

The 238th session of the Virginia Annual Conference was held virtually, Oct. 31, 9 a.m. to 2:10 p.m. The session started with the Rev. Joshua King, chair of the Rules Committee, giving instructions on conference procedure.

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis called the conference to order and welcomed clergy and lay members to the virtual session. She gave thanks to the many people who helped make the session possible. She shared the theme this year is "See All the People." The pandemic and racial unrest has caused us all to see all the people, she said. "I know it is hard, I know we are tired of wearing masks and feel there are too many restrictions, but I want you all to be safe and informed," she said.

The memorial service and ordination service are available on the conference website at www.vaumc.org/Ac2020

Bishop Lewis shared she is calling the conference to three days of Praying and Fasting for the Healing of the Nation. The letter from Bishop Lewis is available at <https://vaumc.org/bishop-lewis-issues-prayer-and-fasting-for-the-healing-of-the-nation/>

The conference members joined in the singing of "Are We Yet Alive," being led by a virtual choir.

The Rev. Raymond Wrenn, who turned 102 in June, brought a prerecorded opening prayer. Danielle Cloud, a youth member from Fredericksburg UMC, Rappahannock River District, also brought a prerecorded prayer.

Host District Superintendent Dr. Hyo Lee welcomed Bishop Hasbrouck Hughes and his wife Mrs. Mera Hughes; Bishop Ray Chamberlain and his wife Mrs. Martha Chamberlain; Bishop Young Jin Cho and his wife Rev Kiok Cho; Unable to attend are Bishop C. P. Minnick, and Bishop Tim Whitaker and his wife Mrs. Melba Whitaker.

Dr. Lee led the setting of the virtual bar of the conference to allow for voting.

Elections

Conference secretary the Rev. Susan Reaves, led the election of:

Assistant secretaries: the Rev. Delano Douglas and Mrs. Bev Myers (Elected)

Chancellor: Mr. Steven D. Brown (Elected)

Election of the treasurer and statistician were delayed until a General Conference is held.

Editor of the Journal: Mrs. Madeline Pillow White (Elected)

General Evangelist: the Rev. Gregory West (Elected)

Annual Conference Committees as found in the Book of Reports (Elected)

Mr. John Meeuwissen, chair of the Board of Laity Nominations Committee, presented the 2020-2024 Conference Lay Leader nomination. The nomination of Mrs. Martha Stokes was put forth to replace Mr. Warren Harper, outgoing conference lay leader. (Elected)

Rules Committee

The Rev. Joshua King, chair, asked the rules be suspended for this conference session. The vote supported the request. The vote to allow conference to be held in a virtual format was taken and approved. King presented 15 proposals from the Rules Committee. The Rev. Bill Davidson proposed an amendment to delete a portion of numbers 13 and 21 of changes recommended.

The Davidson Amendment reads: On page 33 of the Book of Reports under numbers 13 and 21 of the Changes Recommended by the Rules Committee (referencing the Standing Rules V. a. 4. f) moves to delete the following words: “to be disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve,” thereby ending the sentence with the words “and carry out the vision of the Annual Conference.” Page 33 of the Book of Reports: 13. Paragraph V.A.4.f – second sentence – strike “to create a culture of call by engaging, equipping, and empowering people so that they might effectively partner with each other and their pastors to live out God’s call as they lead the church in transforming the world as disciples of Jesus Christ.” and insert “is to fulfill the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; and carry out the vision of the Annual Conference [DELETE to be “Disciples of Jesus Christ who are lifelong learners who influence others to serve].”

Reports ([All reports can be found in the Book of Reports](#))

Mr. Neal Wise gave the **Site Selection Committee Report**. The committee recommends to amend the Site Selection Committee report adopted at the 2019 Annual Conference to accept ONLY the next three years of location recommendations and further, the Site Selection Committee makes no recommendation for a location in 2025.

The Rev. Mary Dadisman gave the report of the **Commission on the Status and Role of Women**.

The Rev. Alan Layman gave the report of the **Minutes Committee**. He asked for the adoption of the Minutes following this conference session.

Richmond District Superintendent Dr. Hyo Lee shared the Report of the **Cabinet**.

The following congregations were voted on and are discontinued as of Oct. 31, 2020:

Charles Wesley United Methodist Church on the Arlington District

Graham Road United Methodist Church on the Arlington District

Pleasant Hill United Methodist Church on the Danville District

Travis Chapel United Methodist Church on the Eastern Shore District

Crawford United Methodist Church on the James River District

Howard Chapel United Methodist Church on the Winchester District

The Cabinet is working on a video project to focus on Race and Race Relations. It will be available for local church use and shared on the conference website. The first installment will be released Nov. 20.

The district superintendents shared their appreciation to clergy and laity who have met the challenges of 2020. Lee said, "The pandemic may have shut us down, but we have found strength in the Lord," he said. "We have offered love and faith to people who have suffered in a myriad of ways."

The Rev. Dr. Paul Baker gave the report on **New Faith Communities**. He thanked the Rev. Melissa Dunlap for her work with New Faith Communities. He also thanked the Rev. Mark Ogren, retired, who served for 46 years for the conference and served as the director of Congregational Excellence.

Two new faith communities have been launched this year:

- New Life International UMC @ St. Andrew's, John Obeng, Planter, Alexandria District
- Impact UMC, Tracy Bass, Planter, Elizabeth River District

Glory Sighting Video #1

A video on the Henry Fork Service Center, Danville District, was shared. [View video](#)

Conference Lay Leader

After sharing remarks (click here to view Harper's remarks), outgoing Conference Lay Leader Warren Harper introduced incoming Lay Leader Martha Stokes. Stokes shared that she worked with the four previous conference lay leaders with her former position in lay leadership at the conference office. She emphasized the partnership between laity and clergy. Laity are 99.2 percent of the church, "and our voices matter."

"This is holy time, this is holy ground," she said. She invited everyone to "take off your shoes" to stand on that holy ground. "Our words and actions matter now more than ever. Holy ground certainly doesn't need to be within the walls of our churches." Click here to read Stokes' remarks to the conference (pdf).

A gift was presented to Harper for his eight years of service to the conference.

The Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc. (VUMPI) video report was presented by Mr. Kenneth Peterson. The seven recommendations presented were approved by the conference.

The **Equitable Compensation Commission** report will be presented by Rev. Joseph Carson III. The minimum compensation schedule and floor schedule were recommended to stay the same for 2021 as it was in 2020. This was approved by conference.

The bishop asked Warren Harper to present the **Common Table Report**. The report was adopted by conference members. Harper also presented the nominations from the bishop, the appointive Cabinet and the Conference Leadership Discovery Development Team in conjunction with District Nomination Facilitation committees. They were approved. The bishop consecrated the 2020-2021 boards and agencies.

Mr. David Dommissé presented the **Conference Statistician** report. The conference is 314,000 members strong. Some 2500 people professed their faith. The conference received \$192 million to support the ministries of the conference.

The Rev. Kathy Gochenour presented the **Harry Denman Evangelism Awards**.

The Rev. Brenda Laws received the clergy award. She is the Case Manager, Intellectual Disabilities Services, Eastern Shore Community Services Board, and pastor of the Greenbackville Charge.

Ms. Arleen Field received the laity award. She is a member of Grace UMC in Manassas.

Jackson Smith of Good Shepherd UMC, Richmond, received the youth award.

United Methodist Family Services (UMFS) was highlighted with a video presentation of the services they provide.

The Rev. Joshua King moved that the rules be suspended to extend the time to complete the business on the agenda. The motion was approved.

A video was shared by Bill Chaffin, conference Scouting coordinator. The video, and a story about the presentation of the Scouting Silver Torch award to Bishop Lewis are available on the conference website at <https://vaumc.org/scoutingministries/>

Glory Sighting Video #2

A video Glory Sighting #2 highlighted Una Familia on the Eastern Shore. [View video](#)

Offering

The bishop prayed for the conference offering and announced the amount would be shared in an upcoming e-Advocate. Some 50 percent of this year's Annual Conference offering is designated to Virginia area food banks and 50 percent to our Virginia Partnerships of Hope International Ministries –

formerly called the Initiatives of Hope. The Partnerships of Hope ministries are Methodists in Brazil, Cambodia and Mozambique.

Treasurer and CFA

David Domnisse presented the Treasurer's report. There has been a shortfall in annual conference receipts which was partially offset by lower spending. Apportionment receipts are down. Conference leadership has reduced expenditures. He praised the churches for working so well through the coronavirus pandemic.

Mrs. Betty Forbes, president of the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA), gave a video report. The conference budget is more than 11 percent lower than last year's so more dollars remain in the local church. CFA's report was adopted by the conference.

The next report came by an action and request of the CFA. At the guidance of the CFA, a workgroup was formed to begin looking closely at the configuration of districts. The workgroup was named the District Alignment Team, referred to as the DAT workgroup. The co-chairs of the DAT workgroup are Mrs. Kathy Merry and Mr. David Domnisse. Merry gave the report. The work centered around the bishop's vision. How can we most effectively order our districts to facilitate the new vision? The DAT has conducted interviews around the conference to align structure to needs. It is a think tank, not an implementer. A recommendation is expected at next year's annual conference.

On Oct. 26, 2020, the conference sent out a number of documents related to the **bankruptcy of Scouting**. A letter was sent out to local churches if they want assistance from the Bradley law firm. Documents must be returned no later than Nov. 2, 2020. Questions may be directed to district superintendents. The business office will be available Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m., and Monday, 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., to answer questions.

Bishop Lewis adjourned the 238th conference with prayer, giving thanks to God for the clergy, laity, faith communities, ministries, churches, and fight against racism. She asked for prayers to guide us through the pandemic.