will begin her freshman year this fall at Randolph Macon College, where she plans to study history and education. Who knows? That might be Amelia's assigned seat in the future. Yeah?

I've been thinking a lot lately about not only who will follow in the conference Lay Leader seat, but in other roles that I've been blessed to hold. There have been a number of life events since we gathered last in Roanoke that have really caused me to focus my attention on the need for greater lay leadership development, for stronger mentoring, especially reverse mentoring where I learn from those younger than myself, and making more space for leadership with younger voices and different voices at the table.

I've been thinking a lot about Norman lately. Some of you have heard me tell this experience with Norman, so if you have, please bear with me for a moment. I was returning from a Discipleship Ministries board meeting in Nashville, and was sitting at the gate at the airport. I'd only been working for Pinnacle Living for a short time. The gate that day at the airport was filled with college students headed out for spring break.

I curiously watched as this one young man worked the room with just great beauty and ease. He went from person to person, introduced himself, and asked where they were going for spring break and what school they were at. He not only stood out though because of his extroverted questioning of all of the others' plans, but because his hair was bright pink. And I sat there probably like many of you all have at the gate of an airport or somewhere you're waiting and thought, "Whomever gets to sit next to him is going to have a really interesting trip." And guess who that ended up being?

As I walked down the aisle, the window seat was taken by an anxious looking young woman. Norman, my new young friend, was seated in the middle seat. And I had just sat down as he started his conversation with the young woman at the window. She was a freshman, planning to become a teacher for students who were deaf. They chatted about their colleges and their campus life. Norman told us both that he was a six-year senior who still was not going to graduate that spring because he'd changed his major so many times. Philosophy was his chosen area of study at that particular time. He shared that his plan was to go to seminary, not to preach, but to teach. And he added so that he could debate religion with his mother, who by the way didn't know that his hair was pink.

And then, Norman turned his attention to me. I silenced him for just a moment when upon his asking where I worked, I described my role with Pinnacle Living and Aging Services. And when he did finally speak again, his question was, "Did you always want to grow up to work with older adults?" And he laughed when I responded, "No, but I always wanted to grow up to be one."

Well, three weeks ago, I retired from my professional work. And I've thought a lot about that conversation with Norman in that time, especially that response I gave, since now I especially feel like I have reached one of those milestones of growing up to be an older adult. I've wondered where Norman is. He would be 30ish, in his early thirties, somewhere in that age range right now. I've wondered what color his hair is or if he has any at this point. And I've wondered how the debate has gone between him and his mother.

There've been just a few debates about religion, including in our own United Methodist family since I met Norman that day. And I've also found myself reflecting on my faith journey, the questions and experiences that have been a part of my path of discipleship, how I've chosen to live out my faith, the people who've been a part of that story with me, and what God might have in store for the next third of my life.

Those times of reflection have come in expected and in very unexpected places. At General Conference, for example, I sat in the laity dinner questioning the example I want to leave for future generations. I stood in the observer section after one of the historic votes, remembering why I have been at this work in the church, especially as I looked at each one of the younger faces in the crowd around me. And it became more clear than ever that I have a choice in the legacy of faith that I live out and that I leave for those who come behind me, especially as we move forward in our new United Methodist Church.

I also remembered my own experiences as a young person in the church; those who took seriously the promises they made at my baptism to help me to come to know Jesus, those who explored gifts and graces with me and supported me as I tried those, and those who did not. A part of my journey is being told when I was in my early twenties that the church would not support the call I felt I was feeling to ordained ministry. That no is the main reason I stand here before you today offering this laity address. The discernment that followed brought me to the realization that I'm really called to be the best lay person I can be.

There are so many others who've experienced the no from the church and moved in different directions. One of the unexpected places that has brought me to a time of reflection recently was in another very important chair, but not the Lay Leader chair. It actually was the hairstylist chair. And some of you all are nodding. You know the importance of that chair, and you know the very personal and intimate conversations that can occur if you know the person that you're working with well.

Now, my hairstylist and I have talked about such a wide of things over the years we've known each other. We know each other's politics. We know and discuss connections that we have in the community. We've talked about travels, we've talked about music. But it dawned on me that we had never talked about faith. And I began to think, "Huh, what a horrible witness I am, that we've never done that."

But the last time I was there was just a short time after General Conference was over, and I shared with her that I had just been to this global conference for a church for the last two weeks. She stopped and she came around to my side and looked at me and said, "Were you at that conference where they just changed the rules about who can be preachers?" I said, "Yes." "The conference where they changed the rules about who can officiate same gender weddings?" I said, "Yes." Then she moved back behind me, looked at me straight in the mirror, put her hands on my shoulders and said, "I love you." And then, without a moment's hesitation went on to say, "Now tell me what the church says about alcoholism."

And I was totally caught off guard by that. I thought the conversation would keep going about those questions she asked, but no. And I shared with her how we have our social principles and our understanding about use of alcohol and mental health supports, and how we want to help people through those times of addiction with support and care and love.

My friend went on to tell me that when her father was dying from liver disease caused by alcoholism, their family's pastor refused to come and pray with them and with her dad. He didn't come to be with them because of his understandings about alcohol use. And then, she told me that that was a pastor serving a Virginia United Methodist Church that she had been a part of growing up. And she added, "I haven't set foot in a church since." I had to ask how old she was when her father died. Twelve. At the age of 12, she experienced a no that impacts her life to this day.

We've got work to do, church, for the Normans, for our youth like Amelia, for the now middle-aged adult who at 12 felt the rejection of the church. And if you were at the observation for Juneteenth yesterday, I'll say for Ronnie. There are voices we need to hear and space we need to make.

So let me end where I started with this message by making some introductions. Members of the Youth Cohort stand up for me for a moment.

Lay and clergy members of the Virginia Conference, here are the ones calling us to honor our promises that we made upon their baptisms and their confirmation in the church to nurture them in Christ's Holy Church by our teaching and our examples. Okay, now youth keep standing. Can I ask all of our young people to stand up? Now I know before you say anything, there are many, many definitions of what young people can make. But for this moment, those of you who are 35 and younger, join the youth in standing for a moment if you can. Look around. Here are the ones calling us to remember our commitment to walk alongside them as guides and coaches, but also to make more space at the table for them and allow their voices to lead us as we focus on the beauty and joy and life-changing power of the church that's ahead of us.

All right, I'm going to ask you all to sit down. And I don't want anybody to panic right now because I'm not going to ask everybody else to stand up, but I'm not leaving the rest of us out. Let me get really personal with the rest of us and speak to those like me who fall into the Boomer and older generations. I think there are a few of us here born before 1964.

Do you realize that more than 40% of our generations are estimated to be unchurched? We will continue to be the fastest growing, non-ethnic demographic in this country for the next 25 years. And almost half of this group has little or no connection to a faith community.

And many of us haven't invited someone to church for years. Many of us haven't talked with those closest to us about our faith. Oh, church, we've got work to do for Norman, for the youth and Amelia, for the 20-something who feels called to ministry, for the now middle-aged adult who at 12 felt the rejection of the church and hasn't returned, for the retired Boomer who's thinking about the legacy they will leave, and the search for meaning and purpose in life.

Let us all remember the covenant that we make with each baptism to surround one another with a community of love and forgiveness, that we may all grow and trust in God and be found faithful in our service to others, that we may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life. Virginia Conference, we've got a lot of work to do. Amen.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

I now want to recognize Rachel Zahradka, who is going to bring us a recommendation from the Conference Board of Laity regarding the Conference Lay Leader for the 2024-28 quadrennium.

Rachel Zahradka:

Hi everybody. I am Rachel Zahradka. I'm a member from the Living Waters District, as well as a member of the Board of Laity Nominations Committee for conference lay leader. On February 12th, 2024, the Nominations Committee met to discuss a recommendation for Lay Leader of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church for the 2024 2028 term. Current Lay Leader, Martha Stokes is eligible and willing to serve another term, Martha's skills of tactful diplomacy, organization and strength, alongside her patience, kindness, and experience throughout the connection are invaluable. Her gifts as a mentor and advisor to our Conference Laity coupled with her dedication as a ministry partner with our bishop makes her the obvious choice. The Nominations Committee unanimously proposed that Martha continue as conference Lay Leader to the Board of Laity, which unanimously approved the selection on March 2nd, 2024. Therefore, Bishop and members of conference, we now wholeheartedly and earnestly recommend Martha Stokes return as conference Lay Leader for a second term. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, if I could get a second to the motion. I now invite all of you in favor of Martha Stokes being the next Quadrennial Lay Leader to stand up if you're willing.

I'm glad you did that because I really can't imagine a better partner. We are here to just report briefly on some work of the conference leadership over the past, since January. We realized, and you saw in our video that it's necessary that we all row in the same direction, in the same boat. And my observation when I got here was there was a lot of great work being done in the annual conference, but it was going in many directions without a lot of clarity and without a lot of guidance.

And so this year your cabinet, your extended cabinet, the common table of the annual conference and representatives of the Board of Ordained Ministry have all met together so that we are on the same page. And we have prayed together at length. We have discerned from month to month. We have had deep discussions about what at this point in the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church we should be focused on.

So our report, we got down to two pages. I'm pretty impressed with that. But the first thing that we really thought was important was that we need to return to the church as a spiritual enterprise, that it is not an organization of doing good. At its heart, it's the body of Christ and the members of the body of Christ need to behave and live out their lives in a Christ-like manner. And so we agreed that we need first of all to really focus on our spiritual practices together to make that a high priority in the annual conference life and to expect that we will manifest the fruits of the spirit and that we will dedicate our lives to prayer. I spoke with the clergy session this morning asking them to highlight the prayer of individuals, the spiritual cultivation in the individual life, and I invite your churches to really be in a season of prayer.

A lot of times I think we do a lot of activity, but God's not quite sure what we're doing, so I hope that you will take time this year with the leadership of your church to really pray and discern where God is leading you. The other thing we concluded was that the annual conference exists to serve the local church. Let's

be real clear on that. That we are here to serve you and not vice versa. And so we are dedicated to building connection, connection between the annual conference and churches, connection between churches, connection between communities and church. We are all about connection. That is our Wesleyan heritage and that's where we're going to put our efforts in the next quadrennium. Martha.

Martha Stokes:

In addition to the discussion about spiritual gifts and our own growth as disciples so that we can work with the Holy Spirit to make more disciples, we also focused a little bit on that next step of moving not from our personal piety, but in step with our personal piety to social holiness. And so how do we work together in areas of mission and justice and advocacy for an inclusive church, for a church that truly meets the needs of our communities and in our context in the different areas where we are at. I think I need to take one step backwards if that's okay, because a part of the work that we did together was in truth telling. And I would invite you all in your local churches to take that opportunity for true telling, for confession, for sharing of the realities of where we find ourselves.

Those were not the easiest of conversations for this group to have, and it caused us to focus on both our real values and our perceived values and how we have been or have not been living them out over the last few years. When we think about the understanding of who we are as United Methodist, all of us still have a lot to learn, and so we invite you and your local churches into a time of looking at this document, share the video that was done before conference as part of our preparation and to enter into those conversations in your local churches so that we are truly in this work together across every level of the church in the Virginia Annual Conference.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Church, we got a lot of work to do. I think I just heard that.

Martha Stokes:

We do.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And we look forward to building connection together.

And now the much awaited rules committee report, Mr. Scott Diamond is going to come and give us our rules report.

Scott Diamond:

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes and members of the 2024 Annual Conference, good afternoon.. Thank you. As chair of the rules committee, I offer this brief report on our work over the past year. The full written report of the rules committee is contained in the book reports beginning on page 34 as well as this year, a short addendum addressing two additional proposals that were in the final packet emailed to you. As in past years with the written report before you, I'll not review each proposal in detail. Regarding those that we consider technical in nature, some are due to past inadvertent and oversight and

not revising cross-references to the book of discipline, or due to other typographical errors. Speaking of this, ironically, there's a typographical error in our proposed recommendation regarding typographical errors.

Hopefully if you look on page 34, if you look at it, there's a proposal to amend 68th to 68th. I hope you have faith in your rules committee that we will not ask that of you. What occurred in the official version of the rules was the sixth was a super script. It looked like a footnote. And then people eligible under this rule would've been ruled ineligible at their eighth birthday, not their 68th birthday. So we changed that. There are two other proposed rules changes that warrant brief reference. First, the site selection committee is seeking more flexibility in its ability to negotiate and plan our gatherings and ask for reduction to one year instead of three for recommending a location for our annual meetings. Second, given that our annual conference gatherings are now recorded, the conference secretary is seeking a new rule to allow for the transcript of the video recording of the annual conference session to serve as the official minutes of the annual conference.

Next, we have a proposal to revise rule 5C8 and to create a new rule, C23. The Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy was formed as the combination of the conference commission on religion and race and the conference committee on ethnic local church concerns in an effort to provide a more focused support for ethnic local churches and to allow more concentrated efforts on systemic issues within the conference, these proposed changes to the standing rules will allow the annual conference to reinstate the two separate teams as they are distinctly outlined in the Book of Discipline. After further discussion on this issue, there has been a revision to the proposal in the book reports. Again, that would be in the addendum. As that addendum reflects for this proposed rule change the name of the commission on ethnic minority concerns and advocacy will remain the same.

Now for the main proposal this year, re-implementing resolutions. As you know for various reasons, our body in the past voted to remove resolutions from our standing rules and instead rely upon petitions that members could sign if they so desired. Last year, a motion was adopted to restore resolutions as part of our proceedings. As a result, the rules committee met numerous times to consider the best manner in which to propose such amendments to our standing rules. Members of the committee reviewed our past version of the rules that included resolutions and had discussions with both clergy and laity who had previously served on the resolutions committee. We also reviewed and considered texts from other conferences standing rules concerning the membership of a resolutions committee as well as various processes and procedures for submitting proposed resolutions and their consideration. The result of this in-depth analysis is the proposed amendment that is before you.

In our proposal, we have established a timeline, guidelines and procedures for allowing for conference boards, agencies, committees, or groups of clergy and laity to submit proposed resolutions. Such proposals would be timely considered by a newly reestablished resolution committee that would accept resolutions as necessary, seek clarification, and if needed, do the topic refer the proposed resolution to another appropriate conference body for consideration and input.

Next, the resolution committee will prepare report of these resolutions for the annual conference and determine their order of consideration. The proposed rules also address the manner of debate and the method for voting. Now in offering this amendment on resolutions, the rules committee realized that

drafting such rules is one of two important steps, with the other step being successful implementation. Should the annual conference adopt these proposed amendments, that will be our recommendation that following the 2025 annual conference proceedings where resolutions would again be considered the leadership of the rules and the resolutions committee confer on the process and determine if further adjustments are needed. Members of the Virginia Annual Conference, I formally present these proposals for changes to our standing rules and procedures for your consideration.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If there's a second. And I'll move it to a vote, if you would approve, please lift a hand. And it is so approved. Thank you. Appreciate it. Scott, we really do appreciate, and I really think it will serve the annual conference well to have the resolutions process that they have proposed and I'm excited by it. I now invite Mr. Neal Wise the chair of our site selection committee to come forward. And boy, we owe him a huge debt of gratitude. Talk about somebody who's constantly working.

Neal Wise:

Thank you. It's so hard to follow the excitement of the rules committee. Bishop Sue, Lay Leader Stokes, Bishop Berlin, Bishop Chamberlain, Bishop Hughes, members of the Virginia Annual Conference and guests, the report of the Site Selection Committee can be found on page 40 of the book of reports. The Site Selection Committee continues to search for and evaluate a broad array of locations throughout the Commonwealth for the annual conference to meet. A wide range of locations regionally in particular have been considered including meeting virtually.

The list of requirements for meeting as an annual conference is included for your reference in the committee's written report. By our conference standing rules, the Site Selection Committee is tasked with recommending the location of annual conference for the next three years. By the new conference rules that were just approved, the committee will be tasked in the future with recommending that location for an annual conference one year in advance. The new rule is effective at our next annual conference. By previous action of the annual conference, locations have been set to meet next year in Roanoke and in Hampton in 2026. The Site Selection Committee is proposing to modify the 2026 location of annual conference as previously approved. In order to receive this recommendation, the Site Selection Committee moves for a suspension of the standing rules in order to entertain the committee's recommendation. Bishop, I move for the suspension of the rules.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, is there a second? If you would approve suspending the rules to consider this site selection suggestion, please lift your hands. And it's overwhelmingly approved.

Neal Wise:

Thank you, Bishop. The committee along with the director of Connectional Ministries, the annual conference event planner, continued to consider locations for holding annual conference. After careful evaluation of venues throughout Virginia, we are pleased to recommend the Atlantic Union Bank Center at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Let me share a short video.

On Video--Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Hello, Virginia Annual Conference. This is Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson and I am here to have you think about how important it is to have a great location for annual conference. I know that you look forward to going to Roanoke and to Hampton and those facilities, but I want you to know this morning I've toured the fantastic new facilities here in Harrisonburg, Virginia at James Madison University and we are excited by the possibilities these new facilities offer. I hope that you will seriously think about and pray about adding Harrisonburg to Roanoke and Hampton as part of our rotation for annual conference.

On Video--Rev. Jonathan Page:

So another reason that we hope you'll consider Harrisonburg as a site for annual conference is this room that I'm standing in. This is called the Atlantic Union Bank Center. It's an arena that hosts basketball and graduations, but it could also be a host for our annual conference session. It's very new. It's state-of-the-art, the seats are comfortable, and there's an exhibit hall right over my shoulder that would allow you to participate in walking through the exhibits and still be participating in annual conference at the same time. We think it's a great space for us to be able to convene and meet together. And here's the thing, this facility that I'm standing in right now is directly connected to a lot of other things that make this a great site. We're right next to the parking garage where most annual conference members would be parking their vehicles. Directly across the street is a dining hall where there is the opportunity to have food access for members of annual conference.

There are meeting facilities right close by and we think that this close proximity of so many different things is part of what makes this site a really great option for the Virginia Annual Conference. Another great reason to support Harrisonburg as a site for annual conference is that it has the appropriate number of residential facilities and dining facilities needed to accommodate the Virginia Annual Conference. Harrisonburg has over 2,500 hotel rooms along with a number of Airbnbs and camping facilities. Additionally, there are a lot of great local and chain restaurants and the infrastructure is present in Harrisonburg to host the large number of people that would be in attendance for the Virginia Annual Conference session and it would be a great host city for annual conference beginning in 2026.

On Video--Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I hope you've enjoyed this video and I hope when it comes time to vote on site selection at Annual Conference, you will seriously consider and support Harrisonburg.

Neal Wise:

Thank you, Bishop. We are excited about the prospect of a new location for Annual Conference to meet. We had previously met in Harrisonburg, as I'm sure all of you will remember, in 1956. A Sheldon Cooper fun fact, Bishop Hughes was ordained at that conference. The conference met again in Harrisonburg in 1970 at the Virginia Conference Uniting Session that brought together the Methodist Church, the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the central jurisdiction to form the United Methodist Church. The Site Selection Committee recommends the location for the 2026 Annual Conference be modified to reflect Harrisonburg, Virginia, and we further recommend that the 2027 annual conference also be held in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Bishop, the committee moves for the approval of this recommendation.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, we have a question. Go to microphone two. I appreciate the hustle. That was good.

Neal Wise:

Yeah, no worries.

Chris Becek

Chris Becek, Laity, Leesburg on the Shenandoah River District. I have a request for information. Is there a cost impact associated with switching 2026 from Hampton to Harrisonburg?

Neal Wise:

No. No, there's not. We are not under contract in Hampton for the convention center or for hotels.

Chris Becek:

Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Other questions? Microphone four.

Danielle Cloud:

Danielle Cloud, Lay member, Three Notch'd District, Wesley, UVA. I'd like a point of inquiry. Could the Site Selection Committee ensure that all members of the Annual Conference are able to secure housing at conference approved hotels? So for example, when I tried to check in at a conference approved hotel as a collegiate member as someone under 21, I was denied housing due to a Hampton citywide ordinance. It's important to note that I'm four months away from 21 and I have stayed in that same hotel in past years as a youth delegate. My campus minister organized housing for me as part of the conference block and this hotel threatened to call the police and escort me off the premises if I did not have someone over 21 staying in the room with me. Luckily, my parents are here as clergy and I'm staying with them.

Neal Wise:

Lucky you.

Danielle Cloud:

But I'm worried that without that where I would be now. Thank you.

Neal Wise:

The Site Selection Committee certainly takes those comments and would like to embrace them and consider them. Thank you for raising them.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

That's disturbing, isn't it?

Neal Wise:

Yeah.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

If that happens to anybody else, I'll find room for you somewhere. Okay. Just call me directly. That's appalling. Okay, other questions? Let's get a second and then we'll have any discussion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

There's a second. Any discussion? Okay. Seeing none, I'm going to move this to a vote. If you're in favor of going to Harrisonburg in 2026, would you please lift your hand?

Neal Wise:

2026 and 2027.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

2026 and 2027. So leave them up if you're good with 2027. Okay. I think we have a new place to visit. I'm very excited. Thank you.

Neal Wise:

Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you going to do, oh, you did 2027 too. Okay. Okay. Here's a fun technical detail. I'm going to have Rev. King move to suspend the rules. We want to have, remember the rules were just modified so that the transcription of Annual Conference will be the minutes and we'd like to do that this year, but that requires a suspension of the rules to allow us to do it. So Rev. King, make your motion.

Rev. Joshua King:

I move to suspend the rules to allow the minutes for this Annual Conference session to be taken virtually through transcription of the proceedings. The transcription of the proceedings will be reviewed by the Minutes Committee within 60 days of the adjournment of this session, and their revisions of the transcript will serve as the minutes of this annual conference session.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Thank you for the second. If you had approve the change in those rules, would you raise your hand? We need two thirds. I think we have it. So yay. You just saved yourself a lot of work. That's excellent.

Rev. Joshua King:

And if I may make a quick announcement, Minutes Committee, this means you will not meet in the mornings for this session.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. Now we're going to move right into our pensions report with Mr. John Fuller. John, come on. Yay.

John Fuller:

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, members and guests of the Virginia Annual Conference, as the Director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions Incorporated, I am pleased to present our annual report and recommendations. Virginia United Methodist Pensions Incorporated, which is commonly known by the acronym. VUMPI, is the Virginia Conference Agency that administers the conference health plans for active and retired clergy along with the denominational pension and welfare plans. At each year's annual conference, VUMPI presents several reports. And recommendations in this year's book of reports, VUMPI's reports begin on page 48. These reports are intended to be informational, providing details about the various benefit programs that we administer. VUMPI's recommendations begin on page 52 of your book of reports. And for this year's annual conference, we have five recommendations. Our first recommendation pertains to the apportionments that are used to fund the majority of the cost for the conference sponsored active and retired clergy health plans.

For 2025, VUMPI is recommending a \$9 million active clergy health plan apportionment and a \$5.4 million retired clergy health plan apportionment. I will note that both of these reflect a 10% reduction from the corresponding 2024 apportionments. For a little bit of historical context, in the 10-year period from 2005 through 2014, the average annual rate of growth in total clergy benefits apportionments was 7.3%. And that's not 7.3% over 10 years, that's 7.3% on average each year for 10 years. In some years this translated to an actual increase exceeding \$1 million. So we recognized that this was an unsustainable growth rate. So in 2015, VUMPI developed and implemented several strategies that were designed to mitigate the financial burden of clergy benefits apportionments on our conference churches. In the 10-year period from 2015 through 2024, the annual rate of change in total clergy benefits apportionments was negative 0.9%.

So we went from a 10-year period in which there was a rapidly growing and unsustainable rate of growth in the conference apportionments for clergy benefits to a subsequent 10-year period in which clergy benefits apportionments were relatively flat. So I'm pleased to report that the recommendation for 2025's apportionments reflects not only the ongoing benefit from those strategies implemented in 2015, but also a couple of other factors that were observed in the past year. Number one, there has been a reduction in total enrollment in the conference sponsored health plans. Between 2023 and 2024 there was an 8.2% reduction in total enrollment in the health plans. There was also a corresponding reduction in total paid

medical claims in our plans. In that same time period, there was a 5.2% reduction in total paid medical claims. So with all of those factors taking together, VUMPI is able to recommend a total of \$14.4 million of clergy benefits apportionments reflecting a \$1.6 million reduction or a 10% reduction from the corresponding 2024 apportionments.

VUMPI's second recommendation pertains to the participant contributions that are paid by clergy who enroll in the conference sponsored health plans. For 2025, VUMPI is recommending no changes across any of the plans. So this applies to medical, dental, and vision plans, and for all plans for active and retired clergy. VUMPI's third recommendation pertains to the past service rate or the PSR, which is a factor in the benefit formula for the pre 82 pension plan. At each year's annual conference, VUMPI is able to recommend an increase in the PSR to help ensure that the benefits paid under the pre 82 pension plan are keeping pace with increases in the general cost of living. The current PSR is \$611 and VUMPI is recommending a 2025 PSR of \$626. And this reflects an increase of about 2.5%. VUMPI's fourth recommendation involves the billing methodology that the VUMPI office uses to bill our conference churches for the clergy retirement security program contributions, that's the current denominational pension plan, along with the comprehensive protection plan premiums. And that is the denominational life and disability insurance program.

VUMPI is not recommending any changes to that methodology, so we are simply recommending that the annual conference approve the continued use, with no changes, of the billing methodology that has been in place since 2014. Finally, VUMPI's fifth recommendation involves the clergy housing tax exclusion that is allowed under IRS code 107, and that requires that the annual conference approve an annual resolution for our conferences active and retired clergy to be able to take advantage of that tax exclusion. So the fifth recommendation is simply that resolution that if approved by the Virginia Conference, will allow our conferences active and retired clergy to take advantage of that IRS housing tax exclusion.

All of these recommendations pertain to internal conference controlled policy and if approved by the Virginia Conference, will be implemented effective January 1st of 2025. Bishop, before I conclude my report, I would like to express my gratitude to the VUMPI board of directors for all of their leadership, their guidance, their support throughout the year. I would also like to thank my VUMPI staff colleagues for all of the work that they do day in and day out to help ensure that we are maintaining these benefit programs that are important to our conferences, active and retired clergy. And with that, Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, I will conclude my report and I now present VUMPI's recommendations one through five for conference consideration.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. We need a second.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Any discussion in the house? Microphone eight. I see a card.

Brian Lamb :

Brian Lamb Laity, Mission Rivers District. I'm here to speak on behalf of the Campus Christian Center at the University of Mary Washington. It is a United Methodist ministry that is served full time by a pastor here on appointment. The conference, we finally, after about a year of searching, discovered that we'll provide our campus minister insurance at the cost of almost a thousand dollars a month. With the changing dynamics in campus ministry, our ministry has had to make the difficult decision to not provide her health insurance. I bring that since our conference offering was to eliminate healthcare debt in Virginia, and I'm sure she's one of many pastors in this conference who aren't able to get health insurance through our plan because of technicalities. And so I would empower VUMPI to take this case study and see if there are ways that the annual conference can provide a basic need of health insurance for our full-time appointed clergy. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I think that's certainly something.

John Fuller:

Absolutely. That's something certainly that we will take into consideration and evaluate. Campus ministries in many situations are considered extension ministries beyond the local church. We have separate rules for how those clergy appointed in that context have access to the health plan, but we can certainly take that as something that we can look into.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Great. Thank you. Any other discussion? Microphone four. Thank you, Steve.

Rev. Seok-Chan Seo:

Seok-Chan Seo, currently serving in Northern Virginia District. This is a question. Is there a plan in a Virginia annual conference to provide healthcare benefit to less than full-time appointment?

John Fuller:

Sure. So the question is there a plan to provide healthcare benefits to pastors serving less than full-time appointment? There currently is not a plan for that. So the Virginia Conference-sponsored health plan, like the majority of employer-sponsored health plans in the United States is designed to provide benefits only to clergy serving full time.

Rev. Seok-Chan Seo: Can I then make a motion about that? I would like to make a motion to a formal study group that will study about different scenarios and implications for local churches and pastors when we provide and extend our healthcare benefits to less than full-time appointments so that the next year when we have information that we can actually make an informed decision about that.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. The motion is before us. Is there a second to it? Okay. Discussion on this or is this something that we continue to study and look at and have you report back next year?

John Fuller:

I think VUMPI would certainly be happy to participate in a study group if one was formed. One thing that I will note just as an immediate response to the suggestion is that any extension of health benefits eligibility beyond the current guidelines would certainly have a financial impact and would very likely lead to an increase in apportionments. There would be no other way to fund that sufficiently without having an increase in apportionments. But I would be happy to participate in a discussion if that was the will of the conference.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I hear your motion. We have a clergy compensation task force that's working hard and I think it could move into this arena. So your motion is to have a task force look at this. Would you be averse to asking the clergy compensation task force to be that group? Does that work?

Rev. Seok-Chan Seo: Yes, and actually I researched about it and there are different annual conferences in the United States that provides healthcare benefit to less than full-time appointments. For example, Baltimore Washington provides for 75%, and CalPAC Conference provides even for 25% appointment. So there are conferences that provide healthcare benefits to less than full-time appointments. And I believe in our book of discipline and social principle affirms our belief that healthcare is actually a basic human rights. So I believe it is very important and I agree that if we have a task force that can actually look into these possibilities, I think that it will be great. Thank you.

Rev. Joshua King:

I'm being instructed by many people to currently put a motion on the floor that is the report.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay.

Rev. Joshua King:

And then we need to deal with that and come back to this motion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. That's why I have you sitting next to me. Why don't we deal with the report of the pension benefit since it's on the floor? Right now, the concern is we have two motions on the floor at the same time. So let's move back to discussion. We will come right back to the motion to have that go to the clergy compensation task force, but right now we need to hear discussion regarding the report of the pension committee and we will address that. Microphone four. You want to say something?

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

Sure. Bishop, Rev. Jessie Colwell, chair of the Clergy Compensation Task Force. And John and fellow wonderful Methodist. We already have a task force also in addition to this task force looking at our

healthcare plans and coverages. And I would move that that task force is the one that considers that. I'm also on that task force-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

But we're going to.

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

... I think there's a solution, Bishop-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Now we have three motions on the floor, so it's quite a dance, but I think it's confusing unless we have one at a time.

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

Okay.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

So would anybody like to speak to the recommendations of the pension board? Okay, well, I don't think we need to call the question. I think we're ready to vote.

Conference Secretary Rev. Joshua King:

One more down there by number four.

Rev. Carrie Moffitt:

Carrie Moffitt, clergy, Living Waters District. I do have a question with regards to what's in the report. You say that the health care cost trends and the decline in the health plan enrollment has decreased. Can you speak as to why? Because I think that would relate also to the study group as well. Do you know why they have decreased?

John Fuller:

I don't know exactly why, but I do know that historically the reasons that have driven contraction in the enrollment in the health plans generally, number one, if full-time appointments are replaced incrementally by part-time appointments, they become ineligible for the health plans. So that could drive part of the decrease. As we are all aware, we went through the era with Par. 2553 disaffiliations and so there were some clergy that simply left our United Methodist denomination and therefore are no longer eligible. There can be other reasons for contraction. For example, if there is an economic recovery, spouses get jobs that offer benefits and clergy leave our program to go on their spouse's coverage. I would say that it's probably multifactorial. We don't ask everyone who leaves our health plan the reason why they're leaving. So I don't know exactly why, but I think that it's probably multifactorial.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Any other questions or discussion on the report? Number five.

Dr. Lester Kurtz:

Hi, I'm Lester Kurtz from Northern Virginia St. Matthews, and I was just wondering if there's any effort to look at any inequities in terms of minority and ethnic groups in the pension benefits?

John Fuller:

Not that I'm aware of. I would say that our benefit programs, to my knowledge, are not. I know of no factors which would drive any sort of racial or other demographic inequities in our programs.

Dr. Lester Kurtz:

Are they based on salaries that the clergy received during their career?

John Fuller:

In part. We have a hybrid denominational pension plan that has a defined benefit component that is not based on compensation and there is a smaller defined contribution component that is. So in part, there is correlation with that. So I suppose if someone were to make an assumption about salary levels and demographic factors, there could be some correlation there. But I am not aware of any specific study group that is looking at that. I'll also note that general conference has adopted a new denominational pension plan that will take effect in 2026. And I recall that a question about this was raised at the general conference when the Compass pension plan was passed, and I think the response to that question was that issues around compensation should be addressed via discussions around compensation rather than discussed around second-order effects like pension programs. So I don't know of any efforts that are underway to look at the pension programs themselves that are really intended to be agnostic to those factors.

Dr. Lester Kurtz:

Okay. Thank you. I'm just hoping that is taken into account in some way. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you Dr. Kurtz. Any other discussion or questions? Seeing none, I'm going to move this to a vote. If you would approve the report of the Board of Pensions, would you lift a hand? Those opposed, same sign. Okay. And the report is adopted. Stay where you are. We've got some stuff to talk about, but I do want to go back to the other motion about having a consideration of the part-time folks and healthcare for the part-time folks. And Rev. Colwell, what was the name of the group that does that?

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

Fuller started the task force so he can share the name.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Oh, okay.

John Fuller:

So we have a clergy benefits task force that was designed to look at other aspects of clergy benefit programs. We can certainly expand the scope of that task force somewhat to include the issue of looking at potential eligibility of part-time clergy in the conference. And I think that if that is considered to be an acceptable resolution to the concern, I would be happy to commit to doing that.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If you would affirm that action, would you just raise your hand please? Great, thank you. Now the fun part, John Fuller's not just... We got number five. Okay. Microphone five.

Brian Lamb:

I'm sorry. Did not seem appropriate to respond in the middle of that, but I want to point out I was no longer employed by the Methodist Church because I was gay. The Episcopalians hired me part-time, but gave me full-time benefits, which made me be able to live until I could get a job full-time in another Episcopal institution. So it is important to remember it makes a big difference in a lot of families lives. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Sometimes there's a big discrepancy between legal requirements and grace and I think that's always our discussion. Now the fun part, John Fuller is a world-class director of our pension board. But he's also a world-class excited dad and you'll not see him again this week because we are sending him away. His daughter, Josephine Fuller, is a world-class swimmer.

I have been watching her all week race. She is a rising senior at the University of Tennessee. She won the gold medal in the hundred-meter backstroke at the 2023 Pan Am Games. Josephine Fuller is a fourteen-time NCAA All-American with 13 Southeastern conference medals. And she is qualified for five events at this year's Olympic trials. The hundred backstroke, the 200 backstroke, the hundred butterfly, the hundred breaststroke, and the 200 individual medley. And John Fuller is headed to Indianapolis and I think we all need to just stand up and yell, "Go Josephine."

John Fuller:

Thank you Bishop. And thanks to all of you. It's obviously a very exciting time for my entire family, but I'd also like to thank multiple people in the Virginia Conference that made it possible for me to be here today and be able to get on a plane to go back to Indianapolis tomorrow and be with Josephine and my family. So thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

One more recognition I want to make before we hear from our youth. Scott Diamond, we joke around about the Rules Committee, but it's a vital, vital part of our ministry and he has served as chair of our Rules for the quadrennium, including multiple called virtual annual conferences and he is rolling off this year. And we would love to recognize Scott Diamond for his chair of the Rules Committee. Scott.

And now I extend a moment of personal privilege to the youth delegation.

Go ahead.

Youth Delegate:

Bishop Sue and the members of the Annual Conference, when we were discussing what our moment of privilege and your gift would be, we decided to share a memory instead of a gift with you. And so in order to foster a spirit of joy within the Conference, we have decided to share a song with you. We have a musical instrument to facilitate you joining in this memory. It is a kazoo engraved with your name and we invite you to join us as we play, Jesus Loves Me, on the kazoo.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

I got it. Otherwise, like this. Okay, let's do it. Ready? Somebody set a pitch.

Thank you guys. That was fun.

Youth Delegate

Bishop, can I get a selfie.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Okay. I haven't played a... I know it's obvious I haven't played a kazoo in decades. Now we're to our delegation report and you don't find two better or more hardworking people than Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman and Mr. Warren Harper. And so come forward dear friends and give us your report.

Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman:

And for our next song on the kazoo.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Here, it's all yours. It's all yours.

Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman:

Good afternoon, Bishop Sue, laity and clergy of the Virginia Annual Conference. My name is Lindsey Baynham Freeman and it is my joy and honor to serve as the head of the delegation for Virginia. I'm joined this afternoon by Mr. Warren Harper, who is the first elected layperson and we are offering the

delegation's report. We're also joined on the stage by our general conference delegates, if they would please stand.

And before we get too far into a report, I just want to thank and give honor and gratefulness for this group of people for holding one another up for the endurance that is General Conference, for passing the snacks, for sharing an encouraging word and for doing the important work of holy conferencing. I'm so grateful for each and every one of them. And I also want to thank the many reserves and people from Virginia who came to bear witness to the important work that happened in Charlotte this spring. We're grateful for you. And so after much anticipation, the postponed 2020 General Conference in 2024 was held in Charlotte, North Carolina from April 23rd to May 3rd. Lay and clergy from all over the world gathered to conduct the business of the church in the spirit of holy conferencing. While all of our delegates from outside the U.S. were not able to attend, we still had 87% participation totaling 749 out of 862 delegates for our time together. We acknowledged the impact of not having full participation and we covenanted to do better moving forward as we become an even greater worldwide church. And so we want to share some highlights and key moments as the people called United Methodists gathered this spring.

Warren Harper:

Without a doubt, there was a spirit at our gathering. In a commentary by Amanda Kim, who was the second lay delegate from the New England Conference. Listen to what she says.

"From the very beginning, I was blown away with how there was such a spirit of cooperation and compassion moving through everyone at the General Conference. There were times where tensions got high and times where it was obvious people did not agree. But it was clear that everyone was motivated to do the hard work that needed to be done. There were different voices and diversity in all of our delegates."

In Bishop Bickerton's opening address to the General Conference, he said, and I quote, "I think it's okay that we have had a delay. We are a completely different church than we were just a few years prior. A bit of dust has settled and we can see that there is a future with hope and possibility."

And he asked the question, "Are you willing to move forward in a spirit of hope and embrace a season a reformation, and revitalization of the United Methodist Church and work for a culture marked by compassion, courage, and companionship?"

And he said, "If you are not here for a good reason, then maybe you're in the wrong place."

We began our work with 14 legislative committees sorting through hundreds of petitions to bring to the plenary floor by consent calendar or through presentation of the committee. We had three of our delegation members serving in leadership of the committees, and that's over 20% of the legislative committees. And the remainder of our delegation acted in such a way that they offered assistance in every committee that went through over a thousand pieces of legislation.

Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman:

Some other key actions that occurred during the conference included granting sacramental authority to Deacons within their ministry context, approving a new pension plan, Compass, which moves to a more contribution-based system for the clergy person while being realistic about financial implications for the denomination moving forward, and approving our budget with a 52% cut to our boards and agencies,

Warren Harper:

We passed several confessional actions, among them of the apology to victims and survivors of sexual abuse and mistreatment. We had adopted a new book of resolutions and resolutions of reparations. There were many acts of wonderful, joyful, spiritual worship. We celebrated the impact of Africa University, 200 years of mission and ministry at the General Board of Global Ministries commissioning missionaries, home missionaries and deacons. Bishop Sue participated in this work and she has served on the General Board of Global Ministries.

Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman:

There is also a lot of energy around three major groupings of legislation. The first being the approval of the revised social principles. The General Board of Church and Society has worked for many years now to revise this document and to seek the input and feedback from our siblings around the world. While there are still points of contention, the document serves as a guide to our engagement in the social work of our faith. It has a strong theological foundation and a clarity of purpose for our church. The revised social principles were approved with some edits to recognize the big tent we inhabit as we represent a worldwide church. The second grouping of legislation being the movement to remove harmful language from our book of discipline. Since 1972, there have been restrictive and harmful language for certain persons within the body of Christ. At this General Conference, language was removed stating that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Language around the restriction of performing wedding ceremonies was removed and provisions for clergy to be reinstated was approved as well.

This action allowed for an expansion of the table. And in the midst of our theological diversity, we were able to achieve this good work together with grace, with connection, with compassion, with curiosity, and with understanding. The third grouping of legislation being worldwide regionalization. And as you have heard through Conference communication and webinars leading up to this Annual Conference, we will take a vote on worldwide regionalization next year at our Annual Conference. Each annual conference in our worldwide connection will take a vote and the threshold for approval is a two-thirds aggregate vote of all the Annual Conferences. And we will not know the results of the voting until 2026. There's information on the Conference website about worldwide regionalization, and we're taking this opportunity of time to do more education, to have more conversations, and to hear from our connection here in Virginia. There will be a Q&A following this business session from 5:30 to 6:15 in Ballroom B. There will also be people at the doors as you exit with FAQs around regionalization. There will be another Q&A tomorrow morning from 7:30 to 8:15 in Ballroom B. And these Q&As, they're of the same format, so pick the one that best suits your schedule and we look forward to the conversation together.

Warren Harper:

And our work continues. Thank you for your continued prayers. We heard them, we felt them. They were part of our being while we studied the legislation, listened and passed important pieces of the church

future. So we thank you and we are grateful to serve in this way and to have a diverse delegation of expertise, experience, opinion, and skill. Thank you.

Rev. Lindsey Baynham Freeman:

Thank you, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you both. Appreciate it. And thanks to the entire delegation.

In all of the discussion of disaffiliation, we've lost sight that a great part of our church's work is ecumenicism and inter-religious concerns. There are many people who give their life's work to bridging the division between the church. And that has led to our full communion with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. And we are working toward full connection with, not the Roman Catholic Church, but the Episcopal Church. And so we are delighted to move into an era when we emphasize... We will get there... Where we emphasize the unity of the church and how we're working together to move toward more partnership, more cooperation, more love for each other, to focus on what unites us rather than divides us. And so I am delighted that one of our clergy has really taken this to heart and has studied and taken a whole coursework on ecumenical relations. And I'm going to call upon Rev. Ryan Ware to come forward.

Ryan, on behalf of the United Methodist Church and the Council of Bishops, I give you the certificate of completion and celebrate your commitment and your representation of our annual conference in the ecumenical work of not only Virginia, but of the entire United Methodist Church and the world. Congratulations.

Rev. Ryan Ware:

Thanks Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I see somebody wanting to speak. Microphone four. Let's get the spotlight on. Yay. There it is.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Beautiful. My name is Drew Ensz, I'm clergy, Northern Virginia, ARISE Campus Ministry. And I'd like to ask to move to suspend the rules in order to pass a resolution for apology for harm done to LGBTQ plus persons.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, the motion is before us to suspend the rules. If you are willing to suspend, is there a second?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If you're willing to suspend the rules, this requires a two thirds vote. Lift your hand. And they are suspended for this continue.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Bishop, I move in adoption of a resolution for the Virginia Annual Conference for apology for harm done to LGBTQ plus persons. Whereas the Constitution of the United Methodist Church declares that all persons are of sacred worth, our social principles have long affirmed the human and civil rights of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation. Whereas the postponed 2020 general conference removed the harmful language that LGBTQ plus persons were incompatible with Christian teaching, and removed the harmful bans on LGBTQ plus person serving as clergy, clergy officiating same sex weddings, and same sex weddings occurring in local United Methodist churches. Whereas Jesus says in the gospel according to John in the 13th chapter, "A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."

Whereas one of their general rules is to do no harm, whereas our denomination calls us to accountability and to repent when we fall short of God's kingdom. Whereas members of our annual conference have used photos and social media posts of couples to bring complaints against pastors, couples such as Brittany and Lindsey Caine-Conley, Delin and Sarah Selik, Emily and Elsa Showcomb, other couples who have asked not to be named, and even others who had to temper their sharing of photos and celebrations so that their pastors could participate in their weddings without being brought under complaint. Whereas churches and communities such as Rise have not received care and support when their pastor was under complaint or been suspended as is required in the Book of Discipline. Whereas clergy have had to live in fear of being who God has created them to be and have had to hide part of themselves in fear of retaliation. Whereas based on the harmful language, some people who experience a calling from God to become United Methodist clergy, have had others in our annual conference question the validity of that causing and thus cause great harm.

Therefore, let it be resolved that the Virginia Annual Conference apologizes and earnestly seeks forgiveness for its roles in harm cause to LGBTQ plus persons.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, the resolutions properly before us. Rev. Ensz, would you like to speak on behalf of it? You get the first speech.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

I think again, one of the major things, we are one of the largest annual conferences in the United States. And it's important that we acknowledge the harm that has happened whether by current members or former members. We have heard speech after speech at different annual conferences of the pain, and it's just so important that we acknowledge it and ask for forgiveness. In my college ministry, one of the things that consistently blocks people from wanting to be United Methodist or from wanting to be a part of the clergy of the United Methodist Church is the harmful language that we have just removed at

general conference. And I think it would go a long way to specifically name the harm that was done and to apologize to the LGBTQ plus persons on behalf of the whole conference. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Would you shoot us a copy of that in writing so we have it? The secretary's on my case.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

It is already been submitted according to the form.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. Now a speech against, do I see any? Is the body ready to move this to a vote? There's microphone eight. I see you in the back.

Robert Horn:

A little too much light. Bishop, I'm Robert Horn, laity member from the Crew Cooperative Parish in the Living Waters District. I oppose this motion or resolution. This seems we've gone a little too far with this. Just as I have seen many requests or recommendations or demands for reparations to the African-American community, and I have spoken with some in that community who have said to me, "I wasn't in bondage. My ancestors were. You weren't a slave owner, so why should you pay reparations to me?" I have gay friends. I don't owe them an apology. I don't think this conference owes them an apology, so I am opposed to this resolution.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. That was a speech against. Speech for? I see the card there. Microphone four.

Rev. Tim Barth: Bishop, Rev. Tim Barth from Mountain View District, disabled. I think we need to add another, whereas I was just talking with Drew, and I remember the first time I encountered somebody who had been removed-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Well then you're doing a motion to amend. State your amendment.

Rev. Tim Barth:

My motion would be to amend to add a whereas that includes persons who have been removed under complaint, or persons who have been removed because of their sexual orientation from local license passed and also complaints.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, we'll move to the... I think it is in order because it's just adding another whereas clause.

Rev. Joshua King:

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Right. But I think they can amend it. So okay, we have the amendment before us to add that clause. Any speeches against that amendment? Okay, the amendment is before us. If you would add that to the resolution, please lift your hands. Okay, that prevails. We just had a speech against. Speech for. How about over, I see you right there in the, I can't even tell what color shirt you have, here in front of the post. Yes. Why don't you go to microphone, what's the nearest microphone? There's not really a close... Nine maybe behind you.

Kaylin Young:

Hi, my name is Kaylin Young. I am from the Living Waters District, and I am a member of the LBGTQ. And I do appreciate people trying to heal wounds. And I'm actually grateful for people realizing that. Because my mother had to comfort me, I felt a calling and I had basically in my mind I had to choose hiding myself or being the person I feel God made me to be. Thank you.

Rev. ReNe'e Teague:

I'm her pastor, not her mama.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Sometimes the two come awfully close. Okay. That was a speech for. Any other speeches against? Okay. Seeing none. Is this a speech against? Okay, microphone two.

George King:

How are you doing? My name is George King, Coastal Virginia St. John United Methodist Church. I'm in agreement with you. I think we get a little bit off track. I believe as you, we should be concerned about making disciples and following Jesus Christ. And I believe should get back to basics, and one of the basics that I'm thinking is we should be about saving souls. And the knowledge is that I look at is that if you love someone you would tell them the good and the bad. And I look at how we tell a child, if the stove is hot and we love them, do we go ahead and let them touch the stove? We'd tell them it's bad. So I use the same analogies with Jesus told us in Revelations 21:8, He tells us those that's going to see the lake of fire. And I think we all can understand the words that's used there. So I invite us to just take that seriously, and each person got to decide what they're going to do with their soul. So I would take look at that seriously and then go from there. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. That was a speech against. Speech for? I'm looking, trying to vary the room. Right here in the front. Microphone three.

Katie Fruman:

Hello, my name is Katie Fruman. I'm laity. I'm from the Three Notch'd District. I think that this is an important step forward to make an apology. We have a lot to apologize for. I have experienced harm as a cis head person for having LGBTQ family members in the Methodist Church. As a child in the Virginia Conference, I have watched my sister who is transgender, be pushed out of the church and away from multiple faith communities. She will not even let somebody wish her Merry Christmas because she has been so harmed by this conference. She is in her thirties and will not step foot near a church and will not let me speak to her about Jesus or anything. I am 37 years old. I'm younger than most of you. And when I tell you that this is how we save souls is by telling LGBTQ people that God loves them and that they are made the way God made them. God loves you whether you're LGBTQ or not. And I do not believe that there is a lake of fire for LGBTQ people or for any of us. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, let's withhold our applause. Is there another speech against? Okay, seeing none, are you going to speak against? Okay, two.

Rev. James Lewis:

James Lewis, Christ Church, Northern Virginia. Is the harm that we are addressing the simple language or is the harm that we're addressing everything that people believe may have radiated from that language? I think to me that's important to distinguish.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. I'm going to ask Rev. Ensz to clarify that for us.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Could you repeat the question one more time for me? I want to make sure I answer it correctly.

Rev. James Lewis:

I wish to clarify whether the harm for which we're being asked to render apology is for the language that was just excised from the Book Of Discipline. Or is the harm that we are being asked to apologize for other actions such as the ones that my sister referenced that occurred to her and others have referenced?

Rev. Drew Ensz:

I think that for me and the stories that I've heard are the actions and inaction, whether they're intentional or unintentional, that have arisen out of the language that was just changed. And I think as we're hearing right now, there is a multitude of stories of personal harm done to persons or harm done to others that we should apologize for.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay. A speech against, I don't think that was a speech against. That was a question. I'm looking for a speech against. I see one card there. Microphone three. Microphone three or six. Pick your pick.

Rob Getty:

Rob Getty, lay leader, Dahlgren United Methodist Church Mission Rivers. I have no problem with the motion, but my objection is the manner in which we're doing this. I am willing to wager 95% of the people in this room could not clearly explain the motion and all of the subtleties of it to their home church if they were to sit there and be put on the spotlight right now. We've already had people trying to amend it. We've had people still trying and clarify. This is the most important thing we've had happen in our conference and our denomination in a long time. Let's get it right. Don't vote on it today. Farm it out, get it polished properly and when it's ready bring it back.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I do think you raise a good point. I think what I would like to do is to receive it in writing, to distribute it. How can we distribute it to everybody? We did this last year, if you'll recall when there was request to study the regionalization stuff more the night of. So why don't we get this posted and available to you tonight and we will bring it to the floor in the morning for a vote.

Rev. Joshua King:

Should I offer a proper motion for that?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Certainly I would invite a proper motion for that.

Rev. Joshua King:

I move that we table this motion for the communications team to be able to properly put this before all of us and have it in our hands and that it would be before us tomorrow morning.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Any discussion? Let's just move it all in favor of that? Opposed? Okay. I think that is a reasonable request. I think we want to honor everybody's, and I think this is an important thing to consider and weigh and to look at the language of. So we will do that. I thank you for your holy conferencing. I thank you for your attention. I thank you for a good first day. I want to note, we're about 15 minutes ahead. And just noting, oh, somebody's waving from microphone eight. Hope it doesn't take 15 minutes, but it might.

Frank Esposito:

I'm properly advised Bishop. I am Frank Esposito. I worship at Burke Methodist in the Northern Virginia District. And I believe I must ask for a waiver of the rules in order to discuss the petition for a net-zero greenhouse gas emission by 2050.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Right. I'm going to bring that to the floor tomorrow. So I think we will handle both of these tomorrow.

Frank Esposito:

Excellent.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, good. Thank you. I haven't forgotten that. We know that's coming. Yes. Microphone one.

Carol Ann Kay:

This is a question.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay.

Carol Ann Kay:

My name is Carol Ann Kay. My name is Carol Ann Kay. I am 72 years old, as far as the age category is concerned. I'm a Celtic white woman. I am straight. I'm the lay leader of Pender United Methodist Church. And my question following your comments about ecumenism and reaching out is to how are we as a conference addressing the people who have heard the words, "If you feel uncomfortable, go to the Baptist church down the street. Perhaps you're in the wrong room." And the multitude of very, very heartbroken, heartfelt pain and agony of those people who are leaving in one way or another.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you for that question. I want to clarify that. I will say I received an email from a former leader of the church and she wondered why in our webinar I had asked people to leave. I watched that webinar again. The first thing I said was, "I don't want anybody to leave the United Methodist Church. I want everybody to stay. I want everybody to stay who was willing to be in a place where not everybody agrees." And so what I said was, and if you look at the webinar, what I said was, "If you are uncomfortable and choose to stay to foment discontent, to foment disunity, to foment division and are not willing to move forward, enjoy with," we disagree on many different things. Human sexuality is one. How we should address war is another. I'm sure tithing is another. There are a lot of things that we do not disagree on. But what we do agree on is that Jesus Christ is the hope of the world and we are united in our efforts to tell others about him and his redeeming love.

So hear me, and this is what I think Tom Bickerton was saying as well. If you are staying just to create division, divisiveness and disunity, there are other places where you will be comfortable and you'll be free to express your faith. If you can live in a place, and the United Methodist Church has always been one of those arenas where we agree to disagree, but we agree on the major doctrines of the church and we go

forth together, then please stay and I welcome you to stay. But the time of the ugliness is over. And if you just are going to sit in a congregation...

And I will add that for 20 years I came to a church where I disagreed and I stayed and I didn't stay to convince anybody I was right or my attitude was the only way. But I stayed because I value multiple opinions. I value different interpretation of scripture. I value bearing with each other in love and having discussion about deep matters of the faith and loving each other through that. And that's the church I want to be a part of. So I only, please hear me and hear me well, I mourn. I have cried so many tears over every lost person in the United Methodist Church. It is a heartbreaking time and I am deeply grieved by it. But I'm also really tired of constant friction, ugliness, division in our churches. I am sick and tired of misrepresentation. I am sick and tired of underhanded efforts. And I'm sick and tired of folks who don't realize that there are 70% of our culture who have no church, that they could be out recruiting rather than recruiting in our United Methodist churches.

So that is where I stand. I will always be honest with you and lay it on the line, but I hope that we can move forward. And if your stomach is twisted and your gritting your teeth and you hate every moment you're part of this, there are places where you will feel more comfortable. And I think as an act of pastoral care, I would like you to go there. So that is the final word for the day. I'm going to call Rev. Chenda Lee to come forward and give us our closing prayer for the day.

Rev. Chenda Lee:

Let us pray. God of our weary ears, God of our silent tears, Thou who has brought us thus far on the way, Thou who has by Thy might let us into Your light, keep us forever in Your path we pray. We give you thanks for the gift of gathering of holy conferencing. We give you thanks for the work that has been done by all gathered on this day. And we pray, oh God, that as we are led out of this place, and as we bring this time of conferencing to an end, that You will lead our spirits to find the courage to say all will be well because we are Yours. That You will lead our spirits to find the ability to live one moment and one day at a time. That You will lead our spirits to serenity and a peace which the world cannot give. That You will lead our spirits to know that with Your power, we can cope with whatever comes our way. You'll lead our spirits to know that we are destined, not for division, but for unity by the power of Your spirit that goes before us. And as we leave this place this day, grant us Your grace, grant us your mercy. Grant us patience and grant us, oh God, the ability to continue to proclaim the goodness of Your love for all of us. We pray this in the name of Christ. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you Rev. Lee. We stand in recess until 8:30 tomorrow morning. Thank you.

Friday Morning, June 21, 2024

BUSINESS SESSION

Major Speakers of this session include:

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, resident Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference

Rev. Jessie Colwell, VAUMC Director of Clergy Excellence

Rev. Tammy Estep, VAUMC Chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, pastor of The Nett Church and District Superintendent of the Central East District in the North Georgia Conference

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page, VAUMC Director of Connectional Ministries for Innovation & Creativity

Rev. Woo Kang, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, Associate Pastor of The Nett Church and the Lead Pastor of At The Table in the North Georgia Conference

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck, VAUMC AC Teacher 2024, pastor, professor, and author

{June 21 began with Singing our Faith, Rev. Drew Willson and the AC 2024 Band led the body in singing several songs.}

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And a big thank you to Drew Willson. He has spent hours leading our worship. Thank you, Drew. Fantastic. Well, I call back into order the 242nd session of the Virginia Annual Conference and we always open with prayer. And our prayer this morning will be led by Blair Ellis of the Mission Rivers District.

Blair Ellis:

Let us pray. Almighty God, we thank you for this day that you have made. Another day that gives us freedom of choice and the opportunity to do your will as we move forward in supporting our United Methodist mission, of making disciples for you, our triune God for the transformation of the world. We are so blessed by you and covet your grace and wisdom as we continue your work. We remember from our conferencing yesterday that our church has a lot of work to do, that we need to consciously look for joy and spread love as Jesus told his disciples, and that we must remember in our lonely and dark moments that there is a grid and we are on it.

You are always with us. Infuse us with the Holy Spirit. Help us listen, understand and discern as we hear reports, recognitions, just compensation, pensions, and other important matters. We ask that you be with us this afternoon as we remember our friends, colleagues, loved ones and family members who left

us during the past year and have joined with you in heaven for eternal life. We miss our friends and family but know that they're with you and that helps us bring comfort with our grief. As we continue to connect with those around us as part of this holy conferencing, we praise your name and ask that you help us down the path that you want us to follow. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you. Thank you very much. One thing that we truly believe as followers of Christ is that God gives everybody a voice and that God wants everyone's gifts to be shared and voice to be heard. And as part of that, we have a monitoring report this morning, so I invite Rev. Lauren Wright and Rev. Jenny Day forward to give their report.

Rev. Lauren Wright:

Good morning. Thank you, Bishop. Friends, my name is Lauren Wright. I'm a young adult clergy person serving on the Coastal Virginia District at Messiah United Methodist Church. I am a white female and I use the pronouns she and her.

Rev. Jenny Day:

I'm Jenny Day and I am no longer a young adult clergy woman, but that's okay. Happens to all of us. The best of us. I serve on the Shenandoah River District and I am a white female who uses the pronouns she and her.

Lauren Wright:

And as a friendly reminder, COSROW is monitoring all of our sessions and it is really uncomfortable to make assumptions about all of these things. So if you are comfortable sharing as much of your demographic information as possible when you speak, whether it's from the platform or the floor, COSROW would appreciate that in our best monitoring efforts. But I want to tell you about a small group gathering that happened at my local church a few weeks ago. I was sitting with a group of adults talking around a table. Several of our church kids were playing in the sanctuary within ear and eye sight of this adult group. We noticed that our kids were playing church. As they were sitting in our sanctuary, a four-year-old little girl stood behind the Holy Communion table. She had her arms raised practicing the motions of what it looked like to play church together, that she has seen time and time again from being formed in our faith community.

And when they were done playing churches, I had crept in the sanctuary and was watching. A kindergarten boy came up to me and he said, "Pastor Lauren, are boys allowed to be pastors too?" Moments like that, they really touched my heart because as a denomination, as a society, as a church, we have come a long way. We have come a long way thanks to the hard and faithful work of so many women, clergy and lay for generations making it possible for this five-year-old boy to not have a second thought about what it means for a female to be his pastor. But at the same time, we still have a lot of work to do. For as many stories as I've got about cute children playing church and the chancel of little

boys wondering if men are in fact allowed to be pastors, there are more women, clergy and lay, from preschool age through adulthood who have had their calls to ministry invalidated either explicitly by those who are in authority or implicitly by the ways that they are treated, by opportunities for which they are passed over.

And even in the very language that is used in worship, we are teaching our theology and doctrine through the words that we use, but also through our actions. My friends, this is where each and every one of us comes in because the little ones, they are watching. They're watching as they listen to the words that we say and they're listening to the postures that we hold. They're watching us when we preside at table and they're watching us when we respond to them as they come to us with questions and share their hopes and dreams. Our job as people of faith who want to continue to nurture the faith is to continue to make space for all in the church right now and in the church for generations to come.

Jenny Day:

This is why the work on the Commission On the Status and Role Of Women, or COSROW, is so important. This is why the work of our siblings on the Commission of Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy and the Commission on Disabilities is so important to show that all people are welcome in the church and more importantly, to let all people know that God's grace is for them. And keeping this in mind, one of the main focuses of Virginia's COSROW this past year has been on language we use and especially when speaking about God. The United Methodist book of Resolutions affirms the use of language that reflects the longstanding commitment to the inclusiveness and diversity of United Methodist members and communities. The church as an institution acknowledges that God has no gender, yet we still heavily include gender-specific language and symbolism in our worship practices and communications.

Now this doesn't mean that we let go of God as father or God as he. It just means that we open and broaden the language that we use to be more inclusive of the other ways we can use to describe God. Because when we limit our language about God, it can create barriers for women and girls and others to see themselves the way that God does: in God's very image. COSROW has been partnering with Allison Hickey who is the president and CEO of All In Solutions, which works with Veteran Affairs. She is a retired Brigadier General in the United States Air Force and has her Master of Theological Studies from Wesley Seminary. Currently, Allison is working on her Doctorate of Ministry, which is focusing building an online source for gender-neutral or affirming resources that can be used among the Virginia Annual Conference, other United Methodist Conferences, and even other denominations.

This site will include gender-neutral or affirming prayers, songs, biblical readings and scripture from Bible versions noted for reducing gender language for God. It will also include sermon templates and slides. The theological focus of this effort is described in relation to John Wesley's theology of equal worth, believing as we adjust our language and symbology about God, we will broaden our vision and understanding of God, which will then have the power to change the way we see all of God's children. Friends, we need your help in this endeavor. Allison has put together a survey focusing on the use of inclusive languages and resources in our local churches. So we encourage and invite you to stop by the

COSROW booth in the display center and fill out a paper survey or scan the QR code to fill it out online. As Allison's site becomes available, we hope that you will use it as a resource to broaden the language used in church. Let us be intentional in our speaking and in our living, that we would show others that they too have a place in the kingdom of God. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you Rev. Wright and Rev. Day. And now it's my great honor and privilege to introduce Dr. Scott Miller. He is the president of Virginia Wesleyan University and he is bringing our report from United Methodist College Presidents. And if you haven't been to Virginia Wesleyan, you need to go over and see what a beautiful and vibrant place it is. And I thank Dr. Miller for a lot of that.

Scott D. Miller:

Thank you. Thank you, Bishop. Good morning friends. On behalf of my presidential colleagues, Mirta Martin of Ferrum College, David Wesley of Randolph-Macon Academy, Robert Lindgren of Randolph-Macon College and Tracy Fitzsimmons of Shenandoah University, I'm delighted to be here with you today. I am Scott Miller, president of Virginia Wesleyan University and I speak on behalf of your five United Methodist Church affiliated schools, colleges, and universities in Virginia. There is a sixth United Methodist institution in Virginia, Emory and Henry College, who regularly interacts with our membership, but they're a part of the Holston conference unfortunately. And a seventh institution, Randolph College, who claims a historic relationship but sadly disaffiliated during the of church controversy and the pandemic. Together, we enrolled 13,000 students in the 2023/24 academic year at your United Methodist Church affiliated colleges in Virginia. That is impactful. Earlier this week I attended the meeting of the 84 United Methodist College and University presidents from across the country. I was there not only as a lifelong United Methodist and a career United Methodist higher education administrator, but also as the president of Virginia Wesleyan University. And I might add that I was also there as the former president of the North American Association of Methodist Schools, Colleges and Universities, a group that I led during the pandemic and the critical period of change within the church. So my comments today will focus on your Virginia institutions and also in the context of United Methodist higher education nationwide.

I'd like to open by expressing the joy and relief from my colleagues at the colleges and universities in Virginia regarding the monumental decision and the bold commitment of the United Methodist Church to serve the spiritual needs of all people rather than extending grace to a select few. Many of our institutions pride themselves on their inclusive and diverse communities. This decision aligns our campuses and churches in a way that has not been felt for many decades. This momentous decision marks a new era of inclusivity where every individual, regardless of their background, is embraced with open arms. It's a testament to our shared belief in the dignity and worth of every person. Our campuses have always been microcosms of society, reflecting a broad spectrum of cultures, beliefs, and perspectives. By fostering an environment where every student feels valued and accepted, we're preparing the next generation to lead with empathy and understanding.

Secondly, I'd like to compliment Bishop Hupert-Johnson for restoring confidence in the church in Virginia during a challenging period. Her steadfast leadership and commitment to transparency have been instrumental in guiding us through uncertain times. Under her guidance, we've seen a renewed spirit of unity and purpose across our united Methodist institutions, reinforcing our shared values of inclusivity and compassion. Thirdly, the Book of Reports contains crucial details about each of our campuses' significant events. Please, it's a lot of information [inaudible 00:38:41].

... Dedicated to ensuring that all students and staff feel supported on their personal spiritual journeys, regardless of which faith or which gender they choose to embrace. Our commitment to inclusivity is reflected in our efforts to provide equitable access to education and resources. We're investing in programs that address the unique needs of our students, from mental health support to career development opportunities. By fostering an environment where every individual feels seen and heard, we're nurturing a community of learners who are empowered to make a positive impact in the world. I close with a reminder and a bold statement on behalf of my presidential colleagues. Our public college colleagues in Virginia, many of whom have Wesley Foundations, have been funded at record levels by the Commonwealth of Virginia, but they're also receiving much more money from the church than your United Methodist affiliated institutions in the name of protecting physical assets. A reality, should those physical assets go away on those state college campuses, those institutions would still find a way to support ministries there.

Your United Methodist related institution institutions are much more than your physical assets and depend on private donations from you as individuals and from the church for critical support. We don't have the state to rely on during challenging times in our higher education economy, yet of the last 10 years, our financial support has severely declined despite significant investments at Public College Ministries. I urge you, we urge you to get to know these five institutions well and make their health and well-being your highest educational priority. I mentioned the meeting earlier this week of the Methodist presidents. A bishop who's been a friend for a long time shared some thoughts. He offered these words on the church's role in supporting United Methodist higher education, and I'll quote him.

"In the tumultuous times in higher education in the church, the most important thing I can do as Bishop, that clergy can do, that annual conference delegates can do, is to make our institutions a priority and not a second option. We should openly be making United Methodist higher education the top priority." I challenge all of us to do the same thing. It's a great and historic time to be a united Methodist and to lead a united Methodist institution, and we applaud the courage of many in this room to get to where we are today. Together, we're not just building institutions of higher learning, we're creating communities of faith, compassion, and innovation. Let us continue to work together, inspired by our shared values and driven by our collective vision for a brighter future. I thank you very much.

Bishop Sue Hupert-Johnson:

Thank you, Dr. Miller. Oh, I see a card. Six, please.

Rev. Devon Maust Earle:

I would like to make a response to the speech, if that's appropriate.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. I think that's appropriate, in order.

Rev. Devon Maust Earle:

My name is Devon Maust Earle. I am the campus minister and director at Wesley at UVA, and I would like to thank our Virginia Conference for the support that you give to our United Methodist colleges and universities as well as to our campus ministries. We could not do what we do without you and we do need your support. I want to talk about abundance. Rather than sharing a pie, we get to share the pie together. And so as we think about funding our United Methodist universities, I also ask that that be shared with us in United Methodist Campus Ministries. Yes, you do fund us, but as we continue to need support to bring up the next generation of United Methodists and United Methodist leaders, we need continued support. So I ask that our support not be reduced, but that we just continue to share out of abundance with just the United Methodist Schools and our United Methodist Campus Ministries. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay. I now recognize Rev. Jessie Colwell, who is our director of Clergy Excellence and does a tremendous job. Rev. Colwell, come on and let's have your report. Thank you.

Rev. Tammy Estep:

The licensing class of 2024: Martha Arullia Allen, Pamela Becker-Bentley, Dinah Bondzia, Stephen Wayne Carr, Jason Michael Corron, Michael Anthony Cuffee Jr, Sean Michael Gray, Richie Keith Jordan, Benjamin C. Kent, Chanmi Lee, Sangjung Lee, Yoonsik Lee, Leah Michelle McGlynn, Joseph Lennox Mazure, Annette Northan Austin, Kwame Owusu Ansah, Stephen Blake Poore, Justin Bradley Robbins, Katie AnnRolka, Michael Frank Russell, Andrew Jeremiah Ryu, J.R. Serrano, Timothy J. Stark, Jacob Edward Thomason, Donna R. Tucker, and Meredith Dean Webb, Meredith has a presentation from the licensed local pastor class of 2024.

Rev. Meredith Webb:

Good morning. My name is Meredith Webb. I'm a white young adult clergywoman from the Valley Ridge District and I speak on behalf of this year's licensing school class. For eight days in May, we gather to fellowship, worship and learn from some of the most gifted minds and talented pastors in our conference. To each of our instructors, the design team, our beloved Crystal Sygeel and Dean Brian Johnson, I offer my deepest gratitude on behalf of this year's class. Bishop Sue joined us one evening of licensing school for an insightful Q&A, inspiring worship and joyful fellowship. Bishop Sue's presence with us made us feel valued, known, and really, really cool. We would like to return the favor by offering you, Bishop Sue, a gift from all of us.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Oh, wow.

Rev. Meredith Webb:

The evening Bishop Sue has spent with us, she shared her joy and her love for the local church. She talked about her beginnings in local church ministry, her longing for the work of loving a congregation and delighting in the joy of the ordinary of local church. Words and stories that were sweet music to the anxious and ambitious ears and weary souls of first-time pastors that have been working towards this moment for years. Bishop Sue, your words will not soon be forgotten. To celebrate our time together and to commemorate this historic time in the UMC, we, the Licensing School class of 2024, would like to present you with this stole.

We selected this stole for a few reasons. One, it's color. Green for ordinary times. Not only the liturgical season, but to celebrate the ordinary work of the local church that witnesses to the extraordinary work of God. The bold display of the word joy to show there is joy in the ordinary. There is joy in the UMC and there is joy in Christ. The rainbow colors that make up the inside of the word joy to commemorate the historic, and yes, joyful full inclusion of LGBTQIA+persons into the life of the UMC. Embroidered on the inside are the words, "For the joy of the local church, Licensing School class of 2024." So again, thank you Bishop Sue and to all involved in Licensing School who make us the licensed locals and provisional members possible.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you all. I'm glad it doesn't have a chicken wing on it.

Rev. Tammy Estep:

And now the commissioning class of 2024. As provisional deacons: Bradley Dean Duty, Laura Rose Vinnitsa, Joseph Henry Clemens, As provisional elders: Madison Long Ailinger, Donovan Hector Archie, Timothy Matthew Blake, Lauren Leigh Geraghty, Betsy Taylor Hudson, H.K. Kim, Eric D. Kleppinger, Jeong Seung Lee, Ashley Nicole Oliver-Thomas, Blaine Hunter Oliver-Thomas, Yosvany Pereira Proenza.

And finally, the ordination class of 2024. For full membership as a deacon: Renee Kiger Delgado and Andrew Christian Labar-Dietz. For full membership as an elder: MiRahng Bae,. Chad Thomas Beck, Robin Garman BeMiller, Brian Thomas Boettcher, Daniel Harrison Burch, Jonathan Steven Greer, Patrick Stevens Pillow, Keith Lee Vernon, and Han Yee.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

It's my honor and privilege before the whole annual conference, the Book of Discipline says that the Bishop as the chief pastor of the annual conference shall work and meet and pray over and discuss the historic questions with those being ordained into full connection in the United Methodist Church. These

questions have been asked of every ordinand since the beginning of the Wesleyan movement and this is a high and holy moment as they have prayed over these questions, we have discussed these questions and now I ask them publicly before you. First, have you faith in Christ?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you going on to perfection?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you earnestly striving after it?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and God's work?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Do you know the general rules of our church?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Will you keep them?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Have you studied the doctrines of the United Methodist Church?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

After full examination, do you believe that our doctrines are in harmony with the holy Scriptures?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And this traditional question is for the elders, but deacons do this as well. Will you preach and maintain them?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Have you studied our form of church discipline and polity?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Do you approve our church government and polity?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Will you support and maintain them?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

We pondered this in the clergy session. This question is traditional for the deacon, but I think you see it applies to elders as well. Will you exercise the ministry of compassion?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Will you visit from house to house, and I add, not just the houses of members?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Will you recommend fasting or abstinence, both by precept and example?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Are you in debt so as to embarrass you in your work?

Ordinands in unison:

No.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Good answer. It's harder and harder. Will you observe the following directions? Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time, neither spend any more time at any one place than is strictly necessary. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time and do not mend our rules but keep them not for wrath, but for conscience's sake. And now I ask those being ordained as elders in full connection. These are my additions, but you'll see why they're important. Will you go where you are sent?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And the last one, will you stay away from where you have been?

Ordinands in unison:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Good. I want to say that if you have any doubt about the future of the United Methodist Church, spend some time with any of our folks who are licensed local pastors, provisional elders or deacons and these folks in full connection. Their calls are amazing. God is mightily at work and I am overjoyed to see where God is leading the United Methodist Church and the Virginia Annual Conference under the leadership of these folks. And I invite you to greet them. I also ask, you'll be tempted to leave tomorrow. I know lots of stuff happening at home, but if you want to really savor the joy of the church, stay for the ordering of ministry service tomorrow, as we welcome and celebrate God at work in these lives. We welcome you all.

Rev. Tammy Estep:

That concludes our report, but again, I too want to invite you to the celebration where these candidates will be recognized fully and welcomed into their ministry. So we will see you tomorrow.

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

We continue on this morning with the Just Compensation Task Force reports. And you'll see the committee is behind me and they have done a lot of hot, hard and holy work for you all as you have asked them to do last annual conference and we are excited to bring to you the work we have done led by the Holy Spirit. Again, I'm Rev Jessie Caldwell, director of Clergy Excellence. White, middle-aged female. There's a couple of us here. Yes, me. And she, her and hers are my pronouns. I'm the chair of the Just Compensation Task Force. Last year, a lay member named Ms. Terri Chaplin of the Mountain View District expressed genuine concern about the financial well-being of our clergy. This led the conference to adopt the amended motion to increase the minimum salary by \$1000 for full-time clergy in each category for 2024.

Out of that same concern regarding the compensation of clergy across our conference, another motion was made by the Rev Dr. Janine Howard of the Northern Virginia District. She said a work group should be created by the annual conference to study housing allowances for clergy and make recommendations to create consistent and equitable practices for setting the allowances. This work group would include representation from various boards and agencies of the Virginia Conference that would pertain to clergy housing. Our committee met seven times for very long hours and additional times in smaller work groups. We made an informational video that included our full reports and the pre-work videos and you can also find our reports on the book of reports on page 43 through 47. And we also have a web link for you to go to view additional materials. Our task force studied our own clergy housing statistics and the practices of various United Methodist conferences in the Southeastern jurisdiction and beyond. We are pleased to share the results of our work.

Our foremost achievement has been the development of the Virginia Conference Annual Housing Review Worksheet. This facilitates a comparison of five suitable homes within the same zip code, factoring in utility costs for heating and air conditioning. This tool is designed for use by staff parish relations committees in collaboration with the district superintendent to accurately calculate just in equitable clergy housing allowances. Our second finding was the need to provide education to clergy and churches through a collaborative effort with key stakeholders such as the Office of Clergy Excellence, the Board of Ordained Ministry, and the Office of Pensions and Benefits. We developed a pamphlet entitled "Pastor Leontine Wesley", which shows you what it looks like financially for a clergy person in their first year of ministry. This will be used as a tool for educational training this coming year. We plan to provide educational trainings around unique clergy tax regulations and maximizing clergy tax benefits and clergy debt reduction and financial wellness.

In summary, a lot of the work that we did as a committee has already been implemented in the updated cabinet housing policy and through the equitable compensation reports, which you are about to hear. In our research, we found that clergy housing allowances were affected by salaries. Bishop, I would like to make a motion that the Just Compensation Task Force continue its work for another year to study clergy

compensation in the Virginia Conference in its totality and present its findings and recommendations pertaining to this topic to the 2025 Virginia Annual Conference. This study will include but will not be limited to examining salary statistics, identifying documented inequities and exploring minimum parsonage standards.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, the motion's before us. There's a second on the front row. Thank you for being on top of that. Any discussion on proposal? I see no cards, so I am going to move it to a vote. Oh, there's a hand waving. Four. Microphone four. All I saw was the card over the four. I didn't see the person.

Rev. Michael Nelson:

Michael Nelson, clergy, white male. Cis-het. Middle-aged, I suppose. I serve St. James on the Mission Rivers District. I submitted what I labeled as a motion through the form. Perhaps it works as an amendment to the report. Not sure which since the report includes minimum personage standards.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Right. Go ahead and state your... Well, if it's an amendment, go ahead and state your amendment. We'll talk about it like that. I think that's the easiest thing.

Rev. Michael Nelson:

So the text that I submitted is I move that the Virginia Annual Conference create a task force or refer to the appropriate existing body to study and consider adding to the minimum standards for personage and annual parsonage review, regular standardized professional inspection of health hazards, including but not limited to mold, mildew, lead paint, asbestos and radon.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Any discussion on this or is this something that we should just vote on? Okay. If you'd be willing to approve this amendment to the report, lift your hand. Thank you. That will be added to more stuff for you to do. Isn't that fun? No, I think that's entirely appropriate and I think that's a good idea. Now we're back to the main motion, the report of the Just Compensation Task Force. Any other discussion? Okay, seeing none. I'm going to move this to a vote. If you would approve their report, please raise your hand. If you don't approve, same sign. And I think we all need to thank them for tremendous work and they've moved us ahead.

Rev. Jessie Colwell:

Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you all. It seemed like every time I turned around they were at the office meeting, so I appreciate their work so much. And now I introduce Rev. Tom Durrance to bring us our equitable compensation report. Rev. Durrance?

Rev. Tom Durrance:

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, members of the annual conference and guests, you can find the updated Equitable Compensation Commission Report on page 36 of the official packet. The purpose of the commission is to ensure that the clergy dedication to the itinerant process is supported by the local churches. The Equitable Compensation Commission provides salary support, ensuring adequate compensation for our clergy. In 2023 through the work of the commission, the Virginia Conference supported 27 charges across the conference, totaling \$168,545. These funds ensured that our clergy received minimal compensation or the appropriate salary supplementation. The commission in consultation with the cabinet recommends an increase of 3% for 2025 minimum compensation schedule. The minimum compensation would be \$47,400 for full connection pastors, \$42,700 for provisional and associate members and \$40,200 for local pastors. The commission also reviews the floor schedule, which is the amount the church must contribute to be eligible for equitable compensation salary support grant. For 2024, the commission recommends that the 2024 schedule remain the same for 2025, be the same as 2024. Bishop Johnson and I move that the recommended minimum compensation schedule and the floor schedule be approved as presented.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. The equitable compensation report is before us. Thank you. I've got a reliable second here. We'll get you your special name badge for that. Any discussion on the equitable compensation report? The floor is open for that now. I see, go to microphone nine.

Rev. Brett Isernhagen:

Thank you, Bishop. Brett Isernhagen, clergy, Shenandoah River District. White male, young by age, but not by lower back. The financial well-being of our clergy is a very important matter, especially as someone who serves a small church for the minimum compensation. And I think we all deserve and need some help, but I would encourage the conference to find a more nuanced solution because simply raising the minimum and asking our small churches who make up the majority of the conference to find the money as they're already struggling to meet their current overhead as they revitalize and restart and reform, I'm fearful of us raising compensation to the level that they can't afford the pastors that they need. I've moved from two or three churches purely because they couldn't afford me anymore, not because we couldn't do good work together. And that breaks my heart, it breaks their hearts and I think it can get in the way of the work of the Kingdom of God.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Other discussion? There's one. Another one on microphone nine.

Rev. ReNe'e Richie Teague:

I'm Pastor ReNe'e Richie Teague. I serve the Living Waters District at Wesley in Hopewell. I'm 63 years old. My pronouns are she and her and I've had a husband for 40 something years. I need a good wife, but that's a position that's been open for some time. I'm entertaining. But I stand here to say that I've served small churches and I understand the issues with them being able to support our younger clergy and people that are called to serve in rural areas. But I'm also here to say that at \$47,400, when you pay your full social security, you take another 8% off of that. That is not enough for these young people and for people that still carry student debt to be able to survive. I have two daughters that have served as school teachers and social workers for 10 years and they make more than that.

They still can't own homes, they can't get married, they can't have children. They can barely make payments, they can't afford cars, they can't afford all of these things. I don't know what the answer is, but I do know that we have a serious, serious problem in paying clergy. I have been a successful pastor for over 20 years and I make 50 grand a year. The problem is massive. It is not a problem for my beautiful staff parish chair to be back here worried about her pastor's inadequate salary. But we do have a problem. We have some that are very well paid and then we have the rest of us. It's something for us to very prayerfully consider and work toward. I see these beautiful young pastors that are willing to commit themselves to this ministry and we need to make certain that they can afford to continue that beautiful work. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. Teague. Microphone eight. Let's hold our applause. Microphone eight.

Brian Lamb:

Brian Lamb, Mission Rivers District. I am a, I guess now middle-aged, adult male. He/him pronouns. Looking at the schedule, I think we're missing a conversation based off of our pay scales. And generally speaking, when someone is offered a salary, it's based off their experience and their education. And we have quite a large licensed local pastor class and I wonder how many of them are coming into ministry with an advanced degree of an MDiv making, I can't see with the light, \$40,200. And so I would urge this committee to start factoring in education in the payment. I don't want to force a motion on the floor today to raise a licensed local pastor with an MDiv to a provisional pay.

But to me, the education is equal. It's just one person hasn't been able to go through all the hoops that are required to become a provisional member in that moment. And so I would commend looking at that. But for laity who aren't aware, my seminary payments are equal to my car payment. So I'm going into ministry with a car payment, a seminary payment making, when I was in it was \$36,000 a year. And so I would commend us looking at how are we making sure that we are not in debt to be embarrassed by paying us for the debt that we're required to take on to do this work. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay. Microphone nine.

Rev. Diana Johnson:

I'm Diana Johnson with Knotts Island United Methodist Church and I'm a she. I have been with the church for 12 years. It was my first church and I am retiring this year. My concern is the same as the first gentleman. I am three-quarters time because the church couldn't afford any more than that. It is hard for the small churches, the rural churches to be able to afford more. I hate to see more churches going to half-time or three-quarter time pastors because they can't afford any more than that. I wish there was a way for the denomination to help the small churches to be able to afford those salaries that you're asking for. I do think we need better pay, but I don't think that the churches right now can afford to pay more for pastors. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Others? Right here. Microphone three.

Lisa Yates:

Hi, my name is Lisa Yates. I am an older adult, young at heart, cisgendered white female and I use the pronouns she and her. I have a question. There have been some very serious concerns. I don't know whether part of the solution is to reduce the floor schedule, but if we choose not to approve this because we have concerns about meeting the salaries, what happens?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, good question. I think we have the Just Compensation Task Force. I think we all are aware of these issues on a daily basis. I know the cabinet struggles with this constantly and I think we do need some creative solution. Obviously we need alternative funding sources and we need folks to tithe. There's a lot of issues here that we need to address as a church. It's not an easy fix. The burdens fall unevenly, but they're either going to fall on the church or on the clergy and we shouldn't have to make that divide. So I think what we can do is ask the clergy Just Compensation Task Force to look into this and to really, I know I've worked since I've gotten here to look for alternative funding sources. And I think that's a really important thing.

It is just difficult in a situation where churches are in flux. We have an aging demographic. There's a lot of issues involved here that we're not going to resolve in an hour on the conference floor, but I think it helps to know that we have people who are working on this and if you feel passionate about this, send us your name and we will add you to this discussion. But these are the daily conversations that I and the cabinet have with churches and clergy every day. And we are more than aware of the issues involved. So I'm going to take one more. I realize, I think we've highlighted the problems. I think we agree on the problems. I don't think we're unaware of the problems, but they are thorny issues and very difficult to come to some conclusions with. So go ahead. Number one.

Rev. Mike Nelson:

Good morning everyone. My name is Mike Nelson. I'm a member at large in the Three Notch'd District and I identify as a sheep in the Church of Christ. So I'm grateful to be here today. Something that's been on my heart for a long time and I'd like to make a suggestion, if that would be in order.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Certainly.

Rev. Mike Nelson:

We are a connectional system. We are a connectional church and we need to really honor that. And the churches that are very small and the churches that are very large, if we worked together on this, I think there's some opportunity by centralizing clergy pay. If we were to make clergy pay an apportionment that's paid to the conference and then clergy are paid from the conference, there'd be an equitable move forward for everyone. There would not be these massive jumps in salaries that we see from people. There would be a way for people to serve where their gifts are needed versus where they need to make funds. I think that would be a real benefit to the community, to the community of clergy and to the community of churches. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. We'll certainly turn that over to the Just Compensation group. Okay, microphone two. Just looking at the clock, just saying.

Chris Reffett:

Morning, Bishop. Chris Reffett, layperson, Three Notch'd District, Wesley Memorial UMC. I have a request for information actually. We've heard several people mention during this there are concerns about student loans and that has the committee looked at that at all as a specific problem that they're trying to address?

Rev. Tom Durrance:

The Just Compensation, we're factoring that in.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

The Board of Pensions is looking at that as well. There's many groups looking at that.

Rev. Tom Durrance:

We're looking at a couple of things.

Chris Reffett:

Thank you. That's all.

Rev. Tom Durrance:

Yes, we're looking.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Microphone two.

Rev. Wayne Snead:

Bishop, Wayne Snead. Three Notch'd District. Retired, so that can tell you about my age. I call for the question.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. The question has been called. This requires the two-thirds vote. It'll move us immediately to a vote on the pending motion. If you would approve the question being called, please lift your hand. Opposed. Same sign. Okay. We're going to move directly to the vote on the report of the Equitable Compensation Committee. If you would approve this report, lift your hand. If you're opposed, same sign. And I think all of us realize that as we pass this report, all of us have kind of sick feelings in our stomachs and we have got to figure out a way forward in a time of... We've come through a lot. Unrest, disaffiliation, COVID.

I know a lot of folks struggle with folks not coming back after COVID, but let's claim a future with hope and say we're in this together. And God willing, we'll figure out the God of abundance, the God who holds all things. We'll figure this out. And I don't think God will desert the church. So let's move forward. Hopefully we have really good minds working on this and we are well aware of the issues involved. So thank you for your report. Thank you to the Equitable Compensation Group for their work, and we'll move forward with a lot to think about. So thank you.

Rev. Tom Durrance:

Amen, thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. I am going to give you a five-minute stand break because I've got to figure out something while you do that.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. I know you want to sit down and be ready for the election of your new leadership for the next quadrennium. And when the lay leader gets back, we'll...

Okay, I am going to turn this over to Rev. Joshua King for the election of our leadership for the next quadrennium.

Rev. Joshua King:

Thank you, Bishop. I move that for the next quadrennium, Mrs. Heather Lockerman be our Conference Chancellor, Mr. Dwayne Stinson be our Director of Connectional Ministries for Discipleship and Congregational Vitality, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page be our Director of Connectional Ministries for Creativity and Innovation, and Mrs. Martha Stokes to be our Conference Lay Leader, and that Mr. David Dommissie be our Conference Treasurer.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. We have these gifted leaders before us for election for the next quadrennium. If you will elect them, I ask you to raise your hand. Okay, thank you. Opposed, same. And they are duly elected. Yay. Okay, Rev. King, part two.

Rev. Joshua King:

I move that the election of the Annual Conference Committee as found in the nominations addendum on page 12, and the Board of Ordained Ministry addendum on page 38 of the digital official packet.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. We are looking at all of the nominations found in your nominations addendum, and the Board of Ordained Ministry members as well. If you would approve these elections for the next quadrennium, please raise your hand. Thank you. Opposed, same sign. And they are duly elected. One more. Okay.

Rev. Joshua King:

In addition to the nominations from the Conference Nominations Team, the Virginia Conference Historical Society has a list of nominations for election to their Board of Trustees. Their nominations team has worked to identify persons to serve and those trustees will require Conference election. And so I move to elect those nominations that have been submitted to the Conference Secretary.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Y'all are good. If you would approve these elections to the historical board, please lift a hand. Opposed, same sign. And they're duly elected. And so now Martha Stokes, please join me at the... Rev. Estep?

Rev. Tammy Estep:

Bishop, on page 78 is a list of those that have been nominated by you and me to serve on the Board of Ordained Ministry and they were selected by us and not the nominating committee. I just want to make sure that they are elected too.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Got you. Okay, let's make sure that the Board of Ordained Ministry is elected. You have been given the reference number. If you'll elect these folks, please just raise your hands. And I think they're duly elected. Thank you for that correction, Rev. Estep.

Now I would like all who have just been elected to stand. And I would like, just our first part of this consecration moment, I would like us all to say the Apostle's Creed together because I'm tired of us being told we don't believe in the Apostle's Creed and I want our Conference leadership to affirm this together. So let us do this.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. The third day he rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence, he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

May it also be duly noted that most people in here knew that by heart. But I ask all of the leaders of the Annual Conference for the next quadrennium to stand and I want to offer a prayer over you and then I'll ask Martha Stokes to have a prayer over you. So I invite you to stand.

Oh Lord, pour out your Holy Spirit on a fresh anointing of these gifted leaders who will lead the Virginia Annual Conference over the next four years. I thank you for their gifts. I thank you for your call on their lives. I pray that you will give them wisdom and courage, that you will give them creativity and joy, that you will give them energy and a new outpouring of your Holy Spirit to lead us in bold and new ways. May their compassion overflow, may their commitment to Christ increase, may their spiritual disciplines be strong and in force, and may you shape them into the leaders you need them to be for such a time as this.

Martha Stokes:

Come, Spirit, come. Fill not just the leaders who are standing who've agreed to serve in Conference leadership roles for the next quadrennium, but fill us all, equip us for the work that's ahead because we do have a lot of work to do. By God we're filled with new energy and new excitement and a sense of renewal and revitalization that I pray, on behalf of each one of us gathered here, just continues to guide our work. Help us to find those 30 minutes, at least, a day to sit and listen, listen for your voice, listen for your call and your vision in our individual lives, our churches, and across our Virginia Conference. Help us continue to serve as the hands and the feet and the heart and the eyes and the mind of Christ in the world today so that all will come to know that the United Methodists of the Virginia Conference are on

fire for you and do all that we offer in service to the world in your name to glorify you and your son all under the guidance of your Holy Spirit. All this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

We are to the point of the consent agenda, but I'm happy to report there's nothing that requires a vote on the consent agenda, so we'll keep going, okay? Now we have before us the report of the Cabinet and the Dean of the Cabinet, Rev. Denise Bates, who I want to publicly thank for her service on the Cabinet through difficult times and the hard work she put in.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Thank you, Bishop. Thank you. I'm Denise Bates and I am a female clergy. I am a proud senior person, and my pronouns are she and her. And it has been my honor to serve on the Cabinet and to serve as their dean for these last three years of my five year of service on the Cabinet. Bishop Sue, Lay Leader Stokes, members of the Annual Conference, the report of the Cabinet is found on pages 39 and 40 of your Book of Reports. Please also open your official packets and turn to the sheet containing minute questions 10, 11, and 12. The sheet containing the listings of the district committees on ordained ministry and the sheet containing the listing of the district boards of church location and building. These are on pages 17 through 34 of the document. First, I move the approval of the district committees of ordained ministry on page 33 and the district boards of church location and building on page 34.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, there's no second required, but I thank you for coming through with that. The nominees for the district committees on ordained ministry and the district boards of church location are before you. If you would approve their service, please lift a hand. Thank you. No, by the same sign. And they are duly elected.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Thank you. Second, I present minute questions 10, 11, and 12 on the sheet. Bishop, I move approval of minute questions 10, 11, and 12.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, if you would approve these, please lift a hand. Opposed, same sign. And they are approved. Thank you.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Now please turn to the closure resolutions that can be found on pages 30 through 32 of the official packet. Listed are the 13 detailed church closure resolutions before the body for vote. After we vote to recognize the discontinuance of these churches as a group, the bishop will offer a prayer of recognition for the ministries of these churches that have touched the lives of people in their communities. Before

we proceed with the vote, you are invited to watch the video on the screens as we remember and celebrate the ministry of these churches.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, I'll refer you back to the official packet from pages 30 to 32 of the workbook of the official packet. That's where you have the detailed resolutions that are listed. The actual text is there. You've heard the report on the closure resolutions. I would again direct you to pages 30 to 32. We will now vote upon these resolutions as a whole. I do see a card. Microphone 2.

Rev. Drew Colby:

My name is Drew Colby. I'm a white adult male. I'm clergy from the Northern Virginia District and my pronouns are he, him, and his. I have a request for information. I noticed that the language of this motion has changed from previous years in that now the property and assets of discontinued churches are being returned to the Conference and not the district in which that church resides. In years past, those assets, including the proceeds from sold church real estate, have stayed on the district. But with the wording of this motion, it sounds like those assets and funds will now go to the Conference. Can you help us understand the reason for that change and the Conference office's vision for how these assets and funds will be stewarded differently by the Conference instead of the districts?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

The trustees... Well, I could hold this out of order because the Discipline does provide that all sold churches, all closed church funds, will go to the Annual Conference trustees.

I think that what we're looking to do is... Well, first of all, every district has significant resources from closure of churches. And the Conference trustees now are looking at how do we pull these resources and how do we have some sort of grant, or how do they approve requests from districts to use these properties. So I still think very little will change. The districts will receive a lot of the benefit of these, but the Annual Conference, much like the Board of Church Location and Building oversees how churches use their funds, the Annual Conference will just make sure that the districts that everything is in order. But I don't foresee that they will deny districts and we will have a clear process for that developed, the trustees know that, over the next year.

So I think this is teamwork. This is the Conference in partnership with the districts and the realization that a lot of the development in the Annual Conference might be in lesser funded districts and that might need to be acknowledged in the future. But I welcome you, Rev. Colby, to serve on that task force as we look into the appropriate oversight. But I think that there is a potential we have to use this money in ways that will foster growth all over the Annual Conference. And so the trustees are going to live into that vision. It will all be transparent, it will all be above board, and if you don't like it, then we can re-examine the process. How's that?

Rev. Drew Colby:

That's great. It would be great to get a briefing on that plan. Just because it's--

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yeah, no, it's being developed and I would love for you to help write that.

Rev. Drew Colby:

It's a significant change that I wanted to just have more information about, so thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Certainly. Certainly. Okay, any other discussion? The closing of these churches... Well, let's do the vote and then we will move into the Time of Lament and Hope. So if you would approve the closure of the churches listed on pages 30 to 32 of the official packet, please lift your hand. Those opposed, same sign. And those churches are closed.

I now invite all of you whose lives have been impacted by the churches on this list to stand. I really see our whole gospel is about death and resurrection. And the sad truth is a lot of times churches close because populations shift, folks die. There's a lot of reasons and we all know that. But what we celebrate is, in God's economy these churches become a legacy for new expressions of the faith. And that's why it's important to look at these resources and use them in ways that help the United Methodist Church move forward to new generations.

But I acknowledge and lament how hard this is. I have overseen charge and church conferences for church closure, and it is never easy. It is always gut-wrenching. So I want to acknowledge with great appreciation and joy the years of ministry that these churches have had and the lives they've touched and the disciples they've made. So let's pray together.

Oh God, we pray that your Holy Spirit, the Comforter, will comfort the hearts that are breaking, will fill the sense of loss with the reminders of the joy's past, the ministries that these churches have provided to their communities, how they've been Christ for decades. We celebrate the weddings performed, the children baptized, the somber funerals held. We celebrate that they were centers of gathering and rejoicing in these communities. They were centers of potluck dinners and covered dishes and all sorts of fun times.

We ask, oh Lord, that you help us celebrate their legacy as we mourn their loss. Encourage us and empower us to build the church for the days to come and to help us to understand that in your economy nothing is ever wasted, we just move into new ways, churches morph into new ways of being, but the gospel continues. May that be so here. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Denise Bates:

Bishop, this concludes the report of the cabinet.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Dean Bates. Why don't we talk about resurrection now? And Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page is going to talk to us about recognition of new faith communities.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Good morning. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, lay and clergy members of the Virginia Annual Conference and guests, my name is Jonathan Page. I am the Director of Connectional Ministries for Innovation and Creativity. I'm white, male, cishet. I use he/him pronouns. And while I'm a middle-aged adult, I'd like to think I can still rock a graphic tee. Oh, and flip-flops. Yeah.

It is my honor to stand before you to offer a report from the Church Development Team, known as CDT for short. Chaired by Rev. Stephanie Parker, CDT works to imagine new expressions of church in and around the Virginia Annual Conference. In the last year, CDT has been fortunate to fund a number of leadership grants, hear exciting proposals for ministries that are edging toward new frontiers, and imagine together some of what the Holy Spirit might be doing to invigorate a fresh movement in the United Methodist Church.

As we work in this space of holy imagination, I'd like to share three important elements of the work CDT has engaged since we last gathered in Roanoke. First, CDT has compiled a lessons learned report. Led by the Rev. Michelle Matthews, a sub-team from CDT worked to complete interviews with key stakeholders such as planters, parent church pastors, district superintendents, and leadership from 28 different faith communities in the Virginia Annual Conference that have been planted since 2008.

Within that report, there are a few findings that I'd like to highlight for your shared consideration. When asked about what has contributed to the success of a church plant, stakeholders named the top three factors as these: having a risk-taking "pivoting" culture, a prioritization of community partnership, and a clarity of mission and vision.

Now, in a similar vein, stakeholders were asked about factors that have contributed to the decline or failure in church planting. The top two responses to this: an unhealthy level of unresolved conflict amongst stakeholders and leadership, and unclear expectations or involvement from external investors in a church plant. In other words, people who might have oversight over a church plant.

So I know we're talking about new church starts in a big way, but I hope something you can see in these two elements of this report, whether your concept of church is emerging as we speak, thousands of years old, or something in between, I hope something you can see is that what churches need is a complete dependence on the Holy Spirit, a complete investment in the community they wish to serve, and a complete commitment to God's lead. What churches do not need is to become institutional, to have too many cooks in the kitchen, or to be monotone, monocultural, or monolithic.

In the outcomes of this report, CDT has received wisdom about the importance of prioritizing equitable opportunities as well as the equitable funding and pastor compensation for African, African-American,

Asian, Hispanic, Latino, and multi-ethnic churches. Furthermore, there is a call to prioritize equitable opportunity as well as the equitable funding and pastor compensation of female church planters.

Finally, there's a recommendation to participate in the ongoing evaluation of culture and power dynamics within the Virginia Annual Conference, evaluating the health of churches that feel a call to anchor church plants, and the readiness and personality of anchor church pastors and planters. All of this done in service to determine why an unusual number of multi-sites and anchor church tethered church plants have not been successful.

I think I speak for this entire team when I say we look forward to working toward this wisdom and continuing to see the fruits of church planting in Virginia in the coming year and years.

Next, I'd like to share just a little bit about an exciting new initiative that CDT is piloting. And to do this, I need to ask you just a quick question. I wonder if you could raise your hand if you or your church has ever tried to apply for a grant from the Virginia Annual Conference? Okay, so there are a few of us. So keep your hands up. Now, let me ask, have you ever tried to apply for a grant from anyone, anywhere, ever? Okay. So we have a few grant seekers in the room.

Now, since we're all these people, is applying for grants an easy process? I don't want to speak for everyone, but my sense from you all is that it isn't. Not at all. And in the Virginia Annual Conference, we have a multitude of granting sources. Many of these have their own grant applications and processes for awarding grants, which often are in amounts of less than \$10,000 per year. There's a challenge with grants, and that challenge is summarized in this that granting is often over complicated inside the Annual Conference, and it's hard to find grants outside the Annual Conference.

So CDT with generous support from the Common Table for Church Vitality and the Virginia United Methodist Foundation has entered into a partnership with Ministry Incubators, known as MINC for short, and an organization called Grantscape to work on what I might call the grants hairball. Yes, it's ironic for someone as bald as me to be concerned with something so hairy.

But over the last several months, MINC has been working alongside Conference leaders to think through the challenges related to grants. And there are a few things I'd like to share with you about their findings. First, we're anticipating some shifts in grantmaking priorities within the Virginia Annual Conference centered on collaboration, accessibility, and clarity. MINC and Grantscape are recommending the creation of an internal grantmaking collaborative. This would allow multiple grantmaking bodies within the Virginia Annual Conference space to consider applications and funding and proposals in unison, making bigger impacts and funding larger projects than what individual bodies could do on their own.

In addition to this, there's a recommendation that we develop a grants portal through our Conference digital spaces that allow ready-made access for Conference members to see what grants are available, ensure a clear and centralized application process, and educate around any necessary protocols for all grants. If implemented appropriately, these shifts would allow Conference members to have more

clarity around availability and access of grant funds and would allow grantmakers the opportunity to make more collaborative impact with the funds they steward.

In addition to what we are being asked to do within the Annual Conference in grantmaking, we're pleased that MINC is helping with the grant seeking work of the Virginia Annual Conference. In recent weeks, MINC has helped to write a \$1.25 million grant proposal to the Lilly Foundation around the integration of children and worship around the Annual Conference. We should be praying that that proposal is successful. Amen?

Additionally, there are some 19 other grants that have been identified for Conference-level consideration of which MINC will be helping to write proposals for several. Over time, the hope is that the Virginia Annual Conference can begin to develop relationships with trusted granting partners that might help fund mission and ministry throughout the Virginia Annual Conference.

So where do we go from here? Before I tell you about this, let me share that this initial report from MINC and Grantscape that I'm summarizing for you today is all of four weeks old. It's going to take some time to consider and implement what they are inviting us to work on, but there are a couple of strategic steps I think we can anticipate as an Annual Conference body.

First, the development of a strategic Grantmaking Task Force will begin in the next few weeks with the hope that such a task force will be able to assist with the consideration of grants beginning with the fall funding cycle of 2024. Additionally, we'll be working to ensure information regarding grant funding is readily available through our Conference digital resources such as the Conference website, and social media platforms.

Over time, MINC and Grantscape have recommended that we consider what it might look like to staff the Annual Conference with a grant writer, a director of fundraising or development, or similar positions that could help with the important work of creating funding streams for essential mission and ministry happening in local churches, districts, and the Annual Conference.

Ultimately, all of this is important to talk about because we have the capacity to make grants less scary and much, much more impactful. There is a desire to create accessibility and opportunity for funding, and all of this is being done in service to create pathways for mission and ministry that apportionments alone cannot create. I'm excited for the potential that this granting work can have in our Annual Conference, and I'll look forward to sharing more with you as this develops in the coming year.

Now, in conclusion, while I think these first two things I've shared with you are pretty important and great, I'm especially excited to tell you about two new faith communities that are taking shape in the Virginia Annual Conference, and I'd like to invite my friends to come forward at this time.

First, I want to introduce you to the Rev. David Drinkard, Warren Drinkard, and DS Jay Carey. The Drinkard Brothers are a part of Appomattox United Methodist Church on the Living Waters District where DS Carey is the superintendent. In the wake of numerous disaffiliations in their surrounding area,

a group of saints came together and named their desire to remain United Methodist. This collective, now known as Appomattox UMC, began meeting in March of 2023.

And while there's a lot to highlight about them, let me tell you all, they might be the only church plant or plant or church, for that matter, I've ever heard of that has asked when they can start paying apportionments. But way more importantly than that, this is a community of faith that desires to shine God's light through their teaching of the scriptures, their formation of disciples in a Wesleyan identity, and their missional connection to their community. We are blessed as an Annual Conference to have the witness of Appomattox UMC. Amen? Amen.

And then I want to introduce you to the leaders connected with the King William campus of New Song United Methodist Church. With us today, we have Jeremy Vest, who is the planting pastor of this campus. Rev. Chad Herndon is the parent church pastor. DS Hyo Lee is the--

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Pastor. Rev. or excuse me DS Hyo Lee is the Three Notch'd District, Superintendent and DS Charles Ledlum-Bates is the Mission Rivers District Superintendent. New Song UMC is located in the Mechanicsville neighborhood of the Metro Richmond area within the Three Notch district. And there was something they noticed, which is that they had a number of folks who were commuting from King William County to be in worship at New Song. Continued assessment of the King William County population brought a realization that there is not a current United Methodist presence in the county, and there are very few churches that are able to offer a modern worship engagement like the one New Song is built to offer. Now here's the thing, if you look at a map of the state of Virginia, excuse me, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and you see the county breakdown of it, you'll notice that King William County doesn't fit neatly into our annual conference because it is in both the Three Notch'd District and the Mission Rivers District.

I have to tell you what I love about this satellite opportunity is that it has the backing of both an incredible parent church and two districts collaborating together to resource the work of the Holy Spirit in King William County. This model of faith community development prioritizes the witness of the United Methodist Church in an underserved community and allows the Holy Spirit to be at work in a multitude of capacities rather than being governed by institutional formalities. And I think we could all say that is some good news. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Amen. Thank you all.

I wonder if you might join your hearts with mine as we offer a prayer for these new faith communities and their leaders. God of all grace, we ask Your blessing upon these, Your endeavors in Appomattox and King William County throughout the Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church and in all of Your creation, might You be raising up generations of people who desire to follow You and to share Your love in every way possible. Would You create inroads to community transformation and personal sanctification that these might be havens of Your Holy Spirit bearing the fruits of the Spirit in their every word in action. Pour out Your grace upon them that it may overflow into the totality of their work and their rest, their being and their doing, their tilling and their thriving. May it all be Yours. We ask this in your most holy and precious name, and all God's people said Amen. Bishop, this concludes the CDT Report.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you Dr. Page. I want to thank him for his tremendous work in creativity and innovation, and he is certainly leading us in creativity and innovation. And I ask you to pray with your church leadership and discern where the Holy Spirit might be calling your church to move out into areas that maybe need a United Methodist presence. Microphone four. I see a card.

Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud:

Thank you Bishop. Gina Anderson-Cloud, Northern Virginia District Floris Church. My pronouns are she and her. And I want to just speak before Rev. Page gets too far off the floor. I want to commend the work of his office and the collaboration across the conference for this grant making initiative. But as I listen to what I know is something in development, I feel like there's a missing partner in this work and that is our districts. This probably loosely relates to Rev. Colby's comment about how the allocation of resources with the closer of our churches are being now placed in the annual conference trustee hands. I think many of us know that there are a lot of resources in our districts and we so appreciate our districts, but in a time, and I speak as someone who has been under this stress of finances and church planting as a former church planter, I'm someone who currently is trying to lead from Floris Church in the fresh expression movement. I think we all need to join hands together, so I would love to see Rev. Page's report amended to include all of our districts as a partner to this grant making work and that we work together as an annual conference to support vital ministry, whether it is church planting, fresh expressions, or just the revitalization of our churches.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Rev. Anderson-Cloud. I think you would... That's called rowing in the same boat, right? We're all trying to row together. So-

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I'll just say I think that's a super friendly amendment and yes, I think we say amen to that.

Rev. Gina Anderson-Cloud:

Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. It works so much better when we support each other and see each other as teammates, partners, and companions on the journey than competitors for limited resources. I don't think that's God's economy, and I don't really want to work in an annual conference like that, and I don't think you do either. So let's all work toward being together, thinking the best of each other and working together well. Okay. Okay. I'm going to make a couple of awards. We have a 10:45 hard closure and I want to give you some time to stretch before we do that. So I'm going to invite Rev. Matt Sergent and Rev. Tim Hazlett to come forward for the One Matters Award.

Rev. Tim Hazlett:

Good morning. Good morning, Bishop. I am Tim Hazlett, and Matt and I have the privilege today of standing with us, and I'll have Kevin come forth. "Rev Kev," who is also known as Kevin Johnson from the Discipleship Ministries in Nashville, and he's here to make the presentation for the One Matters Award, but I get to speak, he just gets to hand out the award. The One Matters Award recognizes one church at annual conference that has struggled in baptisms and professions of faith by turning zeros into positive numbers with a renewed focus on discipleship.

Rev. Matt Sergent :

And this award, which includes a plaque and \$1,000 goes to Emmanuel United Methodist Church on the Mountain View District. Yes. In 2023, they had four baptisms and three professions of faith. So let us give them a great round of applause.

Rev. Tim Hazlett :

And David Hughes is the lay leader and Nancy C. Johnson is the pastor. I feel particularly proud because I served Emmanuel a thousand years ago. She only gave us permission to do the One Matters Award. Can we go ahead and do the Denman?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yeah, yeah. Do the Denman too.

Rev. Tim Hazlett :

Okay. The Harry Denman Evangelism Awards honor United Methodist clergy, lay persons and youth who have exhibited outstanding efforts in Wesleyan evangelism by faithfully carrying out the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. The award is named for the late Dr. Harry Denman, a distinguished lay evangelist whom Dr. Billy Graham called, "My mentor in evangelism."

Rev. Matt Sergent :

The selection process is directed by the Board of Discipleship of the Virginia Conference, and all nominees are collected through the nomination process are set by the board. The recipients of this year's Harry Denman Evangelism Awards are Robert and Tina Hendricks the laity, Jesse Burdette our youth, yes, and Rev. Donald Jamison.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Excellent. Let's get our picture first. He's right there. You all come in too. Thank you.

Rev. Tim Hazlett:

I would like to talk a little bit about each of the recipients, and I would have Tina and Robert Hendrix just step forward at this point. They are laity who serve the Wesleyan Chapel Floral Springs Chapel charge on the Mountain View District. Their passion is providing ministry not only to their home church, but fulfilling the needs of the other two churches connected to their charge and meeting the needs of the community in which they live. Robert and Tina organized mission trips throughout the year to deliver donated items to needy areas in Kentucky. They help with Wesley Chapel's free community meals Satisfy Your Hunger by purchasing, preparing, and serving the food. This program not only feeds the community, but this ministry also provides for those who need spiritual guidance, prayer and other needs.

Rev. Matt Sergent :

That's wonderful. And Bishop, we are so happy to have a youth this year. Jesse Burdette, stand forward. Jesse Burdette is a member of Craddockville United Methodist Church on the Coastal Virginia District. At just 15 years old, Jesse is a vital member of his congregation. Jesse is a charter member and leader of the newly formed youth group at Craddockville. Jesse created a youth committee to address the concerns of why many youth and children are no longer attending church. Jesse is also an active participant at Camp Occohannock and has raised more than \$2,000 for camp efforts there., Jesse, congratulations.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Excellent.

Rev. Tim Hazlett :

And for our clergy, Pastor Don Jamison serves as senior pastor of Sydenstricker UMC in the great Northern Virginia district. Pastor Don has a desire to share God's inclusivity and the Christian faith to all who want to have a relationship with God. He makes certain to share with this congregation that they are the hands and feet of Christ, calling them into active evangelism in their community. Pastor Don's witness is visible in the community, in the operation of the church's food corner that serves food for over 200 families every week. For Pastor Don, evangelism is much more than knocking on doors. It's about building relationships. And that which he wants to be remembered for his legacy the most is the

mentoring he has given to many, many, many persons in the ministry. So we honor Don this morning with this prestigious award.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you guys. Appreciate it. And now I recognize Mr. Brian Christoffersen for the presentation of the Green Church Award.

Mr. Brian Christoffersen:

Good morning Bishop Sue, cabinet and conference. I'm Brian Christoffersen. I'm from Christ Crossman United Methodist Church in the great Northern Virginia District. And I am the chair of the Creation Justice team of our conference board of Church and Society. Today we here to celebrate God's sustaining and redeeming work and all of creation and the collective efforts of the conference, green church teams and all those who are dedicated to creation justice across our Virginia connection. These awards honor individual churches and our entire connection's commitment to caring for creation and advocating for creation justice. Today we are awarding eight congregations, which are part of nearly 100 green churches that are leading this mission across our connection by recycling thousands of pounds of plastics, holding creation care days, planting pollinator and vegetable gardens, and joining in the Power of Faith energy stewardship program, and also joining and collaborating with our global ministries Earth Keepers in their work with organizations like Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, the Elizabeth River Project and the Highland Support Project, just to name a few. And as I present the awards, can the awardees please stand.

As members of the United Methodist Creation Justice Movement and the Conference Board of Churches Society Creation Justice team, we would like to present the following Green Church Awards to St. Andrew's UMC Living Waters District, Cranford UMC, and Farlington UMC in the Northern Virginia District, Wesley Memorial UMC, and Three Notch'd Wakefield in Mission Rivers. And for our Sustaining Green Church Award to Bethlehem UMC in Mountain View, Burke UMC and St. Stephen's UMC.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Excellent.

Mr. Brian Christoffersen:

Thank you so much. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment to your congregation's ongoing dedication to Creation Justice.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. And thank you to Brian Christoffersen for his efforts on Creation Care.

Mr. Brian Christoffersen:

Thank you, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

All the time. Thank you. Okay. Let me give you the roadmap I think we're going to take. We have a 10:45 order of the day with teaching from Michael Beck. We have lunch, which I think we probably want to acknowledge. We will gather right at 2:00. Please, please be in your seats and ready to go at two o'clock as we have our memorial service. And well-

Rev. Joshua King:

It can be done tomorrow.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yeah. Then two o'clock is memorial service. Three o'clock is our third teaching session, and 4:15 we will begin business. But I would like to, I know we said this morning for the resolution that Rev. Ensz provided, we will start with that at our business session at 4:15. And also we will hear a petition on Creation Care at the same time and then go into the rest of the business of the day. I think Rev. King, that should probably come as a motion to modify the agenda. If you would make that motion.

Rev. Joshua King:

I move to modify the agenda to include the motion that Drew Ensz included yesterday that was tabled to this morning, to this afternoon's session.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If you would approve this agenda change, please raise your hand. Opposed? Same sign. Okay. I'm going to give you a five minute stretch break-

Rev. Joshua King:

Can I make an announcement?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And wait. Wait, it's four minutes, 58 seconds because Rev. King has an announcement, so do that.

Rev. Joshua King:

Sorry you all.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Do it quickly. Don't apologize.

Rev. Joshua King:

The office of missional engagement has two announcements. First, we want to draw your attention to the dry erase boards placed throughout this space in the display hall and in the prayer room. We encourage you to pause and respond to the prompt each day. This offers a way for us to practice Holy listening. We also want to sincerely thank everyone who attended our first round of lunch labs yesterday. All four labs will be held again this afternoon, starting at 12:30 ish on the first floor conference rooms A, B, C, and D. Everyone is welcome. Registration is encouraged, but not required. We will have enthusiastic greeters in the hallway pointing the way to the labs. You're encouraged to bring your lunch with you. Thank you for your participation and patience as we joyfully experiment together.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Go to a lunch lab. I think that's what that announcement was.

Rev. Joshua King:

Yes.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I invite you now to have a five minute stand break and let's be seated and ready to hear eagerly for Dr. Michael Beck at 10:45 AM.

Friday Morning, June 21, 2024

TEACHING SESSION

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Everybody move to your seats. I know you don't want to miss a minute of these folks. Okay. It's my distinct pleasure to invite Rev. Dr. Michael Beck to come and lead us this morning. I have known him for many years. If you want parenting stories, find him because he has eight children. And he and Jill are great parents, but boy, they got stories. And he is a breath of fresh air. He has seen a lot, done a lot, and now is really changing the face of the church and asking us to think about church in a new way. So Michael, I'm delighted you're here.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Thank you, Bishop. Thank you. Hey, welcome back, everybody from the break. So can I take you all to church?

Body:

Yes. Please.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Slap your neighbor a high five and say, "Neighbor, let's go to church." But I'm going to take you to a church that maybe you've never been to one quite like this before. Join me in Bark Park in Wildwood, Florida, where we're going to have church in a dog park. And Larry Gabriel, the gentleman you see there in the Miami Hurricanes attire, who's a lay person who has served on every committee that the United Methodist Church has to offer, some of them many times. Is that anybody else in the house this afternoon? But became a church planter at 70 years old as he started a church in a dog park called Paws of Praise. Two things you need to know about Larry. First, Larry has a terrible taste in football teams.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen, brother.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Can I get Amen, Bishop?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen, brother.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Can we-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

We're Gators. We're Gators.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Amen. Yes. All right. Lots of Gators. You got a Seminole in the front.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I know, but I like him.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Security. Security. The other thing you need to know about Larry is that he's a priest. Would you raise your hand if you're a priest? Would you raise your hand if you're a priest? Would you raise your hand if you're a priest? I'm going to keep going until every hand's up. So just say... You are a priest in the priesthood of all believers. You are ordained in the waters of your baptism to be bearers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to create healing communities where people can come to know the love of Jesus in every space and nook and cranny of life. Can I get amen on that?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Larry's a priest. He started a church in a dog park, and this is how it goes. So the humans come in and we have a passing of the piece. The dogs come in, have a sniffing of the butts. We try to never get that crossed up, although it has happened. And right there, Larry leads a little spiritual conversation. Larry has no seminary education, hasn't been to any of that stuff, no degree in preaching. So Larry asks a simple question, if God was a dog, what kind of dog would God be?

Body:

Golden retriever.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Golden retriever?

Body:

Yes.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

Is that a golden retriever in the front? Oh, you're biased. What would you say to that question?

Body:

A border collie.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

A border collie. A shepherd. Okay.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

I'm sure you have deep-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

A Rottweiler.

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck :

A Rottweiler. Wow. Okay. I'm sure you have deep theological reasons for your choice, but Larry makes a compelling case that God would clearly be a Labradoodle because Labradoodles are big and majestic, and you can ride around on them like a horse. Gina makes the case that no, God would be a chihuahua, because they're feisty and bossy, they try to tell you what to do. Jill and I who have two little pugs, Vader and Ferguson, we make a case that God would clearly be a pug because pugs have to be carried around and worshiped, and adored at all times. Any pug people in the house?

But we have church right there, a spiritual conversation, and Christian and not Christian and I'll never be a Christian, get in this conversation. We're orienting our thinking towards God and the beauty of God's creation, and we pray out in a circle, the Lord's prayer. Sometimes we have communion. We just went to Church right in a dog park.

Now, if you haven't noticed, folks, we have built it and they have not come. There's about 20% of people who attend church regularly. That's lower in some places. They're about 20% of people who don't attend church, but say that they do. Can you believe people lie about their church attendance? You don't have those people in your churches, do you? And then there's about 40% of people, they're never going to come. They're Nones, they're spiritual, but not religious. They're Dones. They're when bad Christians happen to good people. They're just not going to show up on our Sunday morning worship experiences no matter how good we do it, no matter how great our coffee is, no matter who our preacher is or our youth program, they're not going to show up.

In fact, the situation where we find ourselves is like this. We've got this beautiful icon representing the Church here. Communal life in Jesus. I know the Church is not a building. I know the Church is not a

steeple, the Church is a people, but just go with me on this image here. Here's this big chasm, this gulf. Here's all these people on the other side that Jesus loves, and there's this space between us, Virginia playlist. You all think about it. So, what do we do? How do we solve this quandary? How do we solve this problem?

Body:

Build a bridge.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Build a bridge? Okay. Say it loud, it's a big room.

Body:

Build a bridge.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Build a bridge.

Body:

Go to the other side.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Go to the other side?

Body:

Go to where they are.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Go to where they are? So, we just leave over here and just go over there where they are?

Body:

Yup.

Rev. Michael Beck:

What else? Have church in the water?

Hey, now we're talking Fresh Expressions, swimming church. There is a skinny-dipping church in the Bible. Peter, for some reason, you all know the story I'm talking about.

So, we don't have to do skinny-dip church, but swimming church. I like that. In the middle together. All right, cool. So, let's walk through these together. I think option number one is, we pray and we wait. We just keep doing the same thing expecting a different result, and I'm not diminishing the power of prayer. Everything we do should be undergirded with ongoing communication with God and God's guidance by the power of the Holy Spirit. But by just keep doing the same old stuff and hoping those people are going to come across and make the swim and get over to where we are. Then there's that building a bridge option that several of you named, so we can make it easier and we're accessible to get to church. We can kill the Christianese and the secret handshakes. We can do Church in more organic relational ways that people connect with God. You all can keep taking pictures of these slides, but I am going to give a QR code at the end, and I'll just send you the slides. But keep taking pics, post it on Twitter, whatever.

The bridge is also a two-way bridge. So, we go to the people and be Church with them. The people come and be Church with us. It's vice versa. But then somebody said right up front, what if we just go and stay, and do life with them where they are?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Can I get an amen?

Body:

Amen.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah. Now, what Larry is doing is he's standing in a Church tradition that stretches back for 2000 years to a person named Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus who preached the greatest sermon ever preached, not in a synagogue, not in a temple, but it's called the sermon on the-

Body:

Mountain.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Jesus went to the synagogue and went to the temple. He wasn't always received there real well. Remember when he came to Nazareth and he said, "The Spirit of Sovereign Lord's upon me. He's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor and to set the captives free." And they tried to throw him off a cliff.

Bishop. Then he has the temple tantrum in Jerusalem. Wasn't received real well there either. Where did most of Jesus' ministry take place? Out in the normal rhythms and spaces of life where the people were. And what Larry's doing is standing in a historic movement of the Holy Spirit, this incarnational impulse that doesn't wait back for people to come and receive the gospel, but goes out and embodies it in new

and creative ways. And what Larry's doing is standing in the Wesleyan Methodist tradition when he's cultivating that Church in a Dog Park. In fact, that incarnational way of putting on flesh and moving into the fields, and embodying the good news where the people do life, is maybe one of the most Methodist ideas of all. And I want to do a little quiz with you today. Somebody will get an A for the day. Who cultivated the very first Methodist Fresh Expression?

Body:

John Wesley.

Rev. Michael Beck:

John Wesley. Jesus? I like that. Jesus was definitely a Methodist. He was not a Baptist, he wasn't hanging out with John the Baptist [inaudible 01:14:07]. So, we got John Wesley, Susanna Wesley. "A" for the day, Susanna Wesley. So, let's do a little Methodist history. The first Methodist Fresh Expression was started by Susanna Wesley in the Epworth Rectory in her kitchen.

Now, at the time, this was very subversive. Women were not allowed to preach and lead Churches. They were not allowed to have Church outside of the normal ecclesial space. And in Epworth, you had a Rev. Inman who was filling in for Samuel when he was on the road, and it seems he was not very effective. Some of the reports talk about they'd have 20 or 30 people at the Epworth Church, but Susanna started a Church in her kitchen that she reports had up to about 200 people that would come and have Church right there in her kitchen. People that were not connected with the Church at all, who are connecting in this.

And Samuel gets aggravated by this, and he writes some letters telling Susanna, "Hey, you need to stop this. You're not allowed to be doing this, and it's inappropriate, and you're causing a little bit of chaos." And Susanna writes back to him, I'm going to paraphrase this beautiful quote that you see on the screen, but she basically says, "You want to stop me, come and stop me, Susanna Wesley, ecclesial gangster." Can I get an amen?

Body:

Amen.

Rev. Michael Beck:

So, the first Methodist Fresh Expression, and I know we talk a lot about John and Charles, but I want to push back on that a little bit. I want to talk about the mother of Methodism. I want to talk about her family growing up in that space and little John and Charles who are under 10 years old at this time, watching their mom start a Church in the kitchen. And imagine growing up in that space of ecclesial innovation, and how that would impact you. And then, John Wesley starts to do things like go to the field. Noticing that people are not coming to church anymore, they're probably not going to come. And he doesn't want to do this. His buddy, George Whitfield, keeps pestering him about going out and doing

this field preaching thing. And John Wesley says, "I love the commodious room and the handsome pulpit. I don't want to go out there and preach in a field."

And by the way, these are two guys that disagree theologically entirely. But as Lacey Warner reminds us, the Methodist movement was not born from a doctrinal dispute, but a missional imperative. And so, even though they disagreed theologically, they found a way to work together and do life together. So, Wesley goes out to that field on April 2nd, of 1739, just outside of Bristol, and he preaches, a couple thousand people show up. The numbers are sketchy, and it seems like there's a George Whitfield, John Wesley preacher number thing going on, but probably thousands of people show up. Maybe it was a couple hundred if you're preachers and your numbers, we like to inflate a little bit.

But he writes in his journal later that day, "Today, I have submitted to become more vile, preaching in the highways and the byways, the glad tidings of salvation." Maybe if Methodism would get vile again, we might get vital again. And John Wesley finds a way to invite people into this movement of grace through societies and classes and bands with... We talked about yesterday in depth. But this is a movement that brought Church to where the people were. This is an incarnational impulse. And the Holy Spirit sweeps through the Church historically, and leads us out of the confines of our building, out into the normal spaces and rhythms of where people do life. If you haven't noticed, there's this rise in spirituality. People very open to spirituality. The nones are saying, "I'm not closed to Jesus. I'm not closed to spirituality. I'm closed off to the Church." And there's this disconnect or this pushing against the new Protestant, protesting against institutional Church.

And part of the reasons for that is that there are one in three people who have experienced religious trauma at the hands of the Church. So, if you think about yourself and two people that you know, chances are one of you or you have experienced religious trauma. And so, if we're going to be the Church in the 21st Century, we have to be a compassion centered, trauma-informed church. That we're not starting with a clean slate, we're starting with people who've been bruised and broken in some ways by religion. And we have to create pockets of healing where people can come to know Jesus, the healer.

And when we put a sign out in front of our building and we say, "All are welcome," this is what people outside the church actually see, a maze of secret customs and handshakes that they don't know really anything about. And when we say all are welcome, what we're really saying is, some are welcome at this time at this day, and we're going to worship in a way that we have chosen before you get here, we're going to speak a language that we have chosen. We're going to sing songs that you may or may not know. All are welcome to come at this time, at that place in that way. But for all those that are going to be welcome, who can come at that time in that place, in that way, a lot of other people are not going to be able to come in that time, in that place, in that way.

And so, this movement of Fresh Expressions, which is a recapitulation of primitive methodism, but discarding some of that harmful DNA of our movement. It's about going out to where people are. The only way the church will become more accessible is if it springs up in every practice, in every space, in every relationship where we do life together. Some spring research has come out about engaging young people, and it tells us that the hallmarks of engaging young people are going to be curiosity, wholeness,

connection, and flexibility. Four things that United Methodists are not necessarily known for. We're not known as the curiosity people, you all, we're known as the answer having people, or as Woo said yesterday, "It's okay to say, I don't know. It's okay to actually turn to wonder and ask questions rather than have the answers."

Our gospel has been more about postmortem destiny, going to heaven when you die, rather than what Jesus actually said, which was about bringing shalom and wholeness and healing to people's lives. People are longing for that connection. I know we're connectional, polity people, but doesn't it seem like we're all just trying to build our own little thing rather than working together as a connection, rather than collaborating resources. Rather than saying, "Hey, your Church does this really well. Our Church is okay at this. Why don't we actually work together as a connection." And then, flexibility. Our hierarchal pyramidal clergy, caste system. Not necessarily very flexible, but Jesus had this forgotten beatitude, "Blessed that are the flexible for they shall not get bent out of shape." Amen? He said this, just Matthew didn't write it down. I don't know what he was thinking.

So, none of what I just shared is the right motivation to go out and to create incarnation communities with people. This is not the save the denomination plan. It's not the pack butts back in pews plan. The only right motivation for this is because there are people of sacred words and great value that are beloved of God and made in the image of God. And if we don't go and find creative ways to share the gospel and build community with people that are never going to come to our inherited churches, they're never going to know the precious life that is communal life in Jesus. The eucharistic nature of the body of Christ is to be taken, blessed, broken and given to the world. And our denominational impulse is often self-preservation where the impulse of Jesus is about self-donation.

But when we break pieces of the body of Christ off and give them to a hungry world, we see the movement of the Holy Spirit in a thing that we call resurrection. When we become willing to die, and a seed goes into the ground that it can experience a harvest of resurrection. And that's what this movement called Fresh Expressions is about, creating that communal life with Jesus, breaking pieces of the body of Christ off, sharing them together in our daily practices of life.

I want to share a couple little stories, and then I'll invite my friends to come up and we're going to have a dialogue. I shared yesterday in the Laity session, that I was born addicted. My mother was not able to care for me. My biological father was unknown, and I was adopted by my grandparents. And my grandparents dragged me to this little church called St. Mark's UMC in Ocala, Florida. Those folks rallied around me of my infant baptism, and committed to raise me in a community of love and forgiveness. They fed me through their never ending potlucks. They nurtured me, they loved me. I was a little hellion, I liked to break stuff and run around and do things church kids shouldn't do. But in the middle of the pandemic, Jill and I, my wife, were co-pastors. We were able to come back to the little church that saved my life. I took a detour in my life and ended up jails, institutions, death, lots of orange jumpsuits, and I encountered Jesus in a solitary confinement cell.

And so, when we sing the great hymn of Charles Wesley, "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night, thine I diffused a quick'ning ray. I woke, the dungeon flamed with light. My chains

fell off. My heart was free. I rose, went forth and followed thee." And that's not just a hymn to me. That's not just words that we sing. That's my experience of the risen Jesus. And now I'm back in the church in the place where I was baptized as a baby, and in the rooms where I got sober and Alcoholics Anonymous, and I preached to people that were present at my infant baptism. And when I dragged my butt out of jail for the last time, I went and connected with the pastor at St. Mark's, Pastor Dan Jones. And he said, "Well, Michael, I'm glad that Jesus has saved your soul, but AA will save your ass."

Body:

He's right. He knew.

Rev. Michael Beck:

So, that was 16 years ago, and AA has still been saving my ass, and Jesus still saved my soul. But I want to share what St. Mark's looks like today, just really briefly. We came to the church, there were about eight people in worship. So as Bishop Sue said, my wife and I have a blended family of eight children. So, we doubled the congregation our first Sunday.

Body:

Now you got grandkids.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Now the grandkids, now I have a whole church just in my family. So, highest percentage annual increase in attendance right there at St. Mark's UMC, double first Sunday. But now we have a dinner church on Wednesday nights, we have a 5:30 AA meeting and an NA meeting at eight o'clock. And so, people have a community dinner in between that. It's called Family Table. Out of that, we have a lot of parents, young families who have kids, and they can't get coverage for it to go to their meetings. And so, we do a thing called Eat, Pray, Play, where we have arts and crafts, a Jesus story. We have a thing called Recovery Church, where we look at the 12 step principles, where those come from in scripture. And we talk about how Bill and Bob were both Christians and took principles from the Oxford Group and developed the 12 steps, and people in recovery explore that maybe Jesus is their higher power, maybe not.

We also have a thing called burritos and Bibles. Sorry, burritos and Bibles at Tijuana Flats, we get in and have burritos, all you can eat chips and salsa, and we take the tortilla after the meal and we break it and we bless it, and we have the Lord's Supper right there in Tijuana Flats. Because of the United Methodist Church, we believe in what kind of a table?

Body:

Open table.

Rev. Michael Beck:

An open table. And we invite people to know God's grace right there in Tijuana Flats. By the way, burritos and chips in a hot bar make any church better. Can I get an amen?

Body:

Amen.

Rev. Michael Beck:

And then we have Church, also a yoga church. My bishop, Bishop Berlin, has come in and joined us for some of these things. We had Bishop Berlin in a tattoo parlor you all. Give it up for him. He didn't get any ink, but we're still working on him. We have a church called Tesla Church, where we meet at an EV supercharger, and we have creation care conversations and eco theology conversations. This is a tattoo parlor church where we gather up, circle up, some people get tattoos. We have the Lord's Supper tattoo, we have a tattoo talk. We do that. This is called Higher Power Hour. We go into the Chemical Dependency Unit in Ocala, Florida, of the local rehab. It's called SMA. And we circle up and we go into there.

I think every United Methodist church in the country should start something for people in recovery. We're in the largest overdose epidemic in the history of the country. A 100,000 people die every year. People like my little brother, McKinley, who overdosed at 34 years old. And we can have a little expression of church in every rehab all over the country. We see people's lives get transformed and healed and changed. We go and have a Jesus story, sing some songs and have a spiritual conversation, where people explore their different higher powers. This is a group called Hands Healing After Narcotic Death Support. For those of us that have lost loved ones to overdose, it's a little bit different kind of a grief process. And so, we create community around healing from that together.

This is called Shenanigans. This is another one that I think every United Methodist Church should have in your local assisted living facility. We think it's pretty jacked up that our senior saints give their prayers, presents gifts, service witness to the Church. And we live in a culture that's about a cult of youthfulness. And so, we discard the wise sage wisdom of our culture, of our elderly saints. And we see people get left in isolation. Their families abandon them, their churches abandon them. That's pretty jacked up. Can I get an amen.

So, we go into Brookdale and Ocala, and we have a thing called Shenanigans. Our ladies named it that because they like to make holy mischief there in Brookdale. And then, we have a fresh worship service. We have fresh worship at nine o'clock and vintage worship at 11 o'clock. And my people at St. Mark's were praying, "Pastor, we just want to see the church full again. We just want to see people in the church." And I would say, "Well, do you really want to see it full again, or do you want to see it full of the people you used to know back in the 1950s? Or do you want to see it full of the people who actually live in this community?"

And so at Fresh Worship we have, Jordan leads us in a time of rap or poetry, or poetry slam. We do dance breaks, coffee toasts, and we have food around tables together doing fresh worship. But we also

have vintage worship at 11 o'clock. And that lady there playing the organ is Ms. Shirley Harvo. And she was playing the organ in my infant baptism, and she's still playing the organ today. And when I was a little boy, I'd run over and mess with her while she was playing with the keys. And now, I do that as her pastor still today.

And people are actually showing up to vintage worship, because what they're doing is, they're connecting in those Fresh Expressions of Church and they're saying, "If you're a Christian, maybe I'm okay. I do want to come and check out what's happening on Sunday morning." And we're creating this ecology of Church. Now, our church is not sustainable through plate donations. When Bishop Sue was my District Superintendent there in the North Central District, she helped lead the charge to actually turn St. Mark's into a recovery housing for men called Open Arms Village. So, our church is actually also a shelter. It's a holistic program where we can house up to 32 men who live there on site. Now, we get state grants and federal funding because in our community, if someone puts a dollar in the plate, that's a big commitment. That's a big step in their faith. So, we're not going to ever probably barring a miracle, the Holy Spirit, fund through just plate donations. So now, through these creative space usage ways our ministry's sustainable financially.

And the last thing that I'll say here is all this creates an ecology of Church, where we see the world as our parish. Remember somebody said something like that, but have we the people called Methodist made the parish our world. And what Fresh Expressions, as we reimagine our community that every first, second and third place can be places where communal life in Jesus can form. Our inherited Church is still a vital part of this ecosystem. People are formed there and shaped there. We worship the living God there. This is not dismissing and saying, we don't need to do traditional inherited Church anymore. It's saying all of them live together in an ecology. We're really reclaiming this idea that the world is our parish.

If you want the slides, hit the QR code. It'll take you to my site, hit free subscription. Don't pay for anything, and I'll send you the slides in the morning. Thank you so much for letting me be here and be part of this annual conference.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Well, thank you so much, Michael, for sharing about the historical movement of the Holy Spirit, and doing that in a lot of fresh ways. One of the things I was thinking of as, I was especially moved by the slide that you gave about the engagement with young people and that curiosity, wholeness, connection and flexibility are the features of that. I wonder, as you think about the history of the Methodist movement, how would you say that folks could observe, especially that idea of curiosity? How has that influenced over our history, the development of the Methodist movement from your perspective?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah, I think the idea of the how goes it with your soul piece, asking good questions that get at spiritual formation, they give honest space for people to share their joys, their struggles, their grief. That's part of

what I feel is so much sometimes missing in inherited Church. We come in, we dress up nice, we smile, "Hi, I'm highly blessed, in favor of the Lord". There's real no space for community and conversation. Sadly, I was more disciplined by Alcoholics Anonymous than I ever was in a Methodist Church, because Alcoholics Anonymous has a very clear process of, we're powerless, we're coming to believe, we make a decision, we do community together, we continue to share our stuff. So turning to curiosity, what we can do in a Fresh Expression, and what I think historically the Methodist movement did was ask questions and really give people space to articulate, this is what I'm struggling with, these are the questions that I have.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I love that. And it seems so much like you mentioned AA, one of the great things about it is that's a space where judgment is not welcome. And so curiosity, oftentimes it blocks out judgment from being able to be present. The other piece of that flexibility, I think about... Obviously, I'm not a gym rat like you. So, think about stretching exercises. So, if somebody out there says, "Hey, it feels like our church or the community that I'm in, is relatively rigid," what's a good first stretching exercise to develop that flexibility muscle or that flexibility mindset?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah, that's a great question. I think we get stuck in long range planning. So, let me tell a story. Edwin Friedman has this great book and these ideas around failure of nerve. And when we get stuck in imaginative gridlock, so the system's gridlocked and you're doing the same stuff, the counterintuitive wisdom is to play. So, what I try to do with Fresh Expression, can we get a small team of people? You don't have to have a church committee meeting and approve Fresh Expressions. That'll be a death by committee for sure. You just get a small team of people and you start to experiment, and get a little experiment.

So at St. Mark's for instance, we got eight people. They're old. They're like, "We've done everything we can to do this..." Chronologically mature, not old. So, our first idea was a dinner church, so can we get a little experiment up and running and see some fruit from it, and then help that little side experience, that's more flexible and intuitive, feed back into the system? So they said, "Well, we can't do that forever, because our thinking is we got to do this until Jesus returns or whatever." So I said, "Can we do a three-month experiment? Jill and I will cook one week. George and Carol cook one week. Everybody take a rotation. Let's see for three months," and then we start inviting people from the community, "Hey, this thing we're going to do tonight, we're going to have a spiritual conversation. Anybody want to lead this next week? Hey, does anybody have the spiritual gift of cooking? Because we need people to cook. Hey, service work keeps us sober. Anybody want to stay up and help clean up."

So, we're not doing something to or for the community. We're co-creating with. And so, three months later, my church folks are like, "We really don't have to do anything." And we had to do some training with them, because our idea is let's serve people and then sit back and congratulate ourselves. So, we

had to sit at the table and train them, ask questions, figure out who the people are at the tables with you. You don't just serve them and then... And so, we had to do some training around that thinking.

Rev. Jonathan Page

And I think so much of what you've just shared is that continual importance of incarnation. That's the model. That's where we have to lean into. So, I'm thinking about people who are listening to this who may say, "Michael, I'm not a people person." Is that anybody? We're all people-people here, I'm sure. But what does it look like to do incarnation well, if you say like, "Hey, sometimes I'm just not comfortable being around other people"?

Rev. Michael Beck:

I think if you're not a people person, you should not be in ministry.

But I do want to say something about introverts and extroversion scale. So, not everybody wants to start something like this or... This is the beauty of Fresh Expression. So, I know some really introverted people, and the focus and our evangelistic history has been very individualistic. You go and you get somebody to pray the Romans Road prayer, and then you knock that off your belt. We haven't really brought in this communitarian, like Ubuntu, Afrocentric thinking where we're communally formed people. And Fresh Expression, we're recovering some of that where everybody has a part to play and it's not anybody... We're not there trying to convert anyone, we're trying to just create community as circle of equals and Jesus in the middle of that. And we trust Jesus to be Lord, and we just get out of Jesus' way.

So, you could be super introverted and still participate in that community. You could be very extroverted... And then, I've seen people start like gaming churches and nerd church. We have examples of this in United Methodist Church. People who are very introverted, you would think that person could never be a church planner, but you put them in a gaming community with their people around their thing, their passion. Larry who started Church in Dog Park is not super extroverted, but around his dog that he loves and the community of people that love dogs, he comes alive in his calling.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

So, that's a good segue to think about the concept of digital evangelism. So, I would imagine most folks in here have some form of social media account, and we see some interesting things on social media as it relates to the Church. And I'm thinking yesterday in... I think it was yesterday in Louisiana, there's this new bill about the 10 commandments have to be posted in every public school classroom. Interesting dialogue about that. What does it look like to practice our faith well in social media spaces as a form of evangelism?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah. I think we need to a serious overhaul there. Streaming worship services and more those attractional inherited things, that could be considered form of digital colonialism. We're going in digital space, we're speaking a language we only understand, we're streaming things or whatever. There is an incarnational way to do digital ministry. So, we've had a thing called Living Room Church VR, we go in headsets. And your avatars can have communion and everything. You can do the full Church. Don't tell my bishop that, but we'll circle up, hold hands. You can do all that. So, what if there's a way to...

And I think what we missed the mark with the whole pandemic thrusting us into this space. The disabilities community has been living an online life for decades, and their significant relationships and work. So, we tried to learn from them and how you can incarnationally... So, spending time together in digital space, actually using some of those media as the, think of a digitally built environment rather than a brick and mortar built environment. And we're real people having real conversation and real spiritual growth in those spaces. But I think it takes not just posting stuff or... I think all that's great, but actually spending time together in digitality.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Sure. I want to pivot just briefly. You talk about being in community, and then we're thinking about the idea of a historical movement. And communities come with history and so does the role of the Church in the development of that history of community. And sometimes that's something to be celebrated, and sometimes it's not. What do you think the role of the Church is in claiming repentance where there's been communal sin in a space?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah, I think it's the only way that our movement's going to heal and find flourishing, if we figure out reparations and repentance. That really, one of the most exciting things about me with Fresh Expressions is, we're not trying to blow the system up. But I believe if you create these little experiments on the side of the system where people can have conversations about the racism that's marked our movement. Like the Wildwood Congregation, Bishop Sue literally had to come and have my back because I'm just going to put it out there, were super racist. 1881 Methodist Episcopal South, Isabel Wilkerson writes about Wildwood and The Warmth of Other Suns. So that was my congregation. So, to try to work in that ecosystem. But we started these little Fresh Expressions in the MLK, and then we ended up having a black, brown and art Church all come together in this collaboration. So, it gave us a way to have honest conversations, get people around tables, healing conversations, where it's...

Rev. Michael Beck:

Conversations, get people around tables, healing conversations where it's really hard to do that in then here at Church of... I'm just like, preach a sermon series on anti-racism or in those spaces, LGBTQ persons can share, "This is the way I was harmed." And trauma studies show us that creating a safe community is the essence of being able to have that kind of healing. So that can be really threatening for

people to enter into an inherited church space, but these little incarnation communities create a space where people can have those convos.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I think that's so, so helpful. And thinking about that idea of personal history, you touched a lot on the idea of trauma informed spaces. I wonder how do we ensure the safety of individuals in our communities of faith as it relates to their personal histories? Is there a methodology or a way that we can cultivate that safe space for trauma-informed healing?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah, I think it's going back to our general rules and doing a lot more listening. In these communities, wild things happen, right? People have really crazy ideas. We try to honor the contribution of every person. And then I will say things or people on my team, that's a really interesting way to think about that. Here's how people in the Wesleyan stream of Christianity have thought about this. But the one place as a leader where you have to step in is where there's harm. So people are spouting some harmful, and my experience with this is it's usually not the people that we're forming community with that are totally outside the church. It's usually Christians with fundamentalist toxic theology who show up and say really harmful things. And then we have to deal with that in the community, the people who are actually growing alongside. That's not so much a challenge.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

For sure. Well, I want to invite Rodrigo and Woo to come up and join our panel conversation. And really, I think this is an important point for all of us to hear, especially as we are here representing a number of different churches and spaces. How do we deal with the idea of perceived safety versus actual safety in church? In other words, I've never been to a church that says, "You know what? We're not a welcoming church." We all think that we're wildly welcoming and good like that. And yeah, sometimes we're not. So how do you deal with that idea of making sure that you're addressing what's actually present instead of what you perceive to be present in life of the church? It's on.

Rev. Woo Kang:

I mean it's going to sound cliché, but I think you have to practice what you preach. And that's something that we have been trying to do at The Net is making sure that before we can even be open and welcoming to others with those that have been present with us in the past nine years or prior to our mergers, are they welcoming each other? And I think that's challenging, but if you are not welcoming and being inviting and creating a space that is safe, that is present in the current moment, how the heck do you think other people are going to perceive that coming in? So I think the biggest thing is relationship building and making those spaces internally. I always say you have to work on ourselves before we can even try to work on anyone else. So I think for churches, that's probably the most important thing. How can we do it within ourselves as well?

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Thanks.

Rodrigo:

Absolutely agree with Woo. I say this before people go where they're welcome, people stay where they're valued. And there's a huge difference between welcoming somebody and value in somebody. Yes, most churches can claim to be welcoming and all it takes is to opening the door and have some sort of coffee and that's it, right? That's welcoming. Valuing somebody is giving them a voice at the table, making sure that they feel that they belong to that place. And that's when sometimes it's the disconnect in local churches because in order to give somebody else's a voice, you have to shut up. You have to scooch over so somebody else can be there. And I think that's when sometimes in churches, we have a hard time doing that.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I think that's helpful. And so when you think about that idea of making space and being in that space, how does that relate to the blended ecology approach and how has that maybe as you've seen that unfold in your own ministries, how has that helped with really that idea of becoming incarnational as bearers of the faith?

Rev. Woo Kang:

I mean, I think a blended ecology is a fancy word, but I also feel like it is our mandate and call as the church we are to be a church for all people in all ways and to be doing it in different ways. And I really have seen it through, especially with Michael, everything that you're doing. And also what we've been experiencing at The Net is that we need to meet people where they are. And one of the things that you said earlier that really stood out to me is the reality is I don't think all of us are going to go out and create all these fresh expressions, but all of us here belong to a church and many of us belong to a church that has maybe a fewer emptier seats than usual. And what you said is, do we want those people?

I couldn't hear you back there if you said from 1985 or 1885, I don't know. But do we want those folks to be in our seats or do we want the people in our community to be in our churches, but to do that, what are we offering that meets them where they are? If they're going to come in and all we have is a Sunday school or a Bible study when people want to play soccer or when people meet God in the woods or something like that, that to me also plays a role in that blended ecology is we need to be out in the world, but also how can we create those spaces inside of our churches as well, which I think will be a little bit more approachable for some folks.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

That's helpful.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

I think one of the great things that Michael was speaking and doing as we have seen the pictures, it really flips the simplicity of church. When you go back and you look at the church in the Book of Acts, doing church, the way we define church with worship, that was easy. It happened in homes, it happened in the marketplace, and even in the synagogue, it wasn't complicated. Following Jesus was hard. It cost you your life. It cost you persecution. It cost you your family often to do it. And sometime in this past 2000 years, we have flipped both things.

All of a sudden church, it's complicated. Look at your budget, how much of your budget it's focused in worship? How much of your staff are working on worship? How much of the energy of the church, it's focused on the complication of one hour activity and then all of a sudden following Jesus is easy, right? I mean, because it's more about your happiness than about your holiness. It's more about, "Well, if this is convenient for me, I'll follow Jesus. If not, I just want..." Right? So what Michael is talking about is the simplicity. Doing church, worshiping Christ. I mean, that shouldn't be complicated. Following Jesus, it's not complicated, but it should be hard.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

That's great. What about you, Michael? Any thoughts?

Michael:

I think piggybacking off that thought, for me, the most explosive thing about the historic Methodist movement was lay empowerment. And again, Susanna Wesley Ecclesial gangster was guiding John Wesley who even pulled back on this because lay people were doing stuff preaching, and she writes him this, "That man's just as called by God to preach as you are." And so there's mama chiding him, but if it's too complicated for any Christian to share their faith and create communal life in Jesus, we're just doing something that's not faithful to what Jesus actually did. And there are beautiful valid ways that laypeople can serve in the inherited church. I'm a recipient of that. But there's also generations who are saying, "I'm not sure that just serving on the committee or just reading liturgy or those things see my faith blossoming in my daily life."

And so one of the questions we ask, we try to get away from extrinsic motivation, which is, "You should do this because the Bible says it," or whatever. And we try to help people find their intrinsic motivation. Our lives are already full and crazy. No, we don't need to add any more stuff to our life from the 21st century. So we don't ask, "Hey, add something to your life." We ask Larry, "What do you do every week? Who do you do that with? You hang out in a dog park with people. Could you maybe introduce a spiritual combo to that?"

Denise started 3.1 Church, we'd run a 5K together. She runs 5Ks and she has this network of people who do that. And we bring a spiritual element into that. And she's been a Christian when she started it for like six months. And she's leading reading the little Jesus story, super simple. And Jesus gives us this ecclesiology, minimal ecclesiology where two or more are gathered in my name. There I am in the midst.

And church can happen when Jesus, the risen one is in a community of two or more people. So I just agree that we really have made it complicated and there's got to be a way for the two forms to live together.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

And it sounds like a lot of that comes back to that idea of engagement, of that curiosity and flexibility are aided by simplicity often, and that if we can strip down to the essentials, sometimes that allows us to find that space that we need. So I can't leave behind the ecclesial gangster, Susanna Wesley, shout out to her. I need each of you to give us a top five of your ecclesial gangsters of all time. We don't need that. But I do wonder when you think about some of the historical figures of Methodism, of Christianity, that if you say, "Hey, if you really want to take a deeper dive on how to do that idea of curiosity or simplicity or flexibility or any of that wholeness," are there any historical figures that you might point to be like, "Hey, this is worth checking out what this person was up to."

Rev. Woo Kang:

Forgive me, it's not Methodist.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Yeah, that's okay.

Rev. Woo Kang:

But for me, especially someone in his writing that has inspired me greatly is Howard Thurman. I think Howard Thurman brings much light to understanding how to walk with others, walk with siblings, walk with people, to see people from much greater than how the world usually sees them to be. And I think when we have that lens like Jesus in the Disinherited, my favorite book, so when you look through that lens in the world and then take that lens into your church or into your ministries, I think how you approach and do ministry changes, and it has to change after reading something like that. So Howard Thurman is one of my gangsters.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

I have to throw one too, not Methodist, Oscar Romero, Bishop Oscar Romero. I mean, he goes and say, "It is not good enough just not to do evil." Not killing, guys that's not good enough. Not stealing. That's not good enough. And you can go through the whole 10 Commandments and just doing those things. That's not good enough. We are called to go and find broken and do good actually.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Amen.

Rev. Jonathan Page

Amen.

Rev. Michael Beck:

I'm tempted to not go with Methodism either, but since I'm going to go OG Methodism and say Harry Hoosier, who was essentially illiterate but could memorize large portions of the gospel that he heard and could preach probably the most compelling preacher the Methodism ever produced. Like people tell Asbury, "Can you sit down? Because we want Harry to preach." And the thing about that, so empowering laity, sorry, I'm back on this again. But the early Christians carried the charisma, right? The treasury of Jesus stories. They didn't walk around with manuscripts and read a sermon. They were sharing the stories of Jesus, his life, his healing, how he fulfilled Old Testament, all that, and people responded to that. So we're seeing a new version of that with what we call sermonic conversations or Jesus stories where you just share simply the story of Jesus and God's grace in your life and how that's transfigured your life. And then people respond to that. It's super simple. You don't have to have a preaching class.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I love that. And I think that's something we didn't kick to everyone to have conversation at your chairs in this session, but I hope when we leave, think about who you might say I want to share with somebody else is somebody like, "Hey, you really ought to pick up on this person's work." There are so many, and what's beautiful about this, some of those have a united Methodist background, some of them don't. I think we have an amazing tapestry of womanist theologians.

We have amazing folks from a number of different backgrounds to be able to think through and be able to really educate, especially as we think about this idea of what incarnation ministry looks like. Because like you said, Michael, so much of this is about learning how to move from the monologue to the dialogue. And as communities are forming their expression, that's a lot of the history of the Methodist movement is that it begins in a dialogical approach. And over time, we've made it into a monologue in a lot of ways. I wonder how, as each of you are practitioners in your own spaces, how have you seen that dialogical approach that's rooted in our history, have an impact on your communities?

Rev. Woo Kang:

I feel like I keep repeating myself since yesterday, but it's breaking bread. I mean, when you eat together, and Susanna Wesley, a great example of it. When you break bread together and intentionally do so, you're not going to eat in silence, hopefully not. And through that, you get to talk life, talk story and talk about Jesus. And when we have seen it not just happen at the table, but just at The Net when we've created those intentional spaces of breaking bread together and you're able to look at someone in their eyes and pass them something and receive something on your plate and create that space of relationship, that is where I see dialogue happening.

And that's why I'm a big supporter and practitioner of a meal centered worship because then it doesn't become you eat and go to the fellowship hall and do your thing, but in service, whatever that may be,

it's sermonic discussion that what you are doing at your tables as you're breaking bread together, that you are continuing the preaching, that you're continuing the sermon because your insight is probably a lot of times greater than mine. And when you're able to have that together, it creates that dialogue rather than monologue. And I would hope to see more of that inside of the inherited church as well.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Beautiful.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

When you look at we thinking what the role of the church is, it's not just being able to impact and influence individuals on communities spiritually, but also emotionally and socially and financially. So you engage people in their stories and that just draws you to be engaged in their lives more on a Sunday morning. But when you hear of the mom that is trying to figure out how to handle the public school system with a kid with special needs, it just draw you to go and see with her in those PTA meetings. When you're hearing that in your neighborhood or in your city, the county, the government is trying to relocate a group of people so they can bring some businesses.

It just draws you to be on those city council meetings raising your hands. It's like, "What do we do with this?" When you look at the sports association and all of a sudden just the kids that can't afford certain equipment and certain trips can't be part of that, and you have demographics of kids that can't play those sports, it just draws you to be part of that. So I think when we look at the pastoral, but the lately role of us as Christians, which has come alongside of people more than just spiritually, it just biblically force us to be part of their lives more than just one hour a week.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

I love it.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Just piggybacking on a little bit, we've followed in the church historically, this sequence of believing, belonging, behaving, the sociological understanding of this where people believe like we did. You come down, you do the creed, you do the membership class, you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness. Now you're in, right? You can belong and then you need to behave. But what we're talking about here is actually just creating communities of belonging and letting believing happen at the pace of grace, and maybe never at all. I have a self-proclaimed atheist named Wayne at my church. He shows up to do everything. He's very helpful. Everything we got going on, we call him the coffee Nazi.

He counts people's cups of coffee, how many cups of coffee they had. We're like, "Wayne, the coffee's free. Jesus can turn water into wine." But he's very committed and he's all in, and we're just giving because he belongs and he knows that he's cared for. And so we genuinely care about people. That's why I'm sorry if I offended anybody about the people person comment, but if we genuinely care and

genuinely ask questions with real concern, the gospel will show up in that conversation that people are longing to share their stories, and we find healing in sharing our stories. So we find a space to let people do that really powerful healing takes place.

Rev. Jonathan Page

Absolutely. Rodrigo, Woo, anything that Michael said where you picked up and you're like, "Hey, this is a huge takeaway for me, something I really want to carry out with me."

Rev. Woo Kang:

When you talked about the Eucharist communion, how a lot of times we have used it as an internal way to survive, and it's more for our sustenance or whatever it may be, but actually the call is to break and give to the world. That's my takeaway that I'm going to keep, and I hope that we can all learn from that. What does it mean that the body broken in the bloodshed is not just for me every week or the first Sunday of the month or whatever you take it, but to live that out and be the body broken in, the bloodshed out in the world. So thank you for that.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

What I love was that image cartoonish of the people in one side and then the church in the other one. My first thought into that one is like, "Well, maybe God just can meet the people, and the church has no role into this." Maybe that just that's it.

But the local church is the hope for the gospel. I mean, by God's grace, he's inviting us to be part of that. And I love also how you put church to everything. A yoga church, dog church, whatever, burritos church, all those stuff. That's the hope for the gospel. I mean, the denomination, the beautiful and lovely United Methodist Church, but it is a system behind you. But at the end of the day, transformation is going to take place in your local communities. What you do, what you don't do will impact people's lives. So I just hope you take that permissive invitation to be that hope for the gospel.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Amen. Michael, you did a great job teaching us and leading us today. Do you have a last word for folks before we break?

Rev. Michael Beck:

Yeah. My final word right now, we are in an epidemic of loneliness and isolation. I'll know if you all saw the Surgeon General's report in 2023, people die every day from loneliness. And we are the most hyperconnected generation ever in human history. We've never been more connected through flows and digital technology. We've never been more alone. And my little brother died of overdose, but what he really died from was a broken heart and loneliness. And this stuff that we're talking about up here,

the stuff that we do as Methodist, it saves people's lives. It heals people's lives. And we have one unique gift that we can give to the world, and it's communal life in Jesus.

It's a community where people can be known and loved and can disagree and vote for different people and sometimes suck and do dumb things, but we're bounded together in Christ. And that precious gift can literally save people's lives. And if all we do is wait back and just do church on Sundays, we are literally watching people right outside our stained-glass cathedrals die of loneliness. So my call is, take your passion, your purpose, the thing that gives you life, the people you like to do that with, and start a little pocket of healing. Start a little expression of communal life in Jesus and your normal daily walk.

Rev. Jonathan Page:

Amen. Amen. Well, hey, I want to let you know if you've been listening, especially to Michael today and say, "Hey, I want get a little bit more on what he's been hitting on." We have an area in our displays where Michael is a prolific author, and so he's written a number of different things. We've got, I think, is it four or five different titles that are available for sale? They're all 10 bucks. And so if you want to go over and check that out, that's there for you. And right after this, Michael's going to be there to sign those books and to do a little meet and greet kind of thing. So feel free to check that out. I know I speak for Rodrigo and Woo. They'd love to say hey to you too. Hopefully you're on your way to a lunch lab this afternoon and doing some great stuff like that. But feel free to engage with them. Can we give Michael and our panel a hand for teaching us today?

Bishop Sue Hauptert Johnson:

Hey, I don't want them to leave because I've got an idea for a book, Michael, and I know you'll be interested in that.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Let's do it.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

And I know you can speak to this, but having done my fair share of church conferences for church closure, I've always had long conversations with the faithful remnant who are still in those churches, and all of them can tell you of a day, go back to your churches and do history. Because there was a day in your church's history when they did this. And I remember the angriest church I had, I asked them, "Tell me the history of your church in this community." And they're like, "Oh." I said, what did your parents and grandparents say? "Oh, every day they were out in our community. Every day they were out talking to people about Jesus. Every day they were doing that." And I said, "And how much of that do you do?"

And they said, "None." And I realized a lot of it was guilt that they had quit working, right? So if you buy in that I just show up and write a check equal to my cable bill, maybe to the church every month and show up and worship twice a month, then I check off that list. That's how churches die, right? So I'm just

thinking of this and all of you, I'm grateful because you get the juices flowing, but all of your churches have this in their history. We're not writing new chapters. So there's the challenge. Go do some history.

I also want to say a word of thanks to Carl Bergeson, which you will never know. Carl was the lay leader in my church in Ocala, Florida. And he dragged me in. He conned me. He said, "I need somebody to come serve communion to the certified lay speakers." So he said, "We'll do it first thing on Saturday afternoon." Well, if you know me, I hate Saturday events. We got to communion at 5:30, and I had to listen to every certified lay speaker preach. And one of them was a guy with the worst haircut in the worst suit I'd ever seen, but man, he could preach. And his name was Michael Beck.

And that started our long relationship and had no college education, no formal education to speak of, and was a convicted felon. And they said, "Okay, make him a pastor in the United Methodist Church." That's Grace at work, folks. Now, if you had told me he would have like 17 degrees and be a prolific author and work alongside Leonard Sweet, one of the legends of our day, I wouldn't have believed it then. But thanks to Carl Bergeson for dragging my butt to Ocala first to serve communion and to meet Michael Beck, you never know. But like all of these guys say it's just about showing up. It's just about showing up. So with that note, I know there are announcements. There're not? Oh, okay. Wow. I'm looking for Jesus to walk in. I think that's a... Okay. Well, one of our very excellent fresh expressions, folks in the Virginia Annual Conference is bringing our closing prayer. Rev. Isaiah Park, come and pray us out.

Rev. Isaiah Park:

United Methodist theologian, an author Leonard Sweet. Ask this question, will someone mistake you for Jesus today? Can you look at someone next to you and say that to them? Ask them, "Will someone mistake you for Jesus today?" You and I, we have an opportunity to show the world who Jesus Christ is. That is our calling. Amen. And we can do that because we have the living Holy Spirit in us. Will you join me in prayer?

Lord, thank you for your Holy Spirit that lives in us and gives us the resurrection power to go into the world. Because if it were up to us, we would never go. It's only in the power of the Holy Spirit that we can go. And Jesus, you tell us you can't do this alone. You need to go in the power of the Holy Spirit to reach the world with my love. And if we don't go in the power of the Holy Spirit, our eyes are veiled, our minds are judgmental, and our hearts are hardened. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, we will see people with the mind, the eyes, the heart, and the compassion of God.

So Lord, our United Methodist Church, our Virginia Annual Conference, we need the power of the Holy Spirit to move in and through us, revive our souls and resurrect all of our senses so that we are moved into action to live as Christ lived, to love, as Christ love, and to die and resurrect as Christ did. Jesus, you are the fresh expression of God's presence, compassion and love to us. And therefore, we too can be a fresh expression of your hope, compassion, and love to this world. We are wholly surrendered to you. We are on our knees and we are available to you so that we may continue in the movement that you

began, you who began a good work in and through us will bring the completion in Christ Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit and Jesus. Holy and beautiful name we pray. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you, Rev. Park. Appreciate it. I hope you'll go to a lunch lab and continue this conversation. We are adjourned until two o'clock when we'll have our memorial service.

Friday Afternoon, June 21, 2024

MEMORIAL SERVICE

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 otherside. 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.

Friday Afternoon, June 21, 2024

TEACHING AND BUSINESS SESSION

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

As you find your seats, Rev. Sam Nesmith has asked for a moment of personal privilege and when he asks for personal privilege, I grant it so.

Rev. Sam Nesmith:

I'm delighted to speak to you for a few moments about a historical person, a friend over the years and a tremendous Methodist, Judge Willard H Douglas Jr. At the present time, he is in a state of dementia. He doesn't know he's in the world, but I visit him every month. I take communion to him, but I know who I am and I think I want you to know there'll never be another person like Judge Willard H Douglas. In the early... Well, before I say that, my wife and I are the two remaining clergy persons from the central jurisdiction. The only clergy left from the central jurisdiction. Now, if you remember, the central jurisdiction was one of the five jurisdictions, but the central jurisdiction was totally the segregated one, and it encompassed the total United States where the other four were based on geography and Willis Douglas, his ministry and leadership started around 1970, a pivotal period during the period of segregation when there was a special emphasis and interest in trying to be inclusive here in Virginia. His devoted discipleships span four decades, the scope of serving in the highest level of methodism.

At the conference level, Willard Douglas served in four conference agencies where he was a Trotter member, Goodson Foundation for Homiletics, Leadership Development Institute, Heart Havens and the Virginia United Methodist Housing Development Corporation. Other committees of the Virginia Conference on which Willard served included Black Methodists; he served in that position for many years. He served many terms as the president of the Ethnic Minority Concerns Committee, the Clergy Development Committee, and the Retired Clergy Housing Development Corporation. He was the lawyer for that committee. He was an excellent lawyer. He was what you would call the lawyer's lawyer, smart, articulate and knowledgeable. Willard served as trustee of the board of two United Methodist related educational institutions, Virginia Wesleyan College, and he served there for 20 years and Ferrum College for 10 years.

Beyond the annual conference, Willard rendered service in the greater area of Virginia. He served as a delegate to General and Jurisdictional Conference, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2012, and 2016. A great Methodist, a great leader. From 1984 to 1982, Willard served on the judicial council and it's my understanding that he served magnificently in that position. I just had to ask the bishop to let me say a word about this outstanding black Methodist in Virginia. Willard also was involved in the World Methodist Community. He served from 2001 to 2016 in the highest level of World Methodism. I hope other Black Methodists will see Willard as an example and a model for Methodism here in America and in Virginia. Thank you, Bishop. I'd like to ask you if you could give a prayer because I think my prayer is so local, yours is international and widespread, so if you would, I'd appreciate it.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Lord, we thank you for this pillar of history. We thank you for his years of service. We thank you for his legacy and we thank you for his example. May we all be guided by his years of service, by his commitment to you and by his never hesitating to respond to your call. We thank you for living legends and we thank you for Rev. Sam Nesmith who brings him to our memory and we thank you for him as

well. May we all follow in their illustrious footsteps, the Lord comfort him in these last days, give him glimpses of memory, but we look forward to his restoration and his resurrection. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you, sir.

Okay, now we have Rev. Woo Kang who's going to come and lead us so well in the teaching sessions and I know that you want to welcome him and express your appreciation for his time with us.

Rev. Woo Kang:

Thank you, Bishop. Thank you Virginia Annual Conference. I'm not as cool as Michael or Rodrigo. I need my notes, so I'm going to stand right here. It's so good to be with you all this afternoon and thank you so much for your hospitality thus far throughout the conference. When Jonathan reached out, he asked me to talk about the missional movement, and when he shared that topic, I was like, "Okay, that one I can do. Let me think about it." And I wrestled with it for a while because I thought to myself, I can talk to you about all the outreach that we do. I can talk to you about the mission Sundays of the Net Church where we shut down all of our campuses on the last Sunday of the month to go serve the community. I can talk to you about our foster closet where we serve foster parents with clothing.

I can talk to you about what we can do as missional, but then as I wrestled with it, I thought to myself, a lot of people can figure out the what. They can figure out a service project, they can figure out a mission trip. They can figure out a plan to go do something. So instead of talking about the what today I wanted us to focus on the why. Why does the Spirit call us to be missional? Why does the Spirit seek to move not just within the church, but through the church and out of the church? Why is it that we seek to be a part of a missional movement? The why is critical in everything that we do. I think of the why as the engine. The why is the reason of why we do what we do.

So I want you to think about why, why do we seek to be missional? I'm going to be blunt and I'm going to be honest. Is the why, because now we're in a privileged space where we have enough money and enough resources, and now I can go do something? Is the why, because if we go do something in the community, they will then come to church? Is the why, so we can, what we say is put warm butts in seats? Why is it that God is calling us to be missional? This word, why, is a word that I've been thinking about a lot recently. I've been very thankful for the North Georgia Annual Conference and especially for Pastor Rodrigo's leadership and allowing me February of last year to begin a ministry in our newest campus of the Nett Church, our fourth campus in historic Norcross, Georgia, and that we created, and we call it... I'm sorry. At The Table.

At The Table is what we call a curated dinner worship experience. It's a fancy way to say dinner church, but we created this service and created this church expression and experience as a way to reach the young and younger folks and young at heart folks in our community that have been hurt by the church or that have left the church. The why behind that was the statistics that we found that broke my heart. One fourth and a one mile radius of this campus are ages 18 to 34. Over 50% of them have said that they no longer go to church. If you hear that correctly, I didn't say, do not go to church. I said, they no longer go to church. What does that tell you? Something happened. Someone was hurt and we as the church has done something wrong. So we thought of this idea of creating a space where we break bread together, where we are able to worship God in a very dialogical way, where we talk together, where we have community together. It's been a great experience, a lot of challenges and struggles, but a lot of joy and a lot of blessings.

One of the biggest blessings and also one of the biggest challenges is that 99.999%, except one person in our whole congregation are not Methodist. They come from denominations I've never even heard of. We have probably every denomination you can think of represented within our community, but with that comes the challenge of the why. If we talk about outreach or missions or evangelism, what it means

to us and why we do it may be very different from the other person, brother, sister, sibling that comes into the space. So I've been spending a lot of time taking 10 steps back and thinking about this word, of why do we do pretty much everything and anything that we do.

What I love about this community and that I have faced through this community is that diversity comes in many different ways. Diversity also comes with theology. It comes with beliefs, it comes with culture, it comes with ethnicity, it comes with race. It comes in many different ways, but the beauty of diversity is that we're able to learn through it. So today I'm going to probably give you a little different way of talking about a missional church than you expected, but I want you to ask yourself this question, why do I want to be a missional church? Why do I want to be a part of a missional church?

If you look at the Nett Church and if you know anything about the Nett Church, one of the words that people say in the community when we ask them, "Hey, what do you know about the net?" They say diversity. That's usually the key word that comes up when we talk about the Nett Church is diversity. While I was preparing this talk, I was doing a Google search and I looked up diversity, and I didn't mean to find this, but it surprised me, right under diversity as an antonym, the word that pops up is unity. So I want you to think about that for a second. I literally had to take a step back and I was like, "Hold on. So does that mean diversity and unity are opposite?" When we as the church are seeking to be unified and do things on a united front, but also seeking for diversity, and I was wrestling with that, and I want you to wrestle with that as well.

Diversity is opposite of unity? And as you have that simmer, I'm going to take you down a journey. Something that we do at At The Table every week is we believe in being interactive and we use a program where I ask you a question, you answer it, it comes up on the screen. That will not support thousands of you. So I made my own, and we're going to do this old school. I'm going to ask you some questions. It's multiple choice, A, B, and C. If you believe the answer to the question is, A, you're going to lift up your right hand. If you think it's B, you're going to lift up your left hand. If you think it's C, you're going to say hallelujah and put up both. Okay? So the first question that I want to ask you is you're going to see this picture. What is this? So the majority is telling me it is the Tower of Babel. Amen. Good job, you pass. Next one, what did the Lord do? So the answers are caught the tower on fire, two, turned everyone to dust, three, confuse their languages and scattered them all over the world. What's the answer? Hallelujah. Hallelujah. If you catch on, hallelujah is the answer.

We are going to go a little bit further into the Bible, but I want to ask you what biblical moment is this? Hallelujah. It's the story of Pentecost.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Jewish acapella group.

Rev. Woo Kang:

The day of Pentecost, I was trying to be funny and creative, put in the other ones. The last question is what was the first thing that happened when the Holy Spirit came down? Everyone fell out in the spirit. Everyone caught on fire. Everyone spoke in different languages. Hallelujah. And church, I want you to hear yourself saying, hallelujah when we say people spoke in different languages.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Hallelujah.

Rev. Woo Kang:

That we are able to say hallelujah when we hear different languages, not, oh, I can't understand you. Can you speak a little louder? Do you speak English? But when someone speaks a different language, are we able to say, praise God. Praise God for the differences. Praise God for the tongue that you have that I do not have. And the story of Tower of Babel, the people were spread and the way that they were divided was through language. Then you fast forward to the day of Pentecost and the way that people came united was through language. If you look at the Pentecost story in Acts chapter two, you see that there were dwelling in Jerusalem. Jews devout men from every nation under heaven, and at this sound, the multitude came together and they were bewildered because each one was hearing them speak in his own language.

The Holy Spirit could have done anything. Think about this with me. The Holy Spirit entering into the world could have done anything, could have given us photographic memory to memorize the Torah. It could have made us the best people to love people. The Holy Spirit could have done anything in that moment, but what did the Holy Spirit seek to do? The first thing when entering into this world was language. God could have done anything in that moment, but what God chose to do was allow people to speak other people's languages, experience one another's differences. What I love about this story was it wasn't that the Holy Spirit came and everyone started speaking the same language, AKA not everyone came and did church the same way. Not everyone walked in the same way. Not everyone was taught in the same way. But what happened in this moment was I was able to experience the way that you experience life and you were able to experience the way I experience life. Church, that is what the Holy Spirit is seeking to do in this very moment in our lives.

Remember that phrase that I said, diversity is opposite of unity? How many of y'all have heard these phrases? Let's agree to disagree. At least we agree on this. Let's just focus on what we can agree upon. The thing is unity and diversity, a lot of times we want them to exist and coexist, but it is hard. We even say let's agree to disagree, is hey, what we disagree on, put it away. The differences, let's put them to the side, but just focus on the thing that brings us together. I'm going to flip the script on that and I believe that is what we are called to do is how can we be diversely unified? We can still be together, but with our differences, where our differences are valued and experienced, just like this Pentecost moment where we value, celebrate, honor and experience these differences together, where we even leave room for differences, actually encourage differences, but common unity in the shared value and principles for of our call and of our love of Christ.

In the world and in society unity and diversity may not always come together, but in the church, I believe it is called to do so, but also out in the world. At the net, we intentionally sing songs in different languages, and I'm going to show you some words on the screen, and this is a song that we love to sing and it says... You don't want me to. I'm not going to sing it, but I'll just read it.

For everything you give me. Thank you Lord, for people who surround us. Thank you Lord for everlasting kindness. Thank you Lord. And for your faithful presence, thank you Lord. And then we say shukran, gam-sa-hae, gracias, asante, four languages, but these languages are all represented within our congregation. But I want you to think about why is it that we sing in different languages in our services?

Honestly, I thought, oh, at first it's so that people who speak different languages can feel comfortable in that service because their language is being sung. But when I really take a look at why we sing in different languages, it's not just for those to feel comfortable hearing their own language, but it's for us to be uncomfortable to speak different languages, for us to be able to partake in something that meets someone where they are, even though it may be discomfoting for us, even if it calls us to embarrass ourselves. I can't tell you how many times when Spanish comes up on the screen, people sing along. As soon as Korean comes up on the screen, Romanized with all the dashes and all these words, people... I don't blame them because it's really hard to follow along, but we don't want to embarrass ourselves.

Sometimes we don't want to step out of our comfort zone. We want to be comfortable, but what does it look like to experience other cultures, other ways of doing things, even if that costs us our comfort?

What I love about this song and us seeing our folks sing this song almost every week is that we're able to see people walking with people and being able to walk in different ways. This is my why, of why we are called to be missional. It's not just so we can go save people, but it's so we can be a good neighbor. So we are able to experience life with people that look different than us, that speak different than us. So if you want to be a missional church and you are not ready to be uncomfortable, you need to work on yourselves before you go anywhere, in my opinion. And I talk to myself personally, am I ready to be uncomfortable? Am I ready to try to experience something different? Am I willing to walk with someone even when I don't fully understand? To be missional is not just going somewhere and doing something good and coming back to your warm bed and calling it a night and checking off a box. Being missional is a lifestyle. Being missional is a calling. What I love about the United Methodist Church is that many things that we do are missional, even things that you may not really think are technically missional.

I chose to become a United Methodist Church pastor really because of many things, but one main thing, which is the open table. To know that all our welcome to this table, no matter how broken we are, no matter how sinful we may be, that we are able to come to this table. I wanted to be a part of that kind of church. I want to be a part of a church where anyone and everyone can come sit and experience the amazing love of God. But do you know what we say when we start the table, we open up communion? We say the table is open and we usually say, "You may come." What does it look like if we take that same table and instead of people coming to the table, we take that table everywhere we go? Where the love of Christ is not just experienced when you come up, but the love of Christ is experienced when we take it out. Are you following me? That is our calling to be a missional church.

But when your why is understanding what it means to serve those that are different than you, that to me is when you are able to walk into that home where it smells a little different than yours, where you're able to eat that food that tastes very different than yours and live out that open table, where all are welcome and where not all come, but where we all go.

I'm going to end with a story, and At The Table is one of our first services, and I did not want to do communion, if I'm honest with you, because I didn't want to be too churchy. My wife, who's always smarter than I am, said, "Hey, we are a church." I was like, "You're right, you're right." She was like, "Let's just do it." I'm like, "I don't want to turn people off, or if this is the first time in a long time coming to church." She was like, "Just do it." Okay. So I stood up there after sermon was over, and I always say a similar liturgy that I made up, but I just say, let's be reminded of that table where the man that betrayed Jesus was able to sit, where the one that turned away and denied Jesus three times was able to sit and experience the love of God. And because of that, Church, you are all welcome to this table. And in the United Methodist Church, we believe in an open table. As I was talking about this, this gentleman was sitting right in front of me, big guy, big beard, definitely looks like he's from Georgia, and he's sitting there and he just starts crying. He did not look like someone that just cries that easily. And he's sitting there looking at me dead in the eyes, just crying. I was like, "What in the world did I do?"

I was like, "Babe, that's why I said let's not do communion." But after it was over, he comes up, takes the bread, dips it in the cup, and he comes up to me, he says, "Can I talk to you?" I said yeah. He was like, "This is my first time in church in about 5, 6, 7 years, and I grew up Catholic and I was never able to take communion. I never felt like I could come to that table. I never felt like I could partake. I never felt good enough. I never felt worthy enough, and this is one of the first times I was able to take communion."

That is the church that we are a part of where we can meet people where they are, the same people that a lot of folks will turn away from. We as a United Methodist Church, you as the Virginia Annual Conference, we are called to be that open table for all. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Thank you, Woo.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

All right, so Woo, you pastor at the table and I feel like we just got fed, so just as we're digesting this now, that's probably enough of that analogy.

You talked about the why as the engine. Folks out there are hearing that and really wanting to think about a compelling why. Not just like you said, it's not about getting more butts on seats or anything like that. What are some steps that pastors or laypeople can really take to begin to discern their why?

Rev. Woo Kang:

That's good. I think everything has to come out of relationship and if you are trying to do something new in your church, if you're trying to do an outreach project, if you're trying to be mission or whatever it may be, instead of first figuring out a good idea, what would it look like to actually talk with the community? What would it look like to sit down for a cup of coffee with that neighbor that you want to help? Instead of you coming up with an idea of "What can I do for you," that I can hear from you, "What I can do for you?" And I feel like a lot of times that's what becomes our why through our conversations, through relationship, and that's what drives us to do what I believe we are called to do. So my encouragement would be talk to people and don't come up with things on your own, but speak to those that you're seeking to walk with.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

It's kind of that, I think some of what we've heard throughout our time together, is that community-informed practice model and how do we ensure that we're rooted in that. One thing that I think I've heard from other colleagues and diversity is a value of, "Hey, how can we become a more diverse congregation, better reflect our community?" Do you have any wisdom for folks who may find themselves and say, "Hey, I'm in a really monoracial or monocultural community." How do you practice diversity in places where it feels like diversity isn't present?

Rev. Woo Kang:

100%. I think Rodrigo shared yesterday, diversity is not always racial. It's not always ethnic. I grew up in the Korean church all my life and even in an homogenous immigrant church, do I believe there's diversity? 100%.

That diversity comes in socioeconomic ways. It comes with family structure. It comes in many different ways where diversity is present. So I think in the same way, what my challenge is, what I always try to challenge my home church but they never listen, is what we need to really be better at is not trying to just say, "Hey, we all are, I'll just use my context. We're all Korean, so we are a Korean church. We all agree on this, we get together and everything's good," but what would it look like if you have opportunities in your church where you actually ask about what are your differences? How can we value your stories? When you hear people's stories and you start to see that there are different stories represented within your congregation, those different stories make your congregation diverse, in my opinion.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Yeah, for sure. And it sounds like that would even contribute to some of what you've talked about with that idea of finding unity in diversity and that sort of thing. I wonder if you might share a little bit with us

about... A distinction I've heard before is there's a difference between unity and uniformity as an example. What does it look like? Maybe you've talked about the Net church, outside of church space and just in life, pursuing that space of how you can practice that true diversity that leads you into a space where you don't have to be the same but you're together.

Rev. Woo Kang:

Yeah, I think one example is if you're a sports fan, unity is great, but we want uniformity when it comes to what team we like. You get me? So it's not like, oh yeah, we all agree, but I need you to exactly who I like and you need to know everything about the team. You need to be the fan that I am and we try to be uniform as sports fans. Unity in my opinion, he uses this a lot. It's like the World Cup. I have my team, which is and will always forever will be Korea, but we have unity in the World Cup with all the different teams and the different ways and the different fan bases, we're able to still come together and celebrate the World Cup, the love of soccer, the love of football, the love of what it means to come together. So I think that's unity, being able to still have what it is that I have but come together in a common way.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Yeah, that's really helpful. So I think one of the things that I'm curious about when we start talking about cultural diversity, let me ask this question, just recognizing my own identity as a white male. A lot of times I think, and just specifically for white folk who are pursuing diversity, sometimes there's a challenge with cultural appropriation, with colonialism. Do you have any wisdom about, for folks who might be in the dominant culture, how do you pursue cultural diversity in a way that avoids cultural appropriation and colonialism?

Rev. Woo Kang:

This one, I'll just say it's simply, let others tell their story. You don't have to be the one to tell their story. I think that's a little bit of a difference is giving the opportunities for my Black sister or my Indian brother to give them the space to share what it is they want to share instead of me being the one saying, "I need to take your story and share it." And I think that's a big thing that we try to do in our church settings is instead of me trying to sing a song in Spanish, we'll make sure that we have someone that can speak Spanish that will sing the song in Spanish. I think that comes with our relationships and the way in which we do ministry, which also means you need to open your doors, create more spaces, more leadership opportunities for people to be able to live out their calling so I don't have to do it.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

That's beautiful and really speaks to the importance of the centering of voices and the centering of positionalities. At the Net, you speak often about the table is the center and this idea that the table is at the center of what it means to be in mission. I know Bishop Sue will often talk about teaching liturgy as a means through which we tell story, that she's spoken just at this conference about if every pastor knows the communion liturgy, they probably can pass the Board of Ordained Ministry and that sort of thing. So I wonder what does it mean to see liturgy through a missional lens?

Rev. Woo Kang:

I think seeing liturgy through a missional lens is understanding that you already are equipped for mission. The liturgy that we are able to be blessed with, the liturgies that we have and that we have grown up with or that you preach every Sunday, these have equipped us. And if you really look into

liturgy, liturgy is not just internal, liturgy a lot of times is a call to action. If you really think about liturgy, most of the times, it's a congregational communal thing and that equips us. And if we can use that correctly, I think it gives us something to be able to walk out into the community with.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Yeah, that's helpful. So I'm going to invite Rodrigo and Michael to come up and as they're coming, I do have a question for you Woo, and it's related to Nett. So I think you and Rodrigo have been pretty open that y'all are getting ready to go through a transition with Rodrigo moving into the conference office, and that's going to be a big change. One of the things that you've really taught us today is that part of effective mission and really, that all of y'all have taught us, is that effective mission is nimble and it's flexible.

I wonder if, in a time of transition, would you have a word of wisdom, especially my guess is there are a few folks that are out here who are about to experience transition whether they be pastors, laypeople who are receiving new clergy, maybe folks who are moving and things like that. What wisdom would you have about engaging transition from a missional perspective?

Rev. Woo Kang:

Yeah. It has been hard and it is going to be hard. He's a founding pastor and they love him. We all love him. Someone said, "We need to saint Rodrigo." I was like, "Oh my gosh." But I think in the midst of transition, what I'm constantly reminded of is the moment that we forget in the mission of the church and the mission of whatever context you're in and that the value becomes the person, it's bound to have issues. But I know that we had a meeting with some of our more seasoned folks, a little more stubborn folks, and we were shocked that the outcome was not "What can you do now? What can we do now?" But they said, "Are we going to stay on the mission?" So I think when you have a strong enough mission and your church is focused on the mission and vision and values, even in the midst of transition, and those difficult times will come, I do feel like that will be what carries you forward, not a person. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Rodrigo, Michael, any thoughts on this?

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah, I'll go a little bit deeper in that conversation because it has been one of the most holiest moments that I have experienced. For the Net, we started as a church plant and part of our growth has been through mergers to taking on existing congregations. As a multi-ethnic church, we have taken on some homogeneous congregations and things went as south as you may expect it. Right from the beginning, people from saying, "Can you take classes where you can get rid of your accent?" And I was like, "No. Having an accent is one of the most popular things to have in this country." From "Can you go back to the country where you came from?" All kind of nasty things in the beginning.

And then five years later, as we're sharing that transition and almost people were like, "Well, we don't really care about you and you can go, that's fine. We're going to keep the vision of the church." And that's where you said, "Jesus, thank you for what you're doing. Thank you for you being the center of what we are doing." One of the things that we share that I love about what he was talking about is John:17, Jesus said, "The way they'll know that You send me is for our ability to become one." Jesus banked the whole future of the church, not in the way we feed people, not in the way we do charity work, not in the way we do worship or how awesome our carpet is or how loud we play the organ, it is

in our ability to become one. So when we find a way to gather a group of people, no matter if they all look alike or if they don't look alike, because can we tell them, "Can you become one with one another, with one with Christ?" And that will do it.

Rev. Michael Beck:

I'll just throw in, from a clergy perspective, involved in lay empowerment movement. Our approach is starting from the beginning with the dream of the person who wants to create something. In the beginning, I failed a lot through, "Let me start some stuff," and then, "Hey, let me hand it off to you." It just doesn't work. So it gets back to that intrinsic motivation of what is your God dream? What is God calling you? What community are you part of? And then nurturing that. And then the transitional piece that's often hard, is not as hard because you've cultivated a movement of people that are empowered, they're living in their gifts, they're doing that. And so you're more like a circuit rider in that system where you're moving around. And the biggest shift in my ministry was where I stopped trying to grow fruit on my own tree and started trying to grow fruit on other people's trees.

And the thing I didn't hit real hard earlier, but when we do this blended ecology movement thing, it's not just the fresh expressions that are lay-empowered and stuff, that also has to happen in the inherited church. So we have a lay preaching team where we all preach equally. We come together for our sermon planning retreat and we all throw ideas at the wall. Everybody brings two or three ideas and then we vote democratically. And sometimes my sermon series that I've cooked up don't get voted on even though they're clearly superior. So next week we're starting a Disney Princess sermon series.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Praise the Lord, now.

Rev. Michael Beck:

I'm glad y'all are excited about it because it wasn't my first go-to, but I'm sure I'll learn a lot. But when you've created that kind of culture, I think the other thing too, it's relational and sometimes itineracy can work against this where it is moving a lot, but can we rethink itineracy as being in the same place for a long period of time, but the itineracy is moving around in a parish cultivating all kind of things all over the place that are self-sustaining and people living out their calling and their God dream.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

That's great. Well, and thank you all for your vulnerability, especially in the midst of transition, just helping to think through that. All of you to a degree have talked in the last couple of days about religious harm and the impacts that that has on movement in general. As United Methodists, we tend to ascribe to Wesley's three general rules, "Do no harm. Do good. Stay in love with God." I know that's not the last one, but close enough. How do we commit to doing no harm? The idea that religious harm could have been fostered in our congregations and our settings. What does it mean for a church or a community to really commit to doing no harm?

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

[inaudible 00:47:07]

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

It's softball, so feel free. Anybody can take it.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

Yeah, I'll say three words and I'll expand a little bit into each one of them. Know, own and change. Let me start with the know. And by that means, k-n-o-w, yeah, right. I want to make sure your English is right, k-n-o-w. But you have to know the story. You have to know the context where you are. We live in the United States of America where there is weight. There is sin, there is heaviness, there is racism. Feel into it. And you have to know what you know, you have to own your power into that. Even as a male Hispanic first generation, there's privilege that I bring to the table. There's conversations where I can walk as a Hispanic that I know my sisters, mis hermanas, they don't have a voice in that table. There's conversations what I can walk into because of perhaps my legal status where other people may not.

So you have to own the level of privilege that you have and you have to change the story. I told this a couple of days ago to the lay session, if you change nothing, nothing's going to change. We can't just keep complaining about the brokenness of the church, about the brokenness of the world and not be willing to do what we can in it. So you got to know the story where you're living into. You have to do the owning of your brokenness and you have to be willing to change it or at least die trying to.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Thank you.

Rev. Michael Beck:

If I could suggest there's a lot to learn from the recovery community here, which Father Richard Rohr's 12 Steps to Spirituality, the Great American Contribution to the Global Spiritual Landscape. And there's some principles there. It's a leaderless organization, there's no president or board. It's polycentric, it's movemental and creates little pockets of safety and healing where people can bring their deepest trauma and struggle and find healing. And there's some key things about it. So apprenticeship, one-on-one relationships, we call it sponsorship, the ability to get real and not have to hold things back. That doesn't mean you go into every meeting and bleed all over everybody, but you can really bring those honest things that you're struggling with.

And leaders modeling that behavior, modeling that vulnerability and having those principles, traditions, create safety for people to do that. And I think it's basically early Methodism that's been recapitulated in 12 Steps. That's my theory. It's like societies, classes and bands, but that's what I say begin to be a trauma-informed church means we need to be an inclusive church. It means we need to repent of the ways we've caused harm and be open about that and then create space where conversations can happen and we co-create whatever the next Methodism is going to be together.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Thanks.

Rev. Woo Kang:

Yeah, I think for me, if we're trying to not do harm, when I think about the opposite of harm, I think of love and are we able to commit to love? And I think one of the things is we got to acknowledge is a lot of churches, and I've been a part of them as well, have we really committed to loving those that are coming through our doors? Are we committed to attendance? Are we committed to our building? Are we committed to how great whatever it is? But when you really commit to love someone that love

needs to come unconditionally, it comes with grace, it comes with mercy, it comes with understanding, it comes with repentance. And I really think that's the shift that I always try to make, is I hope that it's not just, "I hope I don't hurt you, but I hope you can really feel loved by me."

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

I think that's so helpful. And just that framework of what I hear in all of you, it is a true commitment. It's not something that you can just say, "Yeah, sure, we'll do that." But it's really evaluating that on a consistent basis and making sure that that's something that you're being able to ensure is a part of your community. And that leads to a question about in all of these movements, what does assessment look like? So we've talked a lot about fluidity and the fluidity of grace, the fluidity of how community develops, even how mission unfolds. How do you assess at any given moment where you are in the stream, so to speak, and allow that to guide where you're going to go from there?

Rev. Michael Beck:

All right. I'll try not to be not helpful with what I want to share, but so it is a relational following of the Holy Spirit. It requires deep listening. It requires adaptability. It requires like we're just following the relational prompts.

Luke:10 "Find the person at peace, do life with them at their table." So following the stream of the spirit through those relationships, it's a very intuitive thing. I don't think it's anything you could put in a report and turn into... But I will say that currently not only do our metrics not measure it, but they almost program our behaviors away from this kind of movemental missional way of being church.

So what I always encourage people I'm working with in a coaching context, whatever say, "Create your own metrics for what vitality actually looks like in your community, and then feed that back to the system. Help them understand what that looks like." Because the prevailing metrics may or may not measure that, but assessing that requires team conversations. It requires prayerful where do we feel the Holy Spirit is the next thing? And then doing that together as a community.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

That's great. One of the things that we talk a lot in the church at the Nett or moving forward, they will keep talking about it, is there is a difference between failing and sucking at it. And we talk about it's okay to fail because it is okay to fail because not everything that we try is going to work. But one more time, there's external factors that may create a program and express expression, a ministry to fail.

Sucking at it? It comes from the heart, it comes from laziness, it comes from not doing right biblically, what we are called to do. And I think laity and clergy can tell those things apart. So in the life of the church, which I believe every church should have a risk-taking culture, because we know what is at stake. It's people's lives. The credibility of the gospel, that's what is at stake. We constantly are going to have to try to do new things. That just has to be our MO. And we just have to differentiate. "It's okay, we try something that we fail. It ain't okay if we suck at it."

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

I love it.

Rev. Woo Kang:

I want to answer this with a story. Mission Sunday is the last Sunday of the month, where we shut down everything and we say "The church has left the building." We go serve the community. No longer am I in that role, but almost three years. I was a pastor of outreach for the Net, and I remember a lot of folks used to come up to me and say, "We're doing all this in the community, but they're not coming to church." Or "How do you measure what we're doing?" We're putting, and we have a good budget for it, we believe in it, but they're like, "We're putting this much money into it, but what are we doing?"

I don't know. I mean if you come to one, you might find out. But anyways, last couple months ago, we went to an extended stay and this was our second time there. And it's extended stay hotel where that's how homelessness really looks like in Gwinett County where we're at, an extended stay hotel. That was our second time there. We were there exactly a year before and we offered haircuts. We had a barber come out and he did haircuts. And I remember one guy, his name's Dave, and he looked rough that first time we saw him. His beard was down to here. He looked really rough. And our barber, Alex, he made him look real good.

And then a year later, a couple months ago, same extended stay, Dave walks up to me first I was like, "Man, you're still here?" And he said, "Yeah." And he said, "Ever since you guys came and cut my hair, I can tell you my life has changed." So you ask, "How do we assess?" I don't know. There's no metrics to that. There's no measurement to that. But when you get to talk to people, when you listen to their stories, then I think you can assess what God and the Spirit is doing in people's lives.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Well, and I think that gives us a good leading question for everybody out there when we're going to take a stretch break in a minute, and maybe the question we could ask one another or be able to tell one another is, when was the last time you or your church took a risk big enough that it would've required a move of the spirit to see it through? That's so much of what I hear in each of these stories that you've shared today is that the three movements that the Bishop's leading us through in this annual conference session and what will be leading over the next quadrennium is that it requires risk of our comfort, risk of ourselves, risk of who we are, and trusting that the Holy Spirit's up to something. And that when we're willing to surrender ourselves, when we pour ourselves out, that's where there's room for God to do something big.

And so I'm really grateful for what you all have shared. I wonder, Michael and Rodrigo any prevailing thought out of what Wu said, that you'd want folks to take home with them and say, "I remember this."

Rev. Michael Beck:

I loved what Wu said. Can I just say a quick story?

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Yeah, yeah.

Rev. Michael Beck:

So we're in Tattoo Parlor Church. Some people just show up, they bring their friends, "Cheap tattoos. They're going to talk about Jesus, probably, whatever." So this guy comes in for the first time ever in Tattoo Parlor church. He walks in, he is like, we're all sitting there, cross-legged on the floor and the couches and doing our thing. And he says, "This is church? This is effing cool." Can I get an F-bomb in, Bishop? Are you cool?

Bishop Sue:

Yeah, I've never said it before myself.

Rev. Michael Beck:

Okay, all right. So here's the thing. Inside my little pastor heart is going, "Dang, that's awesome." I wish people would walk into my Sunday morning vintage worship service and walk in and go, "This is church? This is effing cool." Wouldn't you get excited about that? Can I get an "Amen" anybody? Hasn't happened yet. So he comes, joins the circle. He comes, starts becoming a regular, slowly, he's like, "I'm the only one dropping the F-bomb like every sentence. I'm the only one that had to smoke a jay before I came in to be part of this."

Slowly over time, maybe now it's like there's three F-bombs in his share, and he stopped smoking weed and gentle spirit transformations happen in his life. All we're doing is creating that ecosystem for that to happen. So yeah, how do you measure a guy moving from 20 F-bombs to two? If that was on my report, I would be killing it. I would have great missional vital signs.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

I just have to interject real quick. The next thing on our agenda is the statistician's report.

Rev. Michael Beck:

All right, add some "How many F-bombs did you hear this week?" if you're truly being missional. Sorry, that was a rabbit trail.

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz::

You see, we live in times where it doesn't take rocket science to acknowledge that, I'll say it, the government, religious institutions, society is constantly giving hell to people. And there is a church, where our ability to give heaven to people. You talk about control, surrender. At the end of the day, what the Lord is asking from you is to be obedient. The outcome is up to God. What happens? It's up to God. What God can do to you, through you, in you, despite of you, by simply being obedient, it can change the course of history to somebody. So just go and give people heaven.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Awesome. So good. Woo, you've shared so much wisdom with us. You get the last word. What do you have for us?

Rev. Woo Kang:

I feel like we've been here for a week. I was talking about ago, a long couple of days. Blessings to you. But I think it's simple. What would it look like for us to be a church where we can better love people and love people where they are?

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

I love it. I love it. Well, hey. Yeah, we can clap for that. That's a good thing.

Friends, I just want to share with you real quickly that 10 years ago today I was ordained in this room. I feel like, in the last decade, I can't remember a time at annual conference where I've felt more fulfilled and more enriched by just the presence of folks who are willing to pour wisdom out onto us as we gather together for holy conferencing. And I think we all just owe an incredible debt of gratitude to

Michael Beck, Rodrigo Cruz and Wu Kang for sharing some time with us. Would you join me as we thank them?

Rev. Rodrigo Cruz:

Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page:

Appreciate you, man.

Rev. Joshua King:

Before we take a stretch break, I just want to make up, not make up, but give an announcement. There is a car, a deep blue Volvo SUV with their flashers that is parked in the parking lot with the lights flashing. That is a North Carolina plate, RGP 7333.

Bishop Sue:

Okay, thank you. Okay. A stretch break. A real short stretch break. We're going to put up the minute clock in about a minute. Okay? So act accordingly.

Ms. Perez:

... that we lean into the challenge that Rev. King gave us to lean into discomfort and do what is asked of us and maybe take this moment to develop some empathy for those of us who have to think about and disclose and fight for our identities every day. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Ms. Perez. Well said. Appreciate it. Okay, I invite Elijah Gilliam, one of our youth delegates from the Northern Virginia District to come for our opening prayer.

Elijah Gilliam:

Let us pray. God of love, today, we pause to give you thanks, for an inclusive church, for hearts open to your spirit, for the transformation that happens when our hearts and minds are renewed. We ask that as the leader of our church, father, let your will be done. Jesus give us direction. Holy Spirit, give us the boldness to speak up and submit our thoughts and our speech to you so your kingdom can continue to be a present reality in us. Bless us as we move forward. In your name we pray, amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you very much. Okay, I'm going to turn to our conference secretary and he's going to talk to us about the resolution process and what his group has learned and how we're going to approach the resolutions today. So Rev. King, if you would lead us in that.

Joshua King:

Thank you, Bishop. I know it has been some time since we have had resolutions on the floor of the Virginia Conference. Some of you may remember from the time back when we dealt with resolutions the whereas statements were not the subject matter to be debated nor the subject matter to be amended. So as we move forward into this time of resolutions, the whereas statements are there for

information, but the only bit of language that is going to be discussed is anything that is after therefore, let it be resolved. And so if you have an amendment, it will be to that language and when we vote it will be that language that will be ratified and put into the official minutes that is the legal language for this session.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

So the whereas clauses will not appear in the official record. And this does not bind the next annual conference. The resolution is only binding for the annual conference year that it's passed. So we will have much more education on resolutions next year because we have the rules that we have gotten before us and we will be working on a clear process. But, sometimes, timing is everything and the two resolutions that we're going to approach right now are timely to be before us. And so, I'm going to ask Rev. Drew Ensz to speak to his first that we posted overnight. There he is. Microphone one.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Thank you, Bishop. With that new information and thank you, Rev. King, I move to rescind my first resolution and seek to introduce the following resolution. The resolution for the Virginia Annual Conference, Apology for Harm Done to LGBTQ+ Persons. Whereas the Constitution of the United Methodist Church declares that all persons are of sacred worth, our social principles have long affirmed the human and civil rights of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, ability, age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation. Whereas the postponed 2020 general conference removed the harmful language that LGBTQ+ persons were incompatible with Christian teaching and removed the harmful bans on LGBTQ+ persons serving as clergy, clergy officiating same-sex weddings and same-sex weddings occurring in local United Methodist churches.

Whereas Jesus says in the gospel, according to John in the 13th chapter, "A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Whereas one of our general rules is to do no harm, whereas our denomination calls us to accountability and to repent when we fall short of God's kingdom. Whereas members of our annual conference have used photos and social media posts of couples to bring complaints against pastors and thus devalued the couple's wedding and have caused harm. Whereas clergy have had to live in fear of being who God has created them and have had to hide part of themselves in fear of retaliation.

Whereas based on the harmful language, some people who experience a calling from God to become United Meths clergy, have had others in our annual conference question the validity of that calling, have been threatened or removed under complaint or removed from the candidacy process due to their sexual orientation. All of this has caused great harm, therefore, let it be resolved that the Virginia Annual Conference apologizes and earnestly seeks forgiveness for its roles in harm cause to LGBTQ+ persons.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, that is before us for discussion. I see a card microphone two. In the middle here. No, she's right back here in the... Right here.

Suzanne Gibson:

I'm Suzanne Gibson, a white, older adult and retired elder on the Missions River District, who uses she/her pronouns. I stand in support of Drew Ensz's resolution. My observation is that many people think the changes made at the recent general conference simply capitulated to the surrounding culture.

Being gay, lesbian, trans, bi, queer or a person anywhere else on the spectrum of sexual orientation is not and never has been a sin. At least in God's eyes.

Sin is not about being. Sin is about behavior that opposes, enacts laws against, maligns, hates, undermines, refuses to recognize, refuses to value an individual or a group and sanctions or causes emotional or physical harm of others. Before his conversion, Saul did not throw stones at the Christians he persecuted. No. He simply stood by and held the cloaks of those who did. And by doing nothing to stop the stoning of Stephen, Saul was just as guilty of Stephen's death as those who threw the stones. Sin is an especially egregious thing when it causes harm in the name of Christ or the church. It's high time we get this right. Being gay is not a sin. People are not sinners because they aren't straight. Straight people like myself might not understand everything about our LGBTQIA+ brothers and sisters, but guess what? They don't understand us either and not understanding our thinking the same way does not constitute sin.

But our response to what we don't understand might very well be sin if it causes harm. And church, we have caused great harm and failed to love as God loves. A genuine apology by the United Methodist Church and every person is necessary because we have done so much harm over the years. The pain and rejection, the isolation, the denial of God's call to ministry, the willingness to take their tithes and offering while denying them a place of ministry in leadership is a great sin that must be confessed, repented of, and redressed. In the very least we can do, Virginia Annual Conference, is to publicly acknowledge our collective sin of the harms we have perpetuated and say that we repent and will intentionally remedy the sins with love and grace going forward. I urge you all to support this motion this afternoon.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. That was a speech for. Speech against?

Speaker 5:

[inaudible 01:21:40] Number four and number three.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Number four? Microphone four?

Rev. Eugene Kim:

Good afternoon, Bishop. I'm Eugene Kim, clergy member from Northern Virginia District. I'm here to respectfully oppose the solution that was presented at the end of yesterday session. I believe that issuing formal apology to LGBTQ+ individuals at the conference level might not align with the general conference commitment to honoring diversity. The general conference aim to recognize and embrace diverse perspectives on homosexualities rather than favoring one viewpoint. There are groups of people in our conference who are still grappling with and finding it challenging to reconcile with the outcomes of general conference while they have decided to stay in our denomination. For those who share this struggle, it's important to remember that the general conference decision was about respecting individual choices, not about imposing a singular perspective to everyone.

If we decide to issue an apology to LGBTQ+ individuals, I worry it may not fully respect the diverse viewpoint within our conference and could potentially contradict the speed of general conference decision. LGBTQ+ individuals have been harmed by exclusive language and policies and they deserve healing through any means. However, if we decide to issue an apology at the conference level, it might be another way to alienate those who hold different views on this matter. For the reconciliation of all

our conference and moving forward for the mission of God together, I kindly urge you, carefully reflect on this consideration. I believe that we really need to navigate this important discussions with compassion and understanding for one another. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Thank you Rev. Kim. That was a speech against; a speech for, microphone three.

Speaker 6:

[inaudible 01:23:54] white female coastal district and district member at large for this conference. I support this but I have concerns about a couple of things in the way the therefore is stated. The Bible doesn't speak about apology. Jesus didn't teach apology. Jesus taught what comes after the and. Earnestly seeks forgiveness. That's what we're about. That's what we've said every day in the Lord's prayer here. Forgiving our transgressions as we forgive others.

I think without the apology statement in there and that we consider all those related to LGBTQ+ persons, not just those persons but the family members, the pastors, the communities, the churches that, those groups that have been affected. I have two nieces that are both gay. One is in the second marriage, wife to wife. I love them. I don't feel I've been harmed, but I know that they maybe feel harmed. But my brother's, two children, two confirmed. The youngest one who's the one that's been married did not confirm and she was hesitant to tell me. Her sister had to ask me, was it okay to invite her friend? So I know, beyond my family, people in the church where I've pastored in the six months this year have been hurt. And I would suggest we add and that we take out apologizing. Earnestly repenting and asking for forgiveness is what I think answers what's being asked.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. Speech against? Number eight in the back.

Nadeem:

Thank you, Bishop. Nadeem Khokar from the Living Waters District, clergy. During the general conference when all these resolutions and these votes were approved, I called a couple of colleagues and I said to them, "Thank you for your hard work. Thank you for what you have been doing to help us lead in the future." And our hope as I am a conservative pastor, I'm a traditional pastor and our hope is and was, and I hope will be, that we can be together in the Virginia Conference. And I'm grateful to you when you came last year, we met with you and we appreciate your desire and your willingness that you said that you want traditional pastors, you want traditional churches to be a part of Virginia Conference and that is our desire. We don't want to leave. And I have been talking to my other clergy friends who are traditionalists. We want to stay.

We want to stay and we want to enter into the new future with the United Methodist Church, I understand the resolution that is demanding apology. When we talk about entering into new future, with reconciliation, forgetting what has happened in the past and withholding to our differences, holding to our disagreements, we do the ministry together in a unity, and this demand of apology, Bishop will create another episode of dissension and maybe anger as well. I feel because of this apology demand, maybe Virginia Conference no longer wants to be a place for all, which I know it is not true, but it gives me an impression.

So what we are hoping is that we leave everything behind and start a new ministry. Our focus should be shifted from all that hatred and anger and bigotry and naming and blaming and just focus on the

ministry. Whoever we are, we just hold each other with love and just move forward. I don't think that demanding apology will do any good to the Virginia Conference. So I am against that.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. Khokar. Speech for, right here in front of me too.

Rev. Dale White:

Bishop, Dale White, Valley Ridge District staff, white male, he/him/his. For the last 30 of my 40 years in ministry, I've been in an extension ministry in a large organization called the United States Navy and Marine Corps. In those institutions, I ended up being the senior chaplain and I learned two things that I think apply here, which is why I support this resolution so beautifully designed by Pastor Drew. The first thing I learned was cooperation without compromise. On my last team, a United Methodist, a female rabbi, an imam, a Mormon, a priest, and a Baptist. That's not the beginning of a joke. That was my team. How did we get anything done? We cooperated without compromise. It can be done. It's been done in extension ministry for centuries and the general conference, when it voted, it voted to remove divisive language, but it also allowed for cooperation without compromise, which is a beautiful thing and new to us in the United Methodist Church.

The second thing I learned was that leaders, lead. Naval officers are expected to speak to authority and to leadership. And the Virginia Annual Conference is a leader of annual conferences, one of the largest. And so it has a role to follow what the general conference voted on and to take the next step in affirming a resolution that continues to those who have been marginalized doing these two things, cooperating without compromise and leading as leaders, promotes healing and it doesn't require anyone to compromise their position because it's not about us individually, it's about us in totality as an annual conference moving forward in the healing process as leaders let us lead.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay, microphone six. Speech against.

Rev. Sarah Locke:

Yes. I'm Sarah Locke. I serve on the coastal Virginia District at Hickory United Methodist Church. And I am a female. I'm a mom of five kids, ages five to 13. And there are moments in our life when our children accidentally or intentionally hurt their siblings, whether it be a harsh word or a push or a shove or even questioning their worth in our family. It doesn't matter whether it's accidental or intentional. I understand it is the same pain. I often, with my mother's heart, wish to have the offending child apologize to their sibling. And what I have learned as a disciple of Jesus is that true reconciliation and repentance only happens within the heart of the person who has sinned. It is rare that me telling my children to ask for forgiveness does anything but cause shame and resentment.

And so I stand before you today as one who has both witnessed colleagues and children of God deeply hurt and harmed by the institutional church, by individuals, and probably by me and any of us, and is one who carries my own story. And I do not wish to marginalize any one person, but I do believe that any public statement of apology that forces some to say something that they are not yet ready to say accomplishes not very much at all. Maybe more shame and resentment.

The work of repentance comes from an experience of life and relationship and the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Something we call as Wesleyan's, prevenient grace. And what to some may seem to be a moment of healing and reconciliation seems to others like it will only deepen the divide between us. I desire for us to be the kind of church we claim to be where all have room to be and believe and serve

Christ. So I do not support this motion. A mandated apology is meaningless unless it comes with true work of the Holy Spirit. And I feel like we need more time.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. Locke. Speech for right here, microphone two.

Rev. Scott Duncan Hopkins:

Bishop, I'm Scott Duncan Hopkins, the pastor of Peace Church in Fredericksburg on the Mission Rivers District. I am an older male and I identify as he/him and his. On this topic, I believe we are standing before what Reinhold Niebuhr called a moral imperative. And this demand is not coming to us by a vote from the floor. It is coming to us by God. And when we find ourselves standing face-to-face with a moral imperative, we are looking for God. And God doesn't live at the top and God doesn't live at the bottom. God doesn't live on the left or the right and God certainly isn't straddling the middle somewhere in between. God lives on the other side of the moral imperative. And if we are going to see God, we have, as the United Methodist Church in Virginia, to walk through that moral imperative to the face of God. We are the largest connection in world Methodism.

I pray, God, we do not become a sleeping giant and we make this clear witness today as Virginia United Methodist that we bear the cross of what we have been part of either vehemently in our ugly words or even more by our silence. It is time not to be silent. It is time to wake up the giant. It is time to walk through that moral imperative. I clearly support Drew Ensz's resolution. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. Speech against. Microphone five.

Alton Keel:

Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I'm not really standing up-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Tell us who you are first, sir.

Alton Keel:

Excuse me. I'm Alton Keel. I'm from Three Notch'd District. I'm an older male and my sciatica attests to the fact that I'm older. My heart and mind are in denial. I use the pronouns he and him and his.

I'm actually for the sentiment, but I'm against the timing. I think now is not the time to assign blame, now's the time to show love. What we need to do is not reach out and blame those who differ with us, but hug them on both sides. Feelings are very strong on both sides, and sometimes they're very shrill on both sides. So let's give us some time to think about this and discuss it and hug one another, hug one another. Let's not put the finger in their chest and say, "Apologize." Let's give some time for this. That's my fervent prayer.

I think we want a victory here by having the language removed. Thanks be to God, thanks be to God. But we don't have to spike the football right now in the end zone. There's no need for that. Let's give it some time.

The final reason and the more substantive reason for delay, despite the fact that only the resolution, after the where-all is the resolution, all the where-all's cause are discoverable. They're discoverable. They're quite broad, they're quite condemning. We live in a litigious society. There is in all likelihood

going to be some soul out there who thinks they are owed punitive damages and emotional damages, and will see this as a basis for proving their case. I'm on a lot of corporate boards. I can tell you, if a resolution like this came up on a corporate board, the lawyers, the corporate lawyers would be pulling their hair out saying, "Whoa, let's subject this to legal review." So my hope is we can delay, and then get not just internal counsel but outside counsel to look at a resolution that'll express the sentiment the way we want to express it. Give ourselves some time.

So in that sentiment, Madam Chairperson, I move to table the motion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. We have a motion to table. That does require a second. Is there a second?

Body:

Second.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay.

Audience:

Point of order.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yes. Point of order, please come state it. Microphone six.

Rev. Andrew LaBar-Dietz:

Thank you, Bishop. Andrew LaBar-Dietz, ordained Deacon, Mountain View District. If I'm correct, a speech cannot end with a motion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I think a motion to table must be able to come in at this point. Otherwise you'd never have an appropriate time for a motion to table.

Rev. Joshua King:

[inaudible 01:39:19] that he rose for a speech before [inaudible 01:39:23].

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Oh, I see. Okay, okay. Okay, yes, you did not start off stating your motion, so we're going to count that as a speech against and now we'll move on for a speech four. His point of order is well taken.

Microphone six.

Gretchen Ward:

Hi, yes, thank you. I am Gretchen Ward, I am lay from the Northern Virginia District. My pronouns are she/her and I am a white, middle-age-ish woman. I have a hearing deficit.

And I would like to speak for this motion, based on everything we've heard the past three days about diversity and unity and how that starts with building connection and recognizing the harm that was

done to a group of people. I returned to the Methodist Church because I wanted to support the churches that were welcoming and affirming to our LGBTQIA+ people.

I am cisgendered, I am straight and I am an ally, and I feel that I am compelled and called by the Spirit to speak up for those people who were harmed and to help build a trauma-informed church. If we are talking about doing no harm, the first thing that we learn as Methodists, we have to start here by offering an apology for all the harm that was done and recognizing that and saying, "Yes, you were hurt." And we can still embrace those with differing views, that's the diversity in unity, listening and having those conversations. But if we don't first start by recognizing the harm and taking a stand and apologizing to those people that were so deeply hurt and removed from the church, I think it's going to be really hard to move forward. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay, I'm going to go way to the back for a speech against, microphone nine.

Jim Chappell:

Good afternoon. My name is Jim Chappell, I am a lay member from Mission Rivers District. I am an older white male who uses he/him/his pronouns.

This is neither a statement for or against, but rather a request for information. Is this an appropriate time to ask?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yes.

Jim Chappell:

Thank you. Should the conference have the motion reviewed by General Counsel for any potential civil liability impact? And did a similar motion for an apology come up or be discussed at General Conference? And what are the results of that conversation? I ask those requests not to be the only factors that drive how this conference votes, but rather to inform this conference before it does vote. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I have consulted with our Chancellor and she has indicated to us that the legal liability is not that great, and that we are a church and that we are in the business of repentance. So I think that that should be the focus of the body and not so much legal exposure. The second question I do not know the answer to, so... Oh, good, okay. Microphone three, we have an answer.

Unidentified Delegate:

General Conference on the last day issued an apology. It said, "On the final day of General Conference, Rev. Gary Graves, Secretary of the General Conference, apologized on behalf of the church of the way the denomination has prevented people from being held accountable for sexual misconduct, thus perpetuating harm within local churches and other ministry settings and damaging the Methodist connection."

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

That's a different issue, though. That's not LGBTQ+.

Unidentified Delegate:

It wasn't?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

No, that was sexual misconduct.

Unidentified Delegate:

Oh, okay. I thought they did. Okay.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, no. Okay, thank you though.

Unidentified Delegate:

Sorry.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

We just had a speech, remind me where we were.

Rev. Joshua King:

We had just had a speech against.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

We just had a speech against, we're having a speech for, microphone two.

Rev. Ryan LaRock:

Thank you, Bishop. Rev. Ryan LaRock, ordained elder, soon to be on the Mission Rivers District at the College of William and Mary, beloved child of God who has been faithfully closeted for eight years in my ministry. And it's hard hearing this because I feel like I'm the first voice speaking that this directly affects, but I appreciate everybody's... what they've put forth.

I'm for the heart and aspiration of this resolution. An apology is a step, a simple step. It doesn't solve anything. The removal of the language doesn't mean harm doesn't continue. We have people in our churches who are coming back to church who have been harmed for 52 years from the church. And we need to focus on welcoming those people into our churches, 'cause they are coming back, they feel they can come back.

So I'm for this resolution, but I would challenge us as a conference to embody our incarnational theology. An apology is important, but we also have to be church in our relationships with each and every person who walks through our churches and extension ministries. That is our call. This is relationship work, it's hard work, but this is a step. So I'm for this resolution, with the challenge that we all commit to living into our incarnational theology, to be the church to everybody.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. LaRock. A speech against, right here, this young woman, three.

Jill Ryan:

Bishop and conference, I'm Jill Ryan from the Shenandoah River District, Leesburg Church. I actually stand to make a motion to table, per the gentleman's argument earlier, and we'll speak to it if it is seconded.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Is there a second?

Audience:

Second.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, go ahead please.

Jill Ryan:

Reiterating the graceful speech of the other gentleman, I also wanted to just say that while we are a church that would like to be in the post-conflict period, we are still a church in disagreement, we are still a church that is healing. We are still a church that is grieving and we are still a church that is hurting. In Wesley's way, we want to do no harm from all sides and we want to learn to love one another. And for that reason I think it is appropriate to table this for now.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. A motion to table is not debatable, so we will move to a vote if you would approve tabling this motion.

Rev. Joshua King:

Tabling is out of order. Postponing it indefinitely would... If we table it would mean we have to deal with it-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Hit it tomorrow?

Rev. Joshua King:

Tomorrow.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Let's clarify. If we table it will come up tomorrow. The other thing we could do is to postpone it, suspend further consideration until next year, or... I think that would be in line?

Rev. Joshua King:

Or to postpone it

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Or to postpone it indefinitely, which would in effect end the discussion. So I would ask, since you're the maker of the motion, what your preference would be.

Jill Ryan:

To postpone to next year.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Okay, so that would be a motion. This is to suspend further consideration of this until next year.

Rev. Joshua King:

It's debatable.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

And that is debatable, so...

Rev. Joshua King:

Sorry, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

No, it's not debatable. I beg to differ. I have the little sheet right here. No, it is debatable, you're right. I read the chart wrong. Go ahead, microphone two.

Rev. David Hindman:

David Hindman, Mission Rivers District. Just a quick question, if we take this in its present form is the action of this Annual Conference binding on next year's?

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

I think the postponing of it would.

David Hindman:

Okay.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

It's the resolution itself that is not binding.

David Hindman:

Okay.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

So I think this is in order. Okay. Speech... I think she spoke for it, so a speech against tabling?
Microphone-

Rev. Joshua King:

Not tabling, postponing.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

On postpone, yes. I used the wrong word. Okay, microphone one.

Rev. Bill Davidson:

I'm Bill Davidson, a retired elder clergy member of the Annual Conference, the Three Notch'd District. I use the pronouns he and him, and I want to speak against this motion.

I've been a member of this Annual Conference at this session for 50 years, and I love this Annual Conference. And it grieves my heart that our conference has done great harm to so many. I think it's time that we face that at this Annual Conference and not postpone this discussion. With all due respect in terms of our individual relationships with one another and our personal opportunities to share the meaning of our forgiveness and grace, that's something we should and ought to do. But this resolution names our corporate responsibility for the harm that's been done by this institution, this body under our stewardship. We've done great harm to so many, and we need to humbly confess our failure to support and affirm our brothers and sisters in Christ, to apologize to them and earnestly seek their forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. And so I speak against this motion to table.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Microphone two, speech against tabling

Nina Cortada Winkler:

In favor of postponing.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Of postponing, yeah.

Nina Cortada Winkler:

[inaudible 01:50:54]. My name is Nina Cortada Winkler. I am an older white Hispanic member of the Three Notch'd District.

I would like to speak in favor of postponing for another year because I don't think this motion is rich enough for the current time. I mean, it's been many, many years that we have been fighting over this issue and I think simply saying, "I'm sorry," is not enough, but if we try to do more everyone will say, "Well we already said I'm sorry." I think if we really do repent, I thought repentance means turning around. And I think to truly repent what has happened in our communities and in our churches we need to have a plan for what does it mean to turn around. Simply apologizing and repeating what the wrongs were doesn't take us anywhere.

So I favor putting off for the year and I would ask you, Bishop Sue, to confer with the appropriate people about how... including Pastor Ensz, what would be the best way to go forward in terms of true repentance. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay, microphone six. This is a speech against.

Bryan Buckles:

Bishop, Bryan Buckles, Valley Ridge District. Male, he/him. I call the question at all that is before us.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Okay. Okay. We will...

Rev. Joshua King:

Two-thirds vote.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Two-thirds vote. So if you would approve calling the previous question, lift your hand. Okay. This means that if you vote yes here on the previous question, we will move into a rapid succession of votes. So the first... If it passes. So the first vote will be on the previous question. If you would like to vote on everything, you vote yes, if you don't, you vote no. If this motion passes, the next motion would be the motion to postpone. And if that prevails that will happen, if it doesn't then we will move on to the vote on the resolution itself. Is that clear? Microphone five, let me hear what... Please, sir, what do you rise to?

Speaker 7:

Point of order.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

Okay. State the rule.

Speaker 7:

I'd like to challenge that a motion to table requires a two-thirds vote.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

No. It's the previous question that requires the two-thirds vote, sir.

Speaker 7:

I apologize.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

That's okay. Okay, we're going now to vote on the previous question. If you would like to bring all matters before us for the vote you vote yes on this motion, so if you would like to do that raise your hand. Okay, thank you. Those opposed, same sign. Okay. There was a two-thirds vote.

Now the motion before us is the motion to postpone this resolution until next year. All those in favor, raise your hand. All those opposed, raise your hand. I'm going to ask you to stand. If you are in favor of postponing, please stand. Okay, thank you. If you are against postponing, please stand. And I think it fails.

Okay, now we're moving on...

Rev. Joshua King:

To Drew's.

Bishop Sue Haupt-Johnson:

To the resolution, Drew Ensz's resolution before us. If you would approve this resolution I invite you to stand. Okay. If you are opposed, same sign.

It is close. Sit down.

I think the best thing to do would be have a paper ballot in the morning. But I'm going to ask you to pray about this because I see... Let's just say whenever a vote is this close, instead of winners and losers there are a lot of losers, often. And so I invite you to pray about this tonight, to think about the Annual Conference as a whole, to really discern what you think is the best way forward. And then tomorrow morning we'll have paper ballots and we'll vote on this. And I think we can see that sometimes voting might not be the best way to deal relationally with each other. And so we will ponder and pray and sleep on this tonight, and then have the paper ballot in the morning. Yes, microphone three.

Brian McLean:

Brian McLean, Three Notch'd District, senior male, unfortunately. And he/him are my pronouns. I'm not standing here to tell people how to vote or whatever, anything like that. But I do think we need to consider what the Gospel teaches us. If we are the Church then we are to practice humility, whatever that means to you. And in humility we need to think about what it is we need to say to others to have them know that they are loved by Christ, no matter what. What is the harm in saying three simple words, "I am sorry."

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, let's move on now. I think we have talked about this as long as we're going to talk about it today and we're going to move now to... I'm going to recognize Larry Dickenson. Is he here? Yay. Okay, give us some good news, Larry.

Larry Dickenson:

Bishop Sue and Conference Lay Leader Martha, and everyone, all members of the Virginia Annual Conference, my name is Larry Dickenson. I am a longtime member of Raleigh Court, United Methodist Church in Roanoke, and currently serving as District Lay Leader of the Valley Ridge District. However, today I am here in my role as president of the Virginia United Methodist Housing Development Corporation. If you were an Annual Conference last year you may remember that I promised a significant announcement of good news for this year. I'm here to deliver that good news, and I hope you receive it with the same joy that I have in bringing it to you.

50 years ago, 1974, the Virginia Annual Conference received a special report documenting a growing need for affordable housing in Virginia and called for action. From that report, two new arms of action were created and set in motion. Later that same year in 1974, Wesley Housing Development Corporation of Northern Virginia was formed, and a year later in 1975 Virginia United Methodist Housing was also formed. Both were dedicated to the proposition of serving low-income Virginians by providing affordable housing.

I want to just make one aside and that is to thank Sam NeSmith and call him out. Call me when you get a chance, Sam.

Willard Douglas was a charter board member in 1975 when the corporation was formed. He served continuously as a board member until the dementia that he has began to affect his ability to be there. That was 2018. He was the longest serving board member in the history of the company.

Back to the Methodist Housing and Wesley Housing. So 50 years later here's what I can share with you. The companies will merge effective December 31 of this year. At that point in time the combined

portfolios will have almost 6,000 apartment units across the State of Virginia that are being managed, all considered affordable housing. And in addition to that there is nearly another 1000 units in the development pipeline. The...

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Great.

Larry Dickenson:

Thank you.

These apartments and apartment communities serve individuals, families and seniors at between 10 and 15,000 people every week, every month, every year. However, I will share with you also that the merger respects that the business of operating and developing and maintaining affordable housing is ever more complex, it's exponentially more difficult now than it was 50 years ago. We are having to compete with national-level companies whose focus is on the money and the deal, while our focus is on the people.

Facing this reality we began discussions early in 2023. Those discussions have yielded agreements. The agreements are in the process of being perfected and will go into effect January 1 of 2025. The new company will retain the name of Virginia United Methodist Housing for purposes of operating and developing properties across Virginia, and Wesley Housing Development will be the sole member and sole owner. A new board will be elected with members from both existing boards at that time.

The new company will have the scale, financial strength and business savvy to continue competing successfully to build on our previous success and continue to expand the supply of affordable housing in Virginia for the foreseeable future. This is social holiness on a scale unequalled to any other effort of the Virginia Annual Conference.

I'll close with a single story to let you know what it means at a granular level. Virginia United Methodist Housing is currently in the midst of a comprehensive modernization of our property in Lynchburg, Virginia. On a recent site visit in May I met a senior female resident who had just moved back into her apartment, after being out for about six months while it was being renovated. As I introduced myself I asked her if she was satisfied with the new unit. She said, "Didn't they tell you? When they gave me the keys and took me to my newly renovated home I opened the door and looked in, walked into the kitchen, put my head down on the counter and cried for 15 minutes. I'd never seen anything so beautiful."

This is the outcome that the merger is intended to continue into the future, and it is the power of the Virginia Conference that we can take, in the Wesleyan tradition, to do big things, dream large, pray hard and act with purpose and unity. Thank you very much.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Larry. Appreciate it. Now it's my pleasure to introduce David Dommissie. We're going to get through these reports, sir, so sit down. We will come back to this later, y'all. We got stuff we got to get done. David Dommissie, come and give your reports, please.

David Dommissie:

Thank you. I can give an abbreviated report and a video of the full report to catch up on time, if that's what you would desire.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay.

David Domnisse:

Okay. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, members and guests of the Annual Conference. The report of the Conference Statistician can be found on page 39 in the...

David Domnisse:

The report of the Conference Statistician can be found on page 39 in the official packet. Bishop, that concludes the statistician's report.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, good. You have a grateful people. Thank you.

David Domnisse:

I don't want the effing statisticians report to come between dinner.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Oh, Lord.

David Domnisse:

Sorry people. And I will say getting laughter is the best thing on a mic. Oh, I apologize. I should say this. I am a white male, age 56, and I'll identify a straight male.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you.

David:

I will now move on to the Treasurer's Report, which can be found on pages 93 through 98 in your Book of Reports. Bishop, this concludes the Treasurer's Report.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Thank you, thank you. Appreciate it.

David:

If I could add one thing for the body, being short, the books have been audited and there've been no adjustments, but I want you to know that we take the audit very seriously and work very hard on internal controls. I believe in transparency, so if you have any questions, just call our office and we'll go through any questions you might have.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, and in the interest of time, why don't we pay homage to Bill Talley right now?

David Domnisse:

Okay. Well, Bill Talley has served as the president of CFA for a number of years. I had big shoes to fill. I've filled Betty Forbes' shoes, has served through some tumultuous times. The Boy Scouts of America served through disaffiliation, has been my friend and companion through this, and he has done a wonderful job, and so I would like to just honor him and recognize his service to the Virginia Annual Conference. And I look forward to the next president in a long line of talented people. Angie Williams is going to be the next president of CFA.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

She's got the closing prayer, so we'll see.

Bill Talley:

David, you're very kind. I do need a moment of personal privilege and I won't delay the events this afternoon. Usually there are two groups of people sitting behind me. One is the Treasurer's Office staff, and of course, the CFA Board. I do not have the Treasurer Office staff behind me. I know they're in the audience, but I want to recognize those people in David's office. They work for you. They are certainly there for you, and I'd ask my board, CFA, to please rise. These are individuals that has a servant heart and they truly have the yeoman's task, what we do every day for CFA, so I want to thank them.

With that being said, Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, members and guests of the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference. As President of the Council on Financing Administration, it's my pleasure to present our annual report. The CFA 2025 budget overview can be found on pages 99 to 101 in your books of reports. The 2025 proposed budget is \$24,620,000. Our goal was to reduce the budget in line with the number of churches that disaffiliated and do the work collaboratively with the ministries of the annual conference. This result in a proposed budget that reflects a decrease of \$2,742,000 or 10% of the total budget.

The Virginia Annual Conference Ministry Apportionments numbers 401 through 405 were reduced by \$537,000 or 7.63%. The conference mission and ministry apportionment were reduced by \$337,000 or 10.4%. Board administrative costs will reduce over \$68,000 and common table grants by \$40,000. Ministries with educational institutions will also reduce \$150,000 in part because the annual conference invested a hundred thousand dollars in 2024 to train each Wesley Foundation in fundraising and capital campaigns. In the conference service apportionment, the line item for the annual conference session increased \$120,000. To reflect the expected costs of the session, these costs have increased substantially over the past several years, and the budget more accurately reflects the expected costs for 2025 Annual Conference session. We were able to offset that increase with decreases to several line items including the Board of Ordained Ministry, legal and audit expenses and computer services. The apportionment of cabinet fund remains the same as there were no change in a number of districts, nor were there any proposed changes to the salaries of district superintendents.

The Equitable Compensation Fund is proposed to be \$50,000, which on its surface looks like a significant decrease. However, this is a realignment of grants between the equitable compensation and the church extension and development apportionment. Grants related to church revitalization or given for missional purposes will be supported through the church development team, which is the conference board that oversee funds for the church extensions and development apportionment. This has been done strategically to align these grant decisions with each board's core responsibility and to work with the cabinet to most effectively deploy our clergy. Even after this shift, the church extension and development fund apportionment was decreased by \$50,000, bringing the total decrease between these apportionments to \$180,000. The reason we were able to reduce these apportionment is because churches that disaffiliated repaid \$925,000 of grants to the church extension and development fund.

The current balance is the church extension fund is currently over \$2.5 million. The work of the Church Development team will not be impacted by this reduction and apportionment.

One of the biggest contributor to the overall budget decrease is the 10% decrease at the Active Entire Clergy Health Plan costs. VUMPI was able to accomplish this by favorable loss experience coupled with fewer planned participants. Additionally, CFA utilized \$340,000 received from its disaffiliated churches to all retirement clergy health costs. The total of these changes resulted in a \$1,940,000 decrease, which equates to a 12.18% in the clergy benefits apportionments. The general church budget has proved at this general conference reflects a significant decrease over prior budgets, offsetting this decrease is at the Virginia Annual is now the largest apportionment annual conference in the denomination. Our share the general church budget, is 4.4% for 2025.

The net of these two factors resulted in a decrease of \$340,000 or 7.73% of the general and your additional apportionments. Section two through six of the CFA report are found on pages 102 to 108. This covers the policy of the Council on Finance and Administration. We are only recommending one sustainable change in our policy. As we did our annual valuation on the average cost per clergy person for health insurance, CFA recommends the active clergy health tier one amount to be increased \$500 to a total of \$6,000 per eligible clergy. Bishop Sue, on behalf of CFA, I move the adoption of the 2024 Council on Finance Administrative report.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you, Bill Talley. The report of CFA is in front of us. The floor is open. Let me get a second just to have it. Thank you. The floor is open now for discussion, questions on the report. Seeing none, if you would approve the CF&A report, please raise your hand. If you're opposed, same sign. Thank you so much, sir. Appreciate it.

Bill Talley:

Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Great. Now, I invite Rev. Ryan LaRock to come forward to present the Francis Asbury Award. Ryan.

Rev. Ryan LaRock:

I think I'm the last thing standing between you and dinner.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

No, there's a prayer.

Rev. Ryan LaRock:

There's a prayer, so stay for the prayer. Well, good morning, afternoon, friends in Christ. I'm the Rev. Ryan LaRock and I have enjoyed serving these last three years as the Chair of the Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry. As I prepare to go into Campus Ministry, I've been grateful to serve these last three years. The Francis Asbury Award actually originated with one of our own clergy in Virginia, the Rev. Dr. Jim Newsworthy, in 1991. Sorry, I'm winded from running to the stage. But Jim Newsworthy is one of our own Virginia Conference Clergy who worked for the general board and he inaugurated this award that we give to campus ministers, laypersons and clergy who exemplify and demonstrate the values of campus and collegiate ministry. The Francis Asbury Award goes to a United

Methodist clergy or layperson who embodies the leadership, advocacy and gifts necessary in the development of the next generation of leaders in our churches.

After receiving several nominations from the Annual Conference, our board decided that we would pick two this year. Our first award goes to the Rev. Bret Gresham. Brett has served as the director and campus minister at the Virginia Tech Wesley Foundation since 2009. One of the distinguishing characteristics of his ministry is his commitment to developing student leaders, and many clergy and laity in this conference have been shaped by Brett in their call to ministry. He has implemented solid leadership development programs, and his students take ownership of every facet of the ministry, organizing events, focusing on our conference youth, reminding all of us of our obligation that we in the local church have the obligation to tell who our students are when they go off to college so that they know there is a place for them.

Brett's district superintendent, the Rev. Doug Forrester says that, "Brett embodies the Virginia Tech motto that I may serve, and he does so in an infectious way that draws others not only to service and not only to VT Wesley, but to Christ." And a student of Brett says that they can attest to his love and determination for this place and the people who fill it to succeed and grow in their spiritual journey. Brett is unable to be here with us, so I will accept the award on his behalf. The second award, if she is present, she is behind me, goes to the Rev. Amanda Miller Garber.

So the Rev. Amanda Miller Garber previously served as RISE's campus minister and pastor from 2007 until this year when she became the director of Missional Engagement for the annual conference. This faith community began when Amanda and a group of leaders recognized that God was birthing something new out of what once was the Wesley Foundation at James Madison University. They described their new beginnings as such. We saw a need for honesty, grace, and love and passion in our community and in our world. We saw a need for the unconditional love of Jesus, and that's why RISE exists so that our friends in the community and around the world will share in the love that binds us as children of God no matter what. If you know Amanda, her commitment to innovation, creativity and nimbleness when faced with a challenge are gifts among many that have allowed RISE to become more than campus ministry and more than a new church start. She has blazed trails from movie theater worship to community partnerships, to fresh out of the box expressions of church.

Needless to say, holy risks have been an inaugural component of this faith community's DNA. Common to both Brett and Amanda has been their unrelenting advocacy for the inclusion of all people. These two leaders have fought tirelessly to ensure that their ministries embrace radical hospitality, empowering their students to resist evil injustice and oppression in any forms they present themselves, even taking significant sacrifices and risks in their own ministry. I'm reminded that through people like Brett and Amanda, much of this holy and hard work, as we've heard time and time again this week, has been taking place and much is ahead of us. Today, may we celebrate Amanda and Brett and their faithful ministries as we continue to build toward the church that God is calling and dreaming us to be. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. We're turning to Joshua King for our announcements.

Rev. Joshua King:

Please stay with us as I have quite a few announcements and that are very important. I'm going to get the first one, which is the easy one. Game Night is tonight at 7:00 PM in Ballroom B. All are welcomed. As to the voting for tomorrow's on the resolution, the paper ballot, I would like to ask the tellers to

come to the front stage right, that is over here after the session this evening for some words of instruction. We'd like to give the body an understanding of how we will handle this tomorrow.

Tomorrow we are going to set a temporary bar for those who have voting rights on this, and would ask that those who do not have voting rights to please leave the bar of the conference so that we can only have ballots being handed out to those who have proper voting. In order to receive a ballot, you will need your voting ID card. There are some badges that have been turned into the lost and found table, so please, you will need those if you wish to vote tomorrow. Also, I would like to ask our Rules Chair to come and just briefly share with us so that everybody in the body knows who will have vote and who will not have vote for this tomorrow.

Rev. Scott Diamond:

Thank you, Joshua. And could I just reiterate that it is important that you please bring your name badge with you tomorrow? If you look at the standing rules of order and procedure, particularly Appendix A, that will provide you guidance and we're happy to answer any questions afterwards if need be. A lady wearing the green badges, if you have your green badge with you, you have the right to vote. Clergy, most of you'll have the right to vote for this issue. It's not a constitutional amendment or anything like that, but there are clergy with voice but no vote, and this is set forth not only in our standing rules, but in the Book of Discipline.

Affiliate member, retired local pastor, elder member of another annual conference, deacon member of another annual conference, associate member of another annual conference, provisional member of another annual conference, retired affiliate member, you have voice again, but you have no vote. If you have a red name badge, you also have voice, but no vote tomorrow morning. That would be lay supply, certified lay minister, honorable location, retired honorable location, minister of another denomination serving a parish in Virginia, official guest, retired full member of another annual conference. If you have a brown name badge, which I believe there are not many, you have no vote. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you for that clarification.

Rev. Joshua King:

The temporary bar, just so you know, that we will be seeking to make will be anything behind the baptismal font, and so that's what we're going to-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

So all eligible to vote sit in front of the font. That seems like a weird dividing line, Joshua, but okay. But it is a big one so it makes sense, okay? But if he would leave the seats in front of the font for those who are going to be voting tomorrow, and then we can, after the vote, all move around, so that will be fine. Others? Is that it?

Joshua King:

That's it.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. It's been a long day. Yes? I see a hand, but I don't see a card or microphone four.

Rev. Michelle Matthews:

Oh yeah, it's here.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Go ahead.

Rev. Michelle Matthews:

Hi. Michelle Matthews, Northern Virginia District Kingstowne Communion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

You have a check over your head.

Rev. Michelle Matthews:

Yeah, we have a check. So now you want to listen. It's a point of general privilege if I may.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Sure.

Rev. Michelle Matthews:

Thank you. So earlier today the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page asked a really important question. He said, "When was the last time your church did something so risky it would take a move of the Holy Spirit to make it happen?" The Kingstowne Communion, we are very much committed to collaborating for the common good. And when we heard that this conference would be collaborating to relieve medical debt across the state of Virginia, we were really excited about it.

And the way we set our budget is we say it's possible that God might do something this year that we can't anticipate, so we put a challenge out to our congregation about two weeks ago and said, "Hey, if you donate towards this, if you are passionate about this, we will match it dollar for dollar with the goal of, perhaps, funding 1% of the conference's goal this year," which the conference's goal was 390,000, and so we wanted to raise 3,900, and today we bring a check. It is a big check. It's a big check with a small amount of money on it. It's not huge, but it actually is above and beyond what our goal was. It's \$4,375.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Wow, that's great.

Rev. Michelle Matthews:

That was raised by our church. And I commend this to you as a church that has a very small budget facing a 40% increase in rent at the school we worship this year and still wanting to say yes to what God is doing. I wonder if there are other churches or districts, or small groups or cabinet, or I wonder if there are other collaborators in the room who might be willing to match this or exceed this. When was the last time you did something that would take a move of the Holy Spirit? Oh, and this is a dry erase board, so somebody got a picture, I think, send that to me. We're going to erase it, give it to Amanda Miller Garber, and tomorrow morning, lots of things to pray about, you all, right? We've given you lots of things to pray about, but tomorrow, if you would like to write your own amount on this check, it's now hers. Come see her.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, we have one more announcement and we are going to adhere to our closing time. I think everybody's pretty wiped, just observing the room. And tomorrow morning I want you to pray all night. I want you to think about, we all have our strong convictions, but I want you to pray and to discern at this juncture in the history of the Virginia Annual Conference, what do you think is the way forward? And I also would like you to come all ready to go. We have a lot to cover in the morning. We will reconvene at 8:30. We'll have one more announcement by Joshua in our closing prayer, but we've got a lot going on, and so I hope you have a restful night, a prayerful night, and that you come renewed and revived in the morning to close out the business before us, and then to have the final joyous celebration of the new thing that God is doing with our licensed commission and ordained folks. Joshua, our final announcement is?

Rev. Joshua King:

If you are being recognized in the Service of Recognition and Call tomorrow morning, we invite you to attend the rehearsal following the conclusion of the session. This group includes retirees of the Class of 2024, licensed local pastors of Class of 2024, commission members, Class of 2024, full members, Class of 2024, new other fellowship and other Methodist transfers, new lay supply and certified lay ministers and are deaconess. Those who do not need to attend the rehearsal include representatives standing with those being recognized clergy in the processional. We invite the retirees to come to the front and the rest of those being recognized to go to the back to be lined up for practice. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Great, thank you. And now I am delighted to introduce to you somebody you probably already know, Angie Williams, who is our new CFA Chair, is going to have our closing prayer.

Angie Williams:

Thank you, Bishop. Incarnational people who have growling stomachs, will you please pray with me? Gracious God in whom we live and move and have our being. You are the God of all movement that inspires, empowers, emboldens and mobilizes all things good in humanity. God that is the movement of the Holy Spirit within us. God that is the movement sweeping our church into a new season of transformation. God that is the movement pushing us out of our comfort zones and into all the world.

As we depart our session together this afternoon and prepare our hearts for Closing Session tomorrow, may the Holy Spirit truly burn like a fire within us that we cannot ignore, a fire that inspires and empowers and emboldens and mobilizes each and every one of us to consider our deepest passions anew, how those passions intersect with the needs of the world and how you are calling each of us uniquely to live out in mutual and reciprocal relationships with our neighbors and our community. Come Holy Spirit, come. Move within us. Move us to embrace our neighbors, but with the understanding that it is we who need the embrace the most, for it is in that embrace that we find you. It is in that embrace that we live fully and have our being in you in Jesus' name. Let all God's people say, amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you, Angie Williams. The Annual Conference is now in recess until we reconvene tomorrow morning, promptly at 8:30. See you then.

Saturday Morning, June 22, 2024

BUSINESS SESSION

Major Speakers of this session include:

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, resident Bishop of the Virginia Annual Conference

Rev. Jessie Colwell, VAUMC Director of Clergy Excellence

Rev. Tammy Estep, VAUMC Chair of the Board of Ordained Ministry

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

It's my honor and privilege to call to order the 242nd annual conference of the Virginia Annual Conference on this Saturday morning. We'll begin with the resolution we left off with last night. I see a card, microphone one.

Rev. Nadeem Khokhar:

Good morning Bishop. Good morning, Virginia Annual Conference. Bishop, we rise to request a suspension of the rules in order to consider a plan of action in lieu of taking a vote on the resolution before us and to do so by having more than one speaker standing here make offer and speak to the shared motion.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. If the body will suspend the rules to hear this, please lift your hand. Those opposed and the rules are suspended. Go ahead and please state your name.

