

2022 Virginia Annual Conference: United as One in Worship

You can view all the proceedings of AC 2022 by visiting the archived livestream of the 240th session: <https://vimeo.com/vaumc>.

You can view photos from the event at: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vaconf/albums>.

The 2022-2023 Appointments can be found here:

<https://doc.vaumc.org/AC2022/2022appointments.pdf>.

The theme for the 2022 Virginia Annual Conference, held June 16-18, 2022 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va., was “United as One in Worship.” The conference theme was based on John 4:24.

Conference Business

By an overwhelmingly majority vote by the Virginia General Conference delegation, the Rev. Tom Berlin, pastor of Floris UMC, Herndon, was endorsed for the office of bishop.

Berlin addressed the conference, and said it was honor to “stand here in this moment.” He said he loves his life, and why would anyone sign up for this position? “This job is hard,” he said, “but you must be continually available to the will of the Holy Spirit.”

Berlin invited members of the delegation to the General Conference and the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference to stand and be recognized. He asked members to look at those delegates and pray for them. “They will be voting for episcopal leaders in November. Every annual conference in the SEJ needs good leadership. I ask you to pray for them so they will have God’s wisdom.”

“Christ is doing a new thing,” Berlin said. “The foundations are dependable but the church is wet clay in the hands of God. God has us on a potter’s wheel and that’s why sometimes it feels like your head is spinning. So pray for the delegates that they may have wisdom and discernment.” He continued, “I am not running for bishop. I am simply making myself available for discernment alongside other candidates. But your endorsement is one of the most remarkable honors of my life.”

The annual conference endorsed his nomination and gave him a standing ovation. Bishop Lewis, Conference Lay Leader Martha Stokes, and Laity Head of the General Conference Delegation Warren Harper laid hands on Berlin as the bishop prayed for Berlin and the process ahead.

Under Minute Question 10, discontinuance or abandonment of churches, eight churches were discontinued in five districts. An additional three churches were closed under Paragraph 2549.3. Two new faith communities and their pastors were introduced.

Clergy and lay members approved the District Initiative which was a motion to create eight new districts from the current 16-district structure. The new structure will begin on July 1, 2022. The new districts and their superintendents are as follows:

- Northern Virginia District - The Rev. Dr. Sarah Calvert
- Three Notch'd District - The Rev. Dr. Hyo Lee
- Mountain View District - The Rev. