



July 18, 2022

Dear Guiding Council and St. Mark's UMC Congregation,

The Virginia United Methodist Church Annual Conference was held on June 16–18, 2022 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, VA. The theme was “United as One in Worship” inspired by God’s Word from John 4:24: *God is spirit, and it is necessary to worship God in spirit and truth.*

This year’s conference was the first to be held in person since 2019. Approximately 2300 people were in attendance. This report summarizes the conference for the Guiding Council and the congregation of St. Mark’s Church. The conference agenda and official Book of Reports are included with this report, and the 2022 VA UMC Annual Conference in its entirety can be viewed here: <https://vaumc.org/ac2022/>

A chronological format will be used to organize the conference highlights.

Thursday AM, June 16th Laity Session:

For lay members, the conference began with this session. The highlight for me was the speaker, Kay Kotan, who described herself as a fourth generation Methodist. She is a noted author and speaker, who reminded us that the Methodist Church was founded as a lay movement. She has worked with many churches to help them streamline their structures and focus more on ministries. In her talk, she encouraged us to think about investing resources outside our gathered church community as we reflect on how much is committed to that one hour on Sunday vs how much is invested in community-

focused ministries. I was so inspired by her vision that I purchased her book, *Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World*, when I saw it later at one of the displays.

Thursday PM, June 16th Session:

Bishop Sharma Lewis called the 240th session of the conference to order at 2:00 pm. She delivered the opening sermon based on the conference theme. Towards the conclusion of her sermon, she issued an altar call. She stated that true worship happens in the most powerful way when we, as believers, worship together and can surrender all our cares/concerns to God. This was a powerful moment for me as I responded to her call and felt a real sense of unity with fellow worshipers and Annual Conference members.

Rev. Denise Bates, dean of the Cabinet, gave its report. District superintendents reported on churches that are closing in 2022. In the Richmond District, Brookland UMC, located on Staples Mill Road, is one of the churches closing its doors. Members are being transferred to Lakeside UMC unless they request otherwise.

Three churches are disaffiliating from the conference. They are Etlan UMC, Charlottesville District; Drummondtown, Eastern Shore District; and Lebanon UMC, Farmville District. These were approved by the Annual Conference. For those churches disaffiliating from the denomination over matters related to human sexuality, Paragraph 2553 of the 2016 Book of Discipline (amended in 2019) is being used to govern this process. The three churches listed above disaffiliated using 2549.3, which governs the disposition of property of closed local churches.

One of the main items of business regarded the merging of districts resulting in 16 districts being converted to eight. The new proposed district names are:

Three Notch'd District – Richmond and Charlottesville
Northern Virginia District – Alexandria and Arlington
Mountain View District – Danville and Lynchburg
Coastal Virginia District – Eastern Shore and Elizabeth River
Living Waters District – Farmville and James River
Shenandoah River District – Harrisonburg and Winchester
Mission Rivers District – Rappahannock River and York River
Valley Ridge District – Roanoke and Staunton

After speeches for and against the new districts, it was moved to postpone the discussion until Friday morning.

Friday AM, June 17th Session

At 9:15 the bishop officially called the conference to order again to reconsider the District Initiative. One of the main questions surrounding the decreased number of districts had to do with the number of youth members of the Annual Conference. The standing rules allow for 2 youth members/district. Would the mergers decrease the number from 32 to 16? The district superintendents shared that they want to see a rule change to allow for more youth lay members per district. In the meantime, they stated that youth can be added as at-large district members. The merger of districts was approved and went into effect on 1 July, 2022.

The Rev. Rob Vaughn, Community of Faith UMC, Arlington District, made a motion related to the bishop's handling of complaints against clergy. This led to controversy in the Annual Conference. The text of his lengthy motion can be found in the online report of the Virginia Annual Conference: <https://vaumc.org/ac-2022-friday-morning-june-17-2022/>

Bishop Lewis said that this was not the business of the Annual Conference and ruled that the motion was out of order. This upset the supporters of the motion, who protested by gathering at the front of the hall and refusing to sit down. A resolution, at least for the moment, came when Rev. Tom Berlin moved to refer the matter to the Judicial Council for a decision. His motion was allowed to proceed and was approved by the Annual Conference. What the original motion referred to was not clear to me as it was not stated at the time of the motion nor in the subsequent discussion. Later I learned that the underlying situation occurred in the Northern Virginia District when a complaint was filed against a clergy person who performed a same-sex marriage. The main issue for the group supporting the motion was that no resolution to this complaint has occurred for almost three years. During the turmoil on the floor, I observed that prayer and the music from the Praise Band helped with the resolution of the conflict.

Friday AM, June 17th Mission Service

Results of the Kits and Kans Annual Conference Service Project were reported. 18,560 total UMCOR Kits were collected as of Friday. The kits, valued at \$298,724, will be taken to Mission Central in Pennsylvania. Some 12,611 pounds of food have also been collected.

Information was given about the chaplaincy program at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. Rev. Dr. Pete Moon spoke about the Doctor of Ministry degree program, which is open to military chaplains serving around the world. A large number have completed the program and more are being enrolled.

Friday PM, June 17th Session

One of the highlights for me during this session was the excellent sermon given by Rev. Dr. Clarence Brown. One statement of his that resonated with me was that “we are so busy fighting with each other we don’t have time for what we’re supposed to be about.”

The 2022 Class of Retirees was recognized. One of them was our former pastor, Rev. David Burch. Unfortunately, he was unable to be there.

Saturday AM, June 18th Session

Because of time constraints, the Team Jeremiah Q&A session scheduled for Annual Conference was not held. Bishop Lewis announced that a Zoom Session will be conducted within the next 30 days. Team Jeremiah was created by the bishop in 2021 and is a “theologically diverse” group whose purpose is to help address the uncertainties surrounding General Conference and its associated issues. Rev. David Bonney, one of our former pastors, is one of the members of the team. In addition to Team Jeremiah, there is a Disaffiliation Task Force.

Mr. David Domnisse, conference statistician, reported that, in 2021, over 2,000 people were welcomed on professions of faith. He also reported that apportionment receipts were \$22,451,085.

Mr. William Talley IV, president of the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) gave his report. Several conference members spoke in favor of adding funds to higher education. A motion was made for funds to be directed toward youth ministries and away from the budget for legal fees. It came too late to be considered. Leesburg UMC started the ball rolling with a pledge of \$1000 for youth ministries and challenged others to follow suit. At the conclusion of the Annual Conference, it was announced that \$66,200 had been pledged! The conference budget, as found in the Book of Reports, was adopted.

Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris UMC in Herndon, was endorsed for the office of bishop by majority vote.

One of the conference members rose for a moment of personal privilege. He stated that the Annual Conference owed Bishop Lewis an apology for what had occurred the day before when her repeated pleas for persons to be seated were ignored during the protests over the motion made by Rev. Dr. Vaughn.

Rev. Steve Summers gave an excellent sermon to conclude the Annual Conference. He said we must move from a you/me posture to a we posture and asked an important question – can’t we just be about Jesus?

Conclusion

The 2023 Virginia Annual Conference will be held in Roanoke.

Much of the conference agenda was oriented around standard essential business. You can find this information in the Book of Reports or in online official summaries of the Annual Conference business. My report has been an effort to share what I felt was important and noteworthy and certainly didn't include everything that occurred. In addition to the official business, I felt blessed by the music, prayers, sermons, and united worship that I was privileged to share.

Please let me or Pastor Justin know if you have any questions or comments on this report. Feel free to contact us! Thank you for the opportunity to be your lay member to this year's Annual Conference.

Respectfully submitted,
Anne Boyle, Lay Member of Annual Conference