

Wrapup

Virginia Annual Conference, Roanoke, VA, June 22-24, 2012, Bishop Charlene P. Kammerer presiding

More than 3,350 clergy and laity representatives of United Methodist churches in the Virginia Annual (Regional) Conference gathered at the Roanoke Civic Center for worship, mission projects, celebration of ministries and conducting the business of the conference. The theme of the gathering was "You Are the Seeds."

The conference bid farewell to Bishop Charlene P. Kammerer, who has been the leader of United Methodists in the conference for the past eight years. During a time to honor Bishop Kammerer, a video was shown with tributes to her ministry. "Bishop Kammerer has been a sign of hope and grace," said Eastern Shore District Superintendent Tammy Estep. Her commitment to mission and social justice was also recognized. Young adult clergy Alan Combs and Jessie Squires presented the bishop a bobble-head doll in her likeness. Young adult Chenda Lee offered a personal story of how Bishop Kammerer has touched her life. She said she was struggling with her call, but heard Bishop Kammerer share her own faith story and was inspired to enroll in seminary. She is the daughter of Bishop John Innis, episcopal leader of the Liberia Conference, who was also in attendance.

Retired Bishop H. Hasbrouck Hughes Jr. said "Charlene has a vision of what the church can be and should be doing ... all with the heart of a pastor and sense of justice for the poor and disenfranchised."

In her response, Bishop Kammerer said "Many of you and your local churches have prayed for me unceasingly and I am more aware of that now. That has helped sustain me." Her husband, Leigh, thanked the conference members for their love and support.

Thirty men and women were ordained elders; 24 were commissioned as provisional members; 29 were licensed as local pastors; one received as an associate member; and one had elder orders recognized.

Local churches brought kits of critically needed items for distribution through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). A total of 36,916 kits, with a monetary value of \$473,846, were collected, breaking down as: 19,151 health kits, 11,586 school kits, 3,991 birthing kits, 1,785 layette kits and 404 cleaning kits.

For the first time, the conference adopted a consent agenda to handle much of its business.

The bishop honored Clark Williams, conference chancellor, for his 12 years of service. Steve Brown of Richmond was elected as the conference's new chancellor.

The Rev. Tom Berlin, who headed Virginia's General Conference delegation with Shirley Cauffman, gave the report from 2012 General Conference. Berlin said General Conference this year was "embarrassing," and that the gathering is best at breeding cynicism. He invited attendees to shed that cynicism, set aside broken expectations, and consider their mutual love of the church. "You can do good every day and no one will vote you down," Berlin said.

The Rev. Dr. Young Jin Cho was elected as the Virginia episcopal nominee for the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in July. A video was shown that chronicled his life and spiritual journey. "Pray for me," he told the audience, "but also for the revival of The United Methodist Church, the other 15 candidates, and most of all, that God's will be done."

The Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, assistant dean at Wesley Theological Seminary, who was representing the retiring class of 2012,

delivered a sermon titled, "It's a Relay Race." Using the imagery of a track meet, she said "The baton is a symbol of the team and passing the baton successfully is key. We are part of a relay team working toward the same goal, with Jesus as our coach. We are not in the race to be winners, but so that everyone can be winners."

Dr. David McAllister-Wilson, president of Wesley Theological Seminary, preached the Service for the Ordering of Ministry, interestingly choosing the wedding at Cana as his text. "Becoming a clergy person is not about us, it's about the guests," he said. "It's about the party we're inviting them to called the kingdom of God."

In his sermon, Roanoke District Superintendent Steve Hundley said that the church keeps discussing doing something about our decline, but are "waiting for someone to tell us to start." Hundley added that we need to stop doing things "just like they've always been, but as God wants them to be."

Harry Denman Evangelism Award winners include youth Maggie Nave of River Road UMC in Richmond; lay person Nancy Haga of Farmville UMC; and the Rev. Robert Lough of Pembroke UMC, Roanoke District. Warren Harper of the York River District was elected as the new conference Lay Leader. His predecessor, Shirley Cauffman, delivered the Laity Address and was honored for her six years of service to the Virginia Conference.

Annual Conference members and friends came out in force to work with the Society of St. Andrew. Two hundred volunteers packed more than 45,658 pounds of sweet potatoes for the Southwestern Virginia Food Bank.

The Virginia Conference again led the connection in giving to "The Advance." Conference Center for Justice and Missional Excellence Director Glenn Rowley accepted the Advance Award for the conference from US-2 Missionary Zach Ferguson.

The Conference Offering was taken to support ministries in Mozambique, Brazil, Cambodia and the Richmond District Urban Ministry's Shalom Farms. "4 Cans 4 Conference" collected 13,000 pounds of food for the Southwest Virginia Food Bank.

During the Service for the Ordering of Ministry, 30 were ordained as Elders, 29 licensed as local pastors, 24 were commissioned as provisional members, one received as an associate member, and one had his orders recognized.

A resolution on developing an endowment of \$1 million over the next quadrennium for Africa University was approved. A resolution opposing the mining of uranium in Virginia was approved. A resolution opposing capital punishment in the Commonwealth of Virginia was approved. Members also approved a resolution that was a five-item plan - including restoration of voting rights - to help end stigmatization of ex-offenders who have "paid their debt to society."

Thirty-seven clergy were honored as they entered into retired status.

Membership stands at 334,764, down 633 from last year. Worship attendance stands at 108,855, down 455. On the positive side, small group membership was up strongly among youth, young adults, Koreans and Hispanics.

-Neill Caldwell, Virginia United Methodist Advocate Editor