Rev. Nadeem Khokhar:

Nadeem Khokhar, clergy in the Living Waters District. Paul says, "Let me show you a still more excellent way." We need to move forward in a way more excellent than majority vote. A period of listening and holding harms will make any future action more meaningful and more authentically healing. We move the formation of a group similar to historic truth and reconciliation commissions that will create a process and a sacred space to hear, hold and begin to heal the harms experienced by individuals and groups within the Virginia Conference during the long season of denominational discord. The group would be identified by the and asked to begin their work by this fall and report the progress to next year's annual conference. If there is a second we will speak to it.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

There's a second. Go ahead.

Rev. Ryan LaRock:

Ryan LaRock, clergy, Mission Rivers District. Yesterday we were so close to a very 50/50 looking vote indicating this is not an action this body was ready to take. Those of us making this motion represent both sides in yesterday's discussion and we would like to avoid taking this vote because any result will create an atmosphere of winners and losers and potentially cause further harm than there needs to be.

There was a desire voiced yesterday to move forward and move beyond contentious voting. This model of a truth and reconciliation committee or commission fits our annual conference's need to move forward to heal and to tell the truth in love. Typically, this would be focused on the past rather than on ongoing events, investigating patterns of events that took place over a period of time, engaging directly and broadly with the affected groups, gathering information on experiences.

This would be a temporary body with the aim of concluding with a final report and then officially authorized or empowered by the body under review. All stories within this conference family can be heard, held and cared for by this group. Healing can happen as we bear witness to the stories of harm and our stories of resistance and resilience. The recent general conference did not propose an apology but did say, quote, "We lament the ways LGBTQ persons have been ostracized from and wounded by the church and how often Christians have been silent in the face of injustice and discrimination against them." United Methodists have been voting on these matters for years and we humbly submit that the way of wholly listening and bearing witness to one another's stories is a more excellent way forward than voting as our goal toward healing.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, I would think this is a motion to refer to a new commission to fully hear, to fully consider, and to recommend in a more informed way. Discussion is open. The floor is open. Microphone six.

Rev. ReNe'e Ritchie Teague:

I'm Pastor ReNe'e Ritchie Teague, senior adult woman. Don't laugh, please don't. Cisgender, hetero he/she/hers. I want to apologize publicly to the trans woman and to anyone that my flip sense of humor may have brought harm to. I am flip at my very soul, but my intention was never to bring harm and I want to apologize. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Rev. Teague. Other discussion on the motion on the floor. Microphone one.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Bishop, I have a speech for if that's an order.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I think it is.

Rev. Drew Ensz:

Rev. Drew Ensz, white, cis straight man, Northern Virginia District Arise Campus Ministry. I have to be honest with everyone this morning, I am really struggling, yet I believe that this is the right decision. Coming together and forming a commission to be able to truly hear the hurts and the heart of our conference would be a beautiful outcome. I also find it necessary though to acknowledge that over the last two days in my opinion more harm has been done because of bringing this resolution, and so I want to personally apologize for my harm this week.

I apologize for the way that this resolution has caused harm to those from different theological camps. I want to apologize to the couples who I called in advance to ask permission to use their names as a part of this resolution and will call later today to let them know that it has been postponed. I apologize to the youth and reconciling Methodists, especially our LGBTQ plus members who were hoping to leave here with an apology and yet experienced a lot of harm. Harm is like a wave in an ocean and I know that it's hard to acknowledge and to name all of it, so I sincerely apologize and seek forgiveness for my part.

But again, I believe this commission will be helpful in allowing us to share stories in our sacred spaces. I know that this group will take this work seriously because it is important. As a campus minister, I hear these stories all the time and we saw yesterday that one in three people have experienced religious trauma and so I look forward to supporting the work and receiving their report. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you Rev. Ensz. Let's hold our applause. Other discussion? I see a card microphone five.

Carol Ann Kay:

My name is Carol Ann Kay. I am a Celtic white woman identifying with the female pronouns. I'm in I guess the elder group. I'm the lay leader at Pender and I would fully support what Pastor Drew has just said. I fully support the motion because I think by moving together with conversations and with both sides being heard, it works to a much more effective way of healing hurt feelings and it takes away the win-lose possibility that a vote would take.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. We've had several speeches for. Is there a speech against? Microphone six.

David Greer:

David Greer, male, Living Waters District, young adult. I call the question.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, I'll move us to a vote. I think we can, since we have no against speeches, we move to a vote. If you would support this motion to create a commission of truth and truth-telling and reconciliation with reconciliation being the heart of it, would you lift your hand? Those opposed, let's pray together.

Gracious God, this is a momentous time in the history of the Virginia Annual Conference as we seek a more excellent way, a way in which we hear everyone's voices, in a way where we approach every person where they are, where we honor theological difference, where we truly strive to be a place where we serve you first and foremost, where we focus on serving Christ and being him in the world and where we seek to be as we are told, ambassadors for him and agents of reconciliation.

This morning we have discussed what, well, throughout the day yesterday we saw that maybe reconciliation might be what we're commanded to do as followers of Christ and so we ask that we live into this door that has opened, that all of us seek to see the best in each other, to see Christ in each other, that we seek to really listen to one another and not discount, not to humiliate, not to negate anyone.

Oh Christ, may we truly be like you exhibiting your fruits and may our churches also be places of reconciliation for folks from all backgrounds who all need to know you. In Jesus' we pray. Amen. I think we can all applaud now. Microphone one.

Rev. Gennie Bowles:

Bishop, if I might, I'd like to ask a moment of personal privilege.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Certainly. Go ahead, Rev. Bowles.

Rev. Gennie Bowles:

Gennie Bowles, clergy, queer Northern Virginia District, cisgender woman. Friends, I believe that our conversations at this conference have made it clear that we have a lot of work to do. Archbishop Desmond Tutu wrote a book called *The Book of Forgiving* in which he describes a fourfold path to tell the story, name the hurt, grant forgiveness, and then to renew or release the relationship. The nature of being closeted has kept the stories of LGBTQ united Methodists from being told and our pain from being named. Though the weight of the institution is no longer on our shoulders, there are many queer clergy who serve in contexts which they don't feel safe to be their whole selves. I believe that it would be beneficial for us to have a queer clergy caucus to provide a safe space for healing and to give a voice to those who for far too long have been talked about and not with.

I've been blessed with the congregation at Prince of Peace who have been willing to accept my whole self. Because of this privilege, I would like to offer to be the organizer of this group a space with a high level of confidentiality so those whose contexts aren't as affirming might be able to participate. I would also like to extend an invitation to those of you who are struggling with the changes made at general conference. The thing about change is that big or small, good or bad, it always involves grief. I know that you are hurting as you grieve the church that was. I know that these changes can be difficult and uncomfortable.

To that end, if in your grief and wrestling it would be helpful to have a conversation with a queer clergy person who loves Jesus and the United Methodist Church, I would like to offer myself to you. If you'd like to get a coffee or have a phone call, I would be glad to take the time for us to get to know each other. The Desert Father Dorotheus reminds us that as we grow closer to each other, we grow closer to God. I believe that fostering this love of God and each other through genuine relationship is the only way for us to find reconciliation and peace. I would invite you all to join me in doing this work together. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you, Rev. Bowles.

I had the privilege of being part of a celebration of Desmond Tutu's life in Atlanta and met his assistant and his daughters and one of his favorite stories, I'm just going to tell because I think it's so telling. One of his favorite movies was *The Defiant Ones*. I hope you'll watch that movie, but in that movie, Sidney Poitier, a black man, and Tony Curtis, a white man, are both prisoners and they're handcuffed together and when they're being transported from one prison to another, the truck crashes and they escape, but they're still handcuffed together.

And there's a great scene that Desmond Tutu loved where they fall into a pit, a deep pit and Tony Curtis starts climbing and is almost out and the handcuffs pull him back down and he realizes that he won't be free until he takes the black man with him. I think all of us need to realize that none of us will be saved until all of us are saved.

Okay, I see this card to the right. Number three.

Juliana Rosas:

Hello, Juliana Rosas. I'm a lay person from Mission Rivers District. I'm on COSROW. Just a reminder, we are only asking for your name, your district, your gender, your trans status is not being asked for, but that's up to you and your lay and clergy status, that's the part a lot of lay folks are forgetting. We got to put if you're lay or clergy, that's also diversity and if you have any specific racial or ethnic place you want me to mark, just let me know. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Thank you. Microphone, do you want to go to six or nine? Doesn't matter. Six. Six works.

Mike Nelson:

Bishop Sue, conference. Thank you for [inaudible 00:17:09]. I wanted to humbly ask for a moment of personal privilege.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

It's yours. Go ahead.

Mike Nelson:

My name is Mike Nelson. I'm a member at large in the Three Notch'd District and use the he/him pronouns. Anyone in this space who knows me well knows that I'm a very emotional and passionate person. In the spirit of this, I'm grateful for my wife to share my words.

Rev. Gretchen Nelson :

Gretchen Nelson, Three Notch'd District serving as clergy. Michael wrote this last night. Having been a person who has struggled with body image all my life, I believe I've experienced more than my share of hurtful words even when the person saying them thought they meant well. Words. Words are important and vital to our ability to function in this world and yet I do not consider myself a master of words. We all know that person that inevitably is able to be the best version of themselves they can be and always have carefully considered words. I admit that is not my gift. Words can be like the game darts. You always intend to hit the board, but there are many holes in the wall around the board. Whether we intend words to be taken in a certain way does not change how they land.

On Thursday, I got up to speak to my church. Yes, I consider you all my church. I playfully and genuinely said I identify as a sheep in the flock of Christ. I was about to speak on our connectional nature. I hoped it would express that we are all in this together, but I missed the board. My words inadvertently diminished something that is very important to all of us, whether we realize it or not, our identity in this world. Then yesterday a sister in Christ helped me to see the hurt I might cause in the cavalier approach that I had to this very personal expression of self.

I want to own that and apologize and commit to do better. I'm sorry for any hurt that I may have caused and I want to step into this uncomfortable place and sit with my siblings in Christ. We are a family and I cherish all of you here, even as I'm aware, we are a full range of beliefs that exist in this space. We are not of one mind, but we are of one spirit and that is a beautiful thing. I'm grateful for our diversity and believe God celebrates our uniqueness in our unity. I strive to be open to anyone calling me out for my mistakes, especially in the spirit of love and unity as I experienced yesterday. I covenant to do better.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay, another one at microphone six. Go ahead sir.

Brian Christoffersen:

Good morning. I'm Brian Christoffersen, Christ Crossman, Northern Virginia District. White male, cisgender. Today I'm coming to call for a motion for the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference to support a commitment to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Can I have a second?

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Oh, my second persons in the front are gone.

Brian Christoffersen:

Oh no.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Thank you. The clergy to be who are being commissioned today and such are filling in. Go ahead.

Brian Christoffersen:

Thank you. Whereas God created the earth and charged humankind with its stewardship, as written in Genesis, as we seek to protect God's creation and improve our environment and in response to the Council of Bishops and their 2009 pastoral letter acknowledged that our neglect, selfishness, and pride have fostered environmental degradation and that we cannot help the world until we change our way of being in it, as we've learned in so many ways today.

The motion is considering that the 2024 General Conference, along with our bishops, general boards, and agencies have affirmed multiple resolutions and support of climate security including the net-zero commitment, we as the Virginia Annual Conference have a significant role to play by committing to a net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. In doing so, we align ourselves with the Council of Bishops, 2009, God's Renewed Creation Letter, the 2021 Climate Crisis Response Letter, and the Virginia Annual Conference 2009 Green Church Initiative.

So I move that people of Virginia Annual Conference, United Methodist Church, confess our failure to be stewards of God's church properly, ask for God's help in restoring creation and join in our general conference, bishops' board, and agencies in pledging to adjust an equitable reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and the establishment of a working group to study this motion and develop an implementation plan which will be composed of a minimum of the Common Table Creation Justice Team, Conference Committee on Finance and Administration, Missional Ministries Trustees, Commissions on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy, Campus Ministries and Chaplains, and United Women in Faith.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you, Mr. Christoffersen. The motion is on the floor for debate or discussion. Anybody like to speak? And we need a copy of that. We had a copy of that. Where'd it go? We need another copy of that. Microphone three. Go ahead sir.

Rob Getty:

Rob Getty, 52-year-old lay leader from Dahlgren UMC Mission Rivers District. Bishop, I would respectfully suggest to the gentleman who just spoke that action without funding is meaningless. So if we're going to sit there and say we want to be net-zero, is the gentleman going to fund the replacement of my fuel oil heating system at my church? We should strive for looking for future construction to be fuel-efficient, earth friendly, but we got a lot of old churches here and saying that we're going to go zero is ridiculous without funding. So if everyone wants to double their apportionments, we can do this. Otherwise, let's make this a realistic motion to say that we strive for as we move forward to be environmentally friendly but don't slap a mandate on me to go through and update stuff that I don't have the funds to update. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. That was a speech against, a speech for? Microphone three.

Rev. Denise Honeycutt:

My name is Denise Honeycutt. I'm clergy. I go by the pronouns she/her. As I understand this, it is a resolution. Is it a resolution? It's a resolution for a work group. We are not making decisions. It's for a work group to come together to talk about the crisis, which we all know is very real of climate change and how we as a Virginia Conference want to address that. And so I would encourage us to support this so that a group can be formed and can work on that. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Okay. That was a speech for, speech against? Microphone three.

Lisa Yates:

My name is Lisa Yates from the Northern Virginia District. I'm a lay member, cisgender female, senior adult. I'm not against this. I would just ask that we consider maybe reducing the timeframe to 2045 and the reason I say this is that our children and our grandchildren are facing a crisis that is immediate and I'd like to even do it earlier. I know things take time, but 25 years is going to be too late, so I'd like to see the person who brought this resolution forward consider shortening that timeframe. That's all.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, thank you. That really wasn't a speech against, it was a suggestion. I think the commission can take that up. Another a speech against, I think we're looking for a speech against. I don't see any cards. There's one way in the back. Microphone eight.

Robert Horn:

Good morning Bishop and friends. My name is Robert Horn, Crewe Cooperative Parish, the Living Waters District and I am XY DNAed. I have a couple of questions and then also a comment. My first question is involving the committee that we just discussed about gender and that is-

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I think that's out of order. Your speech needs to be about the motion on the floor.

Robert Horn:

Yes ma'am. Thank you. I am not opposed to the motion that has been made. However, I think we need to face some realities. The carbon emissions of the United States are a drop in the bucket compared to the carbon emissions from China, from India and what we will do or could do if we could get the entire United States involved, as my dad would've said, would be spitting in the wind. I believe that we would best be served if we could also find a way to involve the other countries that are emitting much more carbon and hydrocarbons than we. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Thank you. Any other speeches? That was against, there's one for in the back. I see you. Microphone ... I can't tell which is closest. Go to the one closest and then I'll ... I see you in the back. I think it's eight. If you'll move over to microphone eight. Oh, you're at seven. I see. Man, got it. Go.

Rev. Carl Perez :

Thank you. Carl Perez. Mission Rivers District, male. I'm calling so we can call the question, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Is anybody opposed to moving this to a vote? I don't think we are. Okay. If you would approve this ... Well, let me have Rev. King read it for you.

Rev. Joshua King:

The motion states I move that the people of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church confess our failure to steward God's earth properly, ask for God's help in restoring creation, and join our general conference Bishops, boards and agencies in pledging to adjust an equitable reduction of greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2050 and establish a working group to study this motion and develop an implementation plan. At a minimum, the working group will include representatives from the common table, the Creation Justice Team, the Conference Committee on Finance and Administration, Missional Ministries, trustees, Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy, Campus Ministries and Chaplains, and United Women in Faith.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, it's properly before us. If you would approve this motion, please lift your hand. Those opposed, same sign. Thank you. I hope you'll all read, on my recommended reading list is a book called *The Heat will Kill You First* and I'd highly recommend that. It really brings to bear the dire circumstances we face and I feel like it's not getting enough attention and I'd like to ask the Creation Care team to have a summit this year before the next annual conference where we really focus on what we as the people of God called United Methodist can do with regard to creation. I realize we might be spitting in the wind but we might not have any wind left if we don't spit. Okay, now we have an opening prayer. How's that? With Jenelle Watson, I want her to pray for us. Jenelle, feel free to pray however you think we need to be prayed for.

Rev. Jenelle Watson:

Good morning brothers and sisters, siblings in Christ. It is good to be in the house of God today. Is it not? Do you feel strangely warmed?

It is good to be here. Let us pray. Creator God who goes before to make the way you have called this day good and us beloved. You have come into this place, filled it with your presence, and called us to join you, to be embraced by you, encouraged, equipped, and filled with your spirit. As we gather this morning with you, to worship you, to work alongside you. Give us ears to hear and eyes to see you. You in the face of the person to our left and to our right, you in the voice of each person at their microphone, in the silence of those who do not step forward, and in the beating of our own hearts. Forgive us for the times we've not seen or heard and the times we have and chose to ignore. Move us this day, Holy Spirit. Tune our hearts to sing your praise, to speak your truth and intently listen for your voice.

In our anxious moments, Lord, still us. Hold us close so that we may hear your heart and fill its beat and then precious Lord, fill us to overflowing with your spirit so that our worship, our words and our work are a mighty and unmistakable outpouring of your, your mercy, and your grace on all those around us in this place and in the places you will call us to. Grant us your wisdom and courage so that all we do may be a pleasing offering to you this day and in all the days to come as we follow you where you lead and walk unashamed and unafraid as Jesus did in whose holy and precious name we pray. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Thank you Rev. Watson. Now we have a monitoring report. I invite Rev. Lauren Wright, Rev. Jenny Day forward and also Rev. Timothy Barth and Rev. Eduardo Carrillo.

Rev. Lauren Wright:

Thank you Bishop. Good morning annual conference. My name is Lauren Wright. I'm one of the co-chairs of COSROW. I'm a young adult clergywoman serving on the Coastal Virginia District and I use the she/her pronouns. Maybe you resonate, but I spent a lot of my life believing that only one thing could

be true in a given moment. For example, I was a person of faith or I struggled with anxiety, I was joyful or I was disappointed, and so on and so forth. But what I have found personally and professionally is that there is much freedom in allowing more than one thing to be true in a given space.

This has given me a lot of compassion both for myself and for others in and outside the church. So to apply this same idea to our annual conference session, one thing that COSROW would like to highlight in particular is that together we spent about a collective four hours of our time in our teaching sessions and in the panel discussion, and of that four hours of our time both of these things are true. The teaching was valuable and the speakers brought diverse perspectives and COSROW and many of the annual conference that have shared with me or have shared with other of our COSROW folks are deeply disappointed that the teaching and panel discussion didn't include any women in any of those four hours.

We implore our annual conference planning team to hear our feedback and request that we continue to this commitment to excellent teaching and to inclusion moving forward together. As we continue our monitoring report time, COSROW yields the rest of our time to our partner monitoring and inclusion groups with the Commission on Disabilities and CEMCA. So I'd like to turn it over to Tim and CEMCA.

Rev. Eduardo Carrillo:

Buenos dias, Bishop.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Buenos dias.

Rev. Eduardo Carrillo:

Buenos dias Virginia Conference.

Body:

Buenos dias.

Rev. Eduardo Carrillo:

I am Eduardo Carrillo, a proud Latino clergy, multicultural, pronouns he/him. I serve Mountain Valley Church, a cross-cultural appointment in the Shenandoah River District. I also serve as a co-chair of the Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy. Our mission at CEMCA is to be a prophetic voice, ensuring the full and equal participation of ethnic and racial constituents in all aspects of the Virginia Conference. We strive to educate, advocate, and hold the church accountable to God's design of inclusivity in all the structures and processes. Our goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen.

Body:

Amen.

Rev. Eduardo Carrillo:

Transforming the world through both word and deed. Our goal is to make visible God's gift of unity among all people in Jesus Christ, and the quality of community that God wills for the whole human family. Church diversity is one platform to change the way we think, live, learn, and work together for the kingdom of God. We want to thank the conference organizers and our bishop for highlighting ethnic minorities' participation in the sessions throughout the conference. It was greatly improved and we see the effort to live into the kingdom.

We have improved a lot yet there is much more work to do. We are indeed working towards perfection. We are eager to continue our journey together in the perfect love of God, working hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder and heart to heart as we grow closer with God and with one another. I pray that we seek together to enhance minority participation in all areas of the conference. Included but not limited to leadership, boards, agencies, committees, and wherever else we might find the least, the last, and the left behind. Bishop, Virginia Annual Conference, [Spanish 00:40:06]. Yes we can.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

[Spanish 00:40:08]

Rev. Eduardo Carrillo:

Gracias.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I also would like to take a moment to thank Lester Kurtz who's up here. Lester is rolling off this Quadrennium as one of the co-chairs of CEMCA and I want to thank him. He is a wise voice, a helpful voice, and I greatly appreciate our leadership and our friendship together, so thank you.

Lester Kurtz :

Oh, thank you Bishop. I have a footnote. I'm a co-conspirator with Eduardo at CEMCA. I'm Lester Kurtz, an elder lay member, elder not in the clerical sense but the chronological, at St. Matthew's in the Northern Virginia district and I was showing my African wife, who's also a delegate from the Northern Virginia District, my monitoring sheet, and I said, "notice if we include the band, we do pretty well." And she said, "Well, that's what women are expected to do. They're to cook and serve the food, pray and sing, and the men are supposed to do everything else."

She's also very wise, however, and goes much beyond that. She in fact has written a great article. I'll get it posted on our CEMCA website on the conference, an article on Ubuntu which was made popular by Archbishop Tutu. The idea, the African Proverb, I am because you are, which I think is good for us all to think about today and I think it's in the spirit of Jesus. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Before you leave the stage, I need to also acknowledge Eduardo Carrillo who was also rolling off of CEMCA and so thank you Eduardo. That frees you up to do other things.

Rev. Timothy Barth:

Members of the annual conference, Bishop, COSROW, thank you for the opportunity to stand before you. My name is Timothy Barth. I am a young adult white male living with a disability and it is my honor to serve at the chair of the Commission on Disabilities for the Virginia Annual Conference. I want to take a moment to thank you and Neil and Jonathan Page for the caption devices that were here this morning, for the fact that there was no wires going across the floor in the exhibit hall. Those were all recommendations that came from our commission as we strive to be a more inclusive church.

COD or the Commission on Disability affirmed that all people, regardless of ability or disability, are of sacred worth, and through advocacy, education and empowerment, we strive to include differently-abled persons fully into the life of the church. Part of our work is to monitor who is in leadership and to make sure that some persons with disabilities are able to lead in Christ Holy Church. This past year, COD has focused on the charge conference required Accessibility Audit. We on the Commission on Disability want to encourage your church to fill out an accessibility audit.

This audit is designed to show how you as a church can improve access to your building and help persons with disabilities feel welcomed. It is the first step to inclusion. It is certainly not the last. While it might seem impossible to fulfill a full audit, I encourage you to pick one or two things on the audit that your church can improve on. Maybe it's having greeters who open the door and help someone to their pew or cutting a pew to create wheelchair accessible spaces throughout the church. Or my personal favorite, make sure every single person uses a microphone. No, we cannot hear you if you don't use one.

Any fostering of accessibility leads to a more inclusive church. One way that you could foster inclusion is to listen to perspectives of differently abled persons. I want to lift up a book called *The Disabled God: Toward a Liberatory Theology of Disability* as a starting place, it will challenge your view and understanding of God as she offers a view of God in a wheelchair that you have to puff into to move it. Bishop Peggy Johnson always said to me as I was coming up in the Peninsula-Delaware Annual Conference, "You aren't disabled unless the world makes you disabled." Church, let us work to bring down the barriers that make people disabled. May we work to build a more inclusive, diverse and holy church reflective of all God's people. Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yeah. They're coming up next. I invite you to take a brief, don't leave your seats, standing break. And I'm going to invite the cabinet now as we fix the appointments and celebrate some transitions. And so just stand, stay in your spot and I invite the cabinet up and the first thing I'll do is give Dean Denise Bates a moment of personal privilege.

Dean Denise Bates:

Good morning, annual conference.

Body:

Good morning.

Dean Denise Bates:

I'll give you a second to scurry to your seats. I'm Denise Bates, Dean of the Cabinet and District Superintendent of the Mountain View District. I'm a senior adult and my pronouns are she and her. As a moment of personal privilege, I was inspired by our annual conference dedication to helping relieve medical debt and further challenged and inspired by Kingstown community's wonderful gift yesterday. I'd like to share that the appointed cabinet and Bishop are pledging \$2,000 for relief of medical debt and the Mountain View District is pledging \$1,000. And I encourage or challenge my fellow district superintendents who might also feel their heart strangely tugged by this as well. And of course, in due time, anyone on the floor.

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson, Lay Leader Stokes, members and friends of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church, the time has come to fix the appointments of the 2024, 2025 conference year. As the dean of the cabinet, I can affirm that all the appointments in each district are correct. The appointment listing can be found at the conference website at www.vaumc.org/2024 appointments. As I call out each district in alphabetical order, I invite the district superintendent and lay leader of that district to come forward. If there is a change in the leadership of a district superintendent in a district, the newly appointed district superintendent will come forth as well. Our bishop will introduce the new superintendents and the passing of the leadership mantle represented by the transfer of a stole from the outgoing to the incoming district superintendent will be made. First, the Coastal Virginia District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

This is Rev. Beth Givens, Dr. Cecilia Brooks and Mrs. Barbara Mason, the lay leader of the Coastal Virginia District. It's my honor and privilege to introduce to the annual conference the Rev. Beth Givens who has served at Haygood United Methodist Church in the Coastal Virginia District. She is a long-standing and valued member of the Board of Ordained Ministry, a gifted leader, a wise person, and I welcome her leadership in the Coastal Virginia District.

I also want to give a word of thanks to Dr. Cecilia Brooks who has served well and who has really served in a difficult time. I think all superintendents in the connection would not have chosen the past several

years to serve, but I thank her for her service and I wish her well as she enters another chapter in the local church. Thank you Dr. Brooks.

Wait, wait, wait. Stay, stay, stay. We got to get this pattern going right now. I invite those who are moving into the Coastal Virginia District to stand. We're going to put them, they're up on the screen and now we're going to invite everybody in that district to stand. And the announcements, the appointments listed on our conference website are correct and are now fixed. And I am delighted to have new leadership coming to the Coastal Virginia District and I wish you well. We'll have a prayer for you all at the end. Thank you. Thank you.

Dean Denise Bates:

Living Waters District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

I'm grateful to Rev. Jay Carey and Mr. Tommy Johnson for their leadership in the Living Waters District. And I invite those who are moving into the Living Waters District to stand. Their names are up now. And now I invite all of you to stand from that district. We're grateful for your service in that region and we'll have a prayer for all at the end. Thank you. Thank you guys. Appreciate it.

Dean Denise Bates:

The Mission Rivers District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Rev. Dr. Charles Ledlum-Bates, and Mrs. Judy Cron. If you're moving into the Mission Rivers district, I invite you to stand as your names are broadcast. We're delighted for your service there over the next year or years or multiple years. We rejoice at your new leadership and we rejoice, I'll have you all stand now and thank you for your service to the Mission Rivers District. Thank you.

Dean Denise Bates:

The Mountain View District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Rev. Denise Bates, who we owe a huge debt of gratitude for her work in the Mountain View District, but also the work she did in the disaffiliation processes. She really shepherded churches through that. And the annual conference needs to be forever grateful. That is some detailed and not very fulfilling work I think, so thank you, Rev. Bates. Rev. Bates is entering into a new chapter called retirement, and I must say I'm a little envious, but I think that it's just another area of ministry, I guess, where you don't have to show up every day, which is a good thing.

And then Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert. I'm very excited, will be taking over the Mountain View District. She has served well in the Northern Virginia District. Sarah's known for her deep relationship with the clergy and laity of the district, and I am excited that she will go to Mountain View and use those gifts there. So if you are moving into the Mountain View District, I invite you to stand as your names are put up on the screens. We celebrate your entry into the Mountain View District. Now invite the whole district to stand as we recognize you and thank you for your service there. Sarah, you're going to stay, right?

Dean Denise Bates:

And Bishop, DS Calvert would like a moment of privilege.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

You got it.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert:

Bishop, before I leave Northern Virginia, I would like to challenge all of the cabinet and the districts and those who serve on those districts and those who lay lead in those districts and match the fund that we are raising money for the conference offering to the tune of \$5,000 from the Northern Virginia District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Wow. Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert:

So it's up to you guys.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay. Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert, Rev. Kirk Nave, and Dr. Karen McElfish. Lots of names.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yeah, I am delighted to Rev. Kirk Nave. Kirk is coming from a long and storied past in the church. He has served in multiple churches with distinction throughout the annual conference. He's currently serving Braddock Street in Winchester. Yay from the Braddock Street folks. And Sarah's going to hand off the stole to Kirk as he comes to lead the Northern Virginia District. I invite those moving into the Northern Virginia district to stand as your names are displayed. And now I invite everybody from the Northern Virginia district to stand. We celebrate your ministry there and we thank you for your service and for your leadership in the annual conference.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

It's good to see you.

Dean Denise Bates:

Shenandoah River District. Always remember your alphabet even if the script doesn't have it that way.
Note to self.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

The Shenandoah River District is led by Rev. Dr. Victor Gomez and Wilma Jennings who always is a bright spot in any day where you meet her. So I'm grateful for you Wilma. We are delighted that Dr. Victor Gomez will be leading this Shenandoah River District for one more year. I made it clear that district superintendents on my cabinet serve for six years, so they don't have to guess when they're going to roll off, but I invite all clergy moving into the Shenandoah River District to stand as your names are put up and now invite all the members of the Shenandoah River District to stand. All of the lay and clergy members, I thank you for your leadership and for being Christ in the Shenandoah River District and I'm so sorry you have to serve in such an ugly place. It's just tragic. So thank you both.

Wilma Jennings:

Thank you.

Dean Denise Bates:

Now the Three Notch'd District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Rev. Dr. Hyo Lee and Ms. Elizabeth Farrell. And I am delighted, this is my home district where my residence is and where my husband serves. He is at Powhatan United Methodist Church and is enjoying his service there. And I am grateful to the Three Notch'd District. If you are new, moving into the Three Notch'd District, I invite you to stand. And now if you are a member of the Three Notch'd District, please stand as we celebrate your ministry and thank you for your leadership.

Dean Denise Bates:

The Valley Ridge District.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Last but not least, another very ugly district. This is Rev. Doug Forrester and Larry Dickinson. And thank you Larry again for the great news about Wesley development and all that is happening with that merger. This is the king of affordable housing. And any of you who are approaching retirement or looking for stuff to do, Larry did construction for years and years and now he's building affordable

housing so God can use us at any time and we celebrate those gifts. If you're moving into the Valley Ridge District, I invite you to stand as your names are put up on the screen.

Those appointments are now fixed, as are all the others. I forgot to say that every time, but I think you figured that out. And now I invite all members of the Valley Ridge District to stand up. Thank you for your service in the Valley Ridge area and your leadership there and now I invite you all to stand as I commission you, as you go forth now that these appointments are fixed to serve in your various areas of the Virginia Annual Conference.

Oh Lord, pour out your Holy Spirit as we stand on the threshold of a new quadrennium. I thank you for these clergy and lay servants of yours who serve in so many capacities, who work hard and are your hands and feet in every corner of this annual conference. We rejoice that your work is equally important all over our annual conference, we rejoice that you have equipped us with gifted individuals throughout the annual conference and we stand ready to pray, to hear your call and to go where the Holy Spirit is leading.

I pray a special prayer for those clergy in transition this year. My heart aches for them because moving is never fun, but I pray for the transition of these clergy into their new churches. I know that you're already at work in the churches preparing them to receive them. I pray that these will be good fits and great matches and that there will be the wonderful relationship between clergy and parish that is so productive and so joyous. Oh Lord, we pray that where we are weak and where we are limited, you will empower us. That you will give us hearts to know, ears to hear, and eyes to see those areas that need your care, your touch, your compassion.

Show us, oh Lord, those who in every district need to be cherished, need to be gathered in need to receive your love. May we be courageous, innovative, bold, and fearless. In Jesus' name we pray, the one who goes before us into every corner of this annual conference in the world, in His name we pray. Amen.

Body:

Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Yay for everybody. Okay, Joshua will make the final announcements.

Rev. Joshua King:

In just a moment, we're going to be concluding this business session after which we will then take a 20-minute break as we reset for the service of recognition and call. Please be mindful of the seating and if there is a seat tag where you are seated, please move to another location. If you are here to stand with those being recognized as commissioned and ordained members, please come and be seated on the right side of the room. The Board of Ordained ministry Marshals will guide you.

For clergy who are participating in the processional, please now go to the conference room A where you can get robed and lined up in the processional. For retirees of the class of 2024 and clergy and laity being recognized in the service, go to room 103. We will be back to start this service shortly and we'll hope that you'll stay as we recognize and celebrate God's call upon the lives of all of these people. We'll even have a moment at the end where the Bishop will issue a call to mission and ministry and we hope that you will consider responding to God's call in your life. Thank you.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Okay, before we adjourn, I've had somebody ask, Jason has asked for a moment of personal privilege. Jason Stanley, come forward please.

Jason Stanley:

Good morning, annual conference.

Crowd:

Good morning.

Jason Stanley:

I want to ask us to be in prayer for people who have been wounded in Oakland, California at a mass shooting on Wednesday at a Juneteenth celebration and for two people killed and eight wounded in Arkansas at another mass shooting today at a grocery store. I want to invite you to sit in a posture of prayer as we take a time of silence to honor those who have been wounded or killed, as well as for violence in our country and the world. Let us pray.

Amen.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson:

Amen. Okay. It is my privilege to call to a close the 242nd Business Session of the Virginia Annual Conference and we will stand in recess for 20 minutes and then we will have a wonderful celebration of worship.

Saturday Morning, June 22, 2024

WORSHIP 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. Thirty-one persons were part of the 2024 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 763.50 years of service. 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 are 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 will 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, three Provisional Deacons, 11 Provisional Elders, two Ordained Deacons, and nine Ordained Elders.

We, the undersigned members of the Minutes Committee and Conference Secretaries, have read, corrected, and approved these Daily Proceedings on August 20, 2024.

Rev. AK

Chas. K. H.

Conference Secretaries

Sandra S. Zulcher

Ch. W.

Yon. B.

C. A. H.