



## TODAY'S SCHEDULE

- 7:30 Morning Eucharist  
(Prayer Room, Rm. 106)
- 8:15 Singing our Faith
- 8:30 Bible Study
- 9:15 Minutes Committee  
Laity Address  
Pensions Report  
Common Table Report  
Elections of Boards and  
Agencies  
Consecration of Confer-  
ence Leadership  
Recognition of UM  
Colleges/Universities  
Recognitions
- 11:00 Conference Mission  
Worship Service
- Noon Recess for lunch
- 1:45 Singing our Faith
- 2:00 Recognition of Retirees
- 3:15 Constitutional  
Amendment voting  
Commission on  
A Way Forward report  
Board of Discipleship  
Awards
- 4:20 Resolutions
- 5:00 Recess for dinner

Welcome to the 235th Virginia Annual Conference, Hampton Roads Convention Center, Hampton, Virginia



Bishop Lewis did not stay on stage long during her episcopal address on Friday before walking out amongst the crowd.

## Episcopal Address: A New Thing

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis delivered her first episcopal address as Bishop of the Virginia Conference on Friday, June 16. She noted that Annual Conference is like a family reunion, a barbecue where everyone has the opportunity to gather all together in the same place. For her address, she drew from Isaiah 43:19: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

She shared with the

congregation of her travels around the conference since coming to Virginia as bishop; she has driven 7,823 miles since Sept. 1, 2016. These travels include her "Chat and Chew" listening sessions in which she traveled to 16 districts to meet with clergy and laity separately and participate in 128 hours total of dialogue.

During her address, Bishop Lewis remarked that she believed that the Holy Spirit was at work in the Virginia Conference. She said she felt a stirring of the Spirit

since her welcoming service at Reveille UMC in Richmond last September. Lewis stated that in order to capture the new spirit at work in the conference, "We must change our focus, clarify our focus, and commit to God's plan."

In order to change that focus, Lewis said, we must stop looking at our past and start looking at our future. "If we are constantly looking at what we used to do and how we used to do it, then

(Con't on back: "A NEW THING.")

Commission on  
a Way Forward  
event provides  
resources


Throughout this week-end, there were several opportunities to hear the Rev. Tom Berlin talk about the Commission on a Way Forward. Berlin will also make a presentation about his roles as a member in the commission on Saturday afternoon. At his talk on Friday morning, Berlin shared some tangible resources that can be used in local congregations.

One recommendation from Berlin is to start with reading *Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict*. The book written by the Arbingers

Institute explores conflict and its end goal through the structure of a fable.

With this foundation, you're ready to start a conversation, but where do you begin? Check out the "Sugar Packet" video at Berlin's website at [revtomberlin.com](http://revtomberlin.com). This video can help your congregation have a basis on which to speak about their beliefs.

The most important thing to remember in the local church is that these conversations are necessary and that ignoring hard topics doesn't make them go away.

To stay up to date on the Commission on a Way Forward be sure to visit <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/commission-on-a-way-forward>. 



It was standing room only during the Rev. Tom Berlin's presentation at 10 a.m. on Friday morning. He gave two presentations at the convention center that morning.



("A NEW THING," *con't from front.*)

we will never see the new thing that God has for this Annual Conference," she said. She then took the time to apologize for the hurt that has been caused in the past by both leaders and members of the church.

Bishop Lewis said that the Virginia Conference's focus should be to follow the mission of The United Methodist Church in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. She noted that in order to clarify focus, we must view our future as full of possibilities rather than problems. Bishop Lewis then outlined her last step to commit to God's plan for us, as stated in Psalm 37:5. To do this, she asked if we committed to loving our neighbors, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation or any other factors that we perceive to divide us.

"Whether you are conservative, progressive or centrist," she said, "have we decided that the souls of our brothers and sisters are more important than our theological agendas?" She then quoted John Wesley, who had said that as Methodists, our one business on Earth is to save souls. She said that this is the work of the kingdom of God, that this is scriptural holiness- to love one another with no exceptions. "Commitment is the state or quality of being dedicated to a cause," she noted. Are we committed to our cause?

Bishop Lewis ended her address by going out into the congregation and meeting the members of the Annual Conference, both clergy and laity. The crowd, on their feet, hugged, shook hands and embraced Lewis as she made her way around the convention center hall. 🍷

The "Engage Me!" presentation shared how the Virginia Conference can be in ministry with young adults.



## Youth presentation asks conference to "Engage me!"

Three young people from the Virginia Conference, Blake Mitchell, Emily Stallings and Joanne Moon, performed a spoken word piece entitled, "Engage Me!" during the Friday afternoon laity session.

The trio began by speaking about the ways people—young people especially—are stereotyped in the church. They shared in their presentation that young people are interested in being leaders in the church, but that they are often met with platitudes such as: "You do not understand," "Bless your little heart," or "Respect your elders." Mitchell said that issues from Annual Conference have a major impact on young people, but that they aren't allowed to have opinions on them because they are viewed too young.

They also said that people, both "young and more seasoned," have a lot that they can learn from and share with each other. People from all across the age spectrum can be found on the margins of the church, wait-

ing to be engaged. The group asserted that churches need to engage the people in them.

This was just one presentation during the laity session that shared the diversity of the conference including a presentation about Scouting ministries and refugee work. 🍷



## Last Potato Drop kicks off AC 2017

The annual Society of St. Andrew's Potato Drop began at 7 a.m. on Friday, June 16. Fifty-two thousand pounds of potatoes were divided into 10-pound bags, which totaled over 100,000 servings of potatoes. Despite the early hour, participants said they were energized and excited to serve the community. While the Society of St. Andrew has ministries that reach all across the United States, the food from this event will be distributed to food banks in the Virginia Tidewater area.

People came to volunteer both in groups and as individual volunteers. For some, this was their first year participating. Jackson, age 5 (and a half, he interjected), said that this was his first year participating and he shared that he was having a good time.

Others were more experienced, like Sarah Ramey, the organization's gleaning coordinator, who has participated in nine Annual Conference Potato Drops and many more outside of the conference. The Virginia Conference youth delegation participated this year as well, as has been their tradition for over 20 years.

This year's Potato Drop was especially notable as it was the last one to be held at conference. However, there are plenty of ways for people to get involved with the Society of St. Andrew. The organization has plenty of learning and volunteer opportunities around the Virginia Conference. In 2016 alone, the organization held over 5,000 events across the country, which saved 27,320,172 pounds of food.

As the United States has wasted over 60 billion pounds of food this year so far, the work of the Society of St. Andrew is more important than ever.

To learn more about the work of the Society of St. Andrew, visit their website at [endhunger.org](http://endhunger.org). 🍷