

Annual Conference Wrap Up

The theme for the 2018 Virginia Annual Conference, held June 15-17, 2018 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va., was “Servant Leaders Making a Difference.” The conference theme was based on I Peter 4:10, “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” Service was incorporated in the conference theme and lived out in The Great Day of Service, a three-hour period on Saturday, June 16 when the conference session was halted for conference attendees to participate in service.

Over 1,000 people registered and service included clean up in the Hampton community including alleyways and a historic cemetery of freed African-Americans. Other participants stayed inside the convention center to put together 3,000 UMCOR kits and listen to three different social justice talks.

Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion

The Rev. Ileana Rosario, pastor of Lower UMC, York River District, preached for the Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion in which 63 conference clergy and laity who died since the last Annual Conference were remembered.

Harry Denman Awards

The clergy Denman award went to the Rev. Larry Cochran, pastor of Belmont UMC, Richmond District. Laity award went to Kevin and Judy Mooers, members of the Northumberland Charge, Rappahannock River District. Youth award went to Justin Robins, member of Shady Grove UMC in Mechanicville, Richmond District.

Conference Vision

Bishop Lewis reviewed her vision on June 15 that she had introduced at last year’s Annual Conference: Disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve. This is her vision for the Virginia Conference for the next four years.

She reminded those gathered that all Virginia United Methodist churches will have a process of intentionally-forming disciples by 2020. She clarified that each church will have

to individually choose what this will look like for their context. She suggested that each church begin in prayer, have a conversation about their potential mission fields to form disciples and to study three books that she recommended:

- *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius B. Dotson
- *Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People* by Junius B. Dotson
- *From Membership to Discipleship: Grow Maturing Disciples Who Make Disciples* by Philip Maynard

Virginia Conference presented awards from Global Mission Connections

The Rev. Amy Valdez Barker, executive director for Global Mission Connections, presented six awards to the conference for categories based on the ranking with the U.S. annual conferences. These awards were: United States Disaster Response (#1), International Disaster Response (#3), Missionary Support (#1), Mission Initiatives (#4), In Mission Together (#2) and Health-related Programs (#4).

Conference Business

Eight churches were discontinued in five districts. Two new faith communities and one chartered church and their pastors were introduced.

The body discussed three of eight resolutions on Saturday, June 16.

Resolution 6- Gracious Accommodation Virginia Annual Conference. The resolution had to do with the implications of possible irreconcilable theological differences between that of the local congregation and United Methodist polity and discipline particularly as it pertains to ministry to and with members of the LGBTQ community on local congregations' buildings, assets and liabilities. The resolution was called out of order by Bishop Lewis as it called to ignore a part of the Discipline; it is improper as a matter of church law as only General Conference can enact changes in the Discipline.

Resolution 3 - Compassionate Support for Members of the Armed Forces, Veterans and Their Families Suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress and Moral Injury. The committee recommended concurrence. The resolution was approved.

Resolution 1 - Affirm Unity in Christ. The committee recommended concurrence. It resolves that the Virginia Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church urges the 2019 General Conference to affirm unity in Christ in the midst of our diversity, to challenge in love all that divides and to offer to all people God's saving grace through Jesus Christ that

transforms the world. They urge and pray that the 2019 General Conference will resist schism and express openness to diverse perspectives in matters of sexual identity and practice. They urge all faithful United Methodists to pray for a way forward that nurtures an inclusive, evangelical, and faithful Church. The resolution was approved.

Two motions were made from the floor on Sunday, June 17:

The Rev. Jan Rivero brought a motion that the annual conference condemns the manipulation of Scripture to justify political policy that is contrary to the command of Jesus to love all people, especially children. She spoke to the motion about the history of children being separated from their parents and is now being done on the U.S. southern border. After speeches for and against the motion was adopted.

The full text of the Rivero Motion read:

I move that the Virginia Annual Conference, meeting in Hampton, VA, June 15-17, 2018:

- Condemns the manipulation of scripture to justify a political policy that is contrary to the command of Jesus to love one another, especially children;
- Calls upon all public figures to implement policies and actions that reflect the words of Romans 13:10 which reads, "Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law."
- Calls upon the Department of Justice and appropriate agencies to release detained children, reunite families unjustly separated, and develop immigration reform that protects all children and families.
- And requests that a copy of this motion, be delivered to the Attorney General of the United States.

The Rev. **Tom Thomas** brought a motion from the floor about an exit path to be considered by General Conference for churches pertaining to the outcome of the plans from the Commission on a Way Forward and the Council of Bishops. The motion was tabled.

Clergy and lay members voted on the corrected proposed **Constitutional Amendment 1** on Friday, June 15. General Conference Secretary Gary Graves, in an email to conference secretaries, said, "It is imperative that this vote occur during the very next session of your annual conference (2018 or prior to May, 2019)." Results will be announced after all annual conferences vote on the amendment.

Update from Commission on a Way Forward

The Rev. Tom Berlin, member of the Commission on a Way Forward, presented a report on the work of the commission prior to the start of the Clergy and Laity sessions on Friday, June 15. The commission is a 32-member group with representatives from nine countries and held their first meeting in January 2017.

Berlin shared that materials from the commission will be available in July.

During the presentation, Berlin spoke about the phrase in the Discipline that says “homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching” as well as the statement that “self-avowed practicing homosexuals” cannot be ordained.

“We have another issue where people are actually leaving the church over this,” Berlin said. “It’s the ‘leaving of the church’ that is one of the issues before us.” Some people are leaving because some clergy are performing same-sex marriages. Some people are leaving because clergy cannot perform same-sex marriages.

“This has possibly been one of the most Christian exercises I’ve ever been through,” Berlin said. All the meetings of the commission, he stated, had been based in Bible study and prayer. Berlin admitted that he had hoped the commission could find the one solution to bring peace to the entire church.

“We are everywhere. We are in red and blue states. In African nations, homosexuality is illegal. In six of those nations, it can be punished with the death penalty.” Berlin said this changes the conversation considerably. Eastern and Western Germany are different. It’s ludicrous to suggest that “all younger people think alike, but Gallup polls show younger people are more progressive.”

He also spoke to each of the three plans that came out of the commission’s work. In February 2019 delegates will go to a four-day General Conference. More information about the work of the Commission on a Way Forward is available on the Virginia Conference website at <https://www.vaumc.org/WayForward>. Berlin’s slides from the presentation can be accessed at: <https://www.vaumc.org/pages/resources/2018-ac/2018acfridaymorning>. The video of Berlin’s presentation can be found at: <https://livestream.com/VAUMC/AC2018/videos/176376355>.

Glory Sightings video series

After their introduction last year, the “Glory Sightings” video series continued again this year. These videos were shown throughout conference to highlight mission and ministry throughout the Virginia Conference. These videos covered an afterschool program at a

church, a food pantry ministry, a medical supplies ministry and a video covering the events from Saturday's Great Day of Service. These videos can be accessed at: <https://vimeo.com/virginiaumc>.

Great Day of Service 2018

There were 1,637 people who participated in the Great Day of Service on Saturday, June 16 from 2- 5 p.m. This day of service allowed participants three options for service: the building of 3,000 UMCOR kits, participating in three social justice talks and eight locations around the Hampton area with service projects that included cleaning historic cemeteries and alleyways. You can view the "Glory Sighting" video about the day at: <https://vimeo.com/275491965>.

A Service for the Ordering of Ministry

Nineteen people were ordained elders, two were ordained deacon, 11 were commissioned as provisional members, two were recognized for orders and 32 were licensed as local pastors in the Saturday evening Ordering of Ministry service.

Bishop B. Michael Watson, retired bishop in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, delivered the sermon preached on the topic of "But, I Haven't Finished Yet."

"This is a remarkable service," he said. "I wish that all United Methodists could experience an ordination service. This is a defining time for individuals and the church. It is occasion of great challenge and great celebration."

He asked all the Christian ministers to stand and said it is all baptized Christians who are baptized into ministry.

"Jesus came to reconcile all people to God," Watson said. "This is the unique role of Christ and it is now the unique role of the people of the church." He said people must be brought into the presence of God.

To those who are being recognized, Bishop Watson said, "I want you to hear this.

Sometimes it is hard to know what to do. You are sent, you are called, and you wonder." Bishop Watson also shared that ministry can be frustrating but there are holy moments throughout ministry.

"What a holy, holy privilege. You will have that privilege. You will decide what you do with it."

Bishop Watson ended his sermon saying, "We say to you tonight with love and affection,

'Go. Go with God.' Amen."

Following the ordering ceremony, Bishop Lewis asked people to pray and invited anyone who may have a stirring of call to come forward for prayer and a continued discernment about their call to ministry.

Closing Worship

Bishop Lewis based her sermon on the Annual Conference 2018 Scripture: I Peter 4:10. She shared that at her installation service in 2016 that she wanted the Virginia Conference 'to stir up the gifts' and felt that the Great Day of Service the day before showed that the conference could discover those gifts and employ them to serve others.

"As the body of Christ, we no longer experience the freedom of the Holy Spirit or operate in our spiritual gifts because we are too concerned with what we may look like to our fellow colleagues or parishioners or just too afraid—as United Methodists—that we will be labeled as charismatic. Beloved, I believe just like we experienced yesterday; that it's time for the body of Christ to discover your gifts; use your gifts and stir up gifts.

"When you use the gifts God has given you, you will discover that God will give you the power you need to operate in your gift," she said. "It is by grace we received the gift and it is by grace that we use the gift. My brothers and sisters, spiritual gifts enable the body of Christ to function as whole."

Bishop Lewis reminded those gather that once you have discovered your gift, you must do something with it.

"Just think about it: when someone gives you a gift, what do they expect you to do with it. They expect you to use it."

Wrap-up stats

Annual Conference members brought 44,774 disaster relief kits for United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) to Annual Conference. **Kits** included: 29,409 Hygiene kits; 13,367 School kits; 703 Birthing kits; 334 Layette kits; 840 Cleaning kits; 16 Bedding kits; 102 Sewing kits; and 3 miscellaneous kits.

At the Saturday morning **retirement service**, 44 pastors retired.

Attendees of conference contributed almost 9,000 pounds of **canned goods** and boxed dry foods as part of the "4 Cans 4 Conference" drive.

Members approved a 2019 budget of \$31,615,000, down \$185,000 from the 2018 budget.

The **Conference Treasurer** reported that statistics show a decline but membership stood at 320,000. Worship attendance stood at 100,000. Engaged in small groups were at 95,000. Some 75,000 serve in mission reaching over 1 million in their communities and around the world. Financial resources are good. Virginia Conference church members tithed \$200 million. Church owned assets generated \$25 million. Eight hundred and eighty-one churches paid 100 percent of their apportionments, a 2.6 percent increase over 2016. The 2019 budget was approved or \$31,615,000, a reduction from the 2018 budget. A **conference offering** of \$111,000 was collected. The offering was divided between the following: Cambodia, Brazil, Mozambique, Volunteers in Mission (VIM) teams working with Native Americans, Haiti, Cuba recovery, Puerto Rico recovery and new this year, Moscow Seminary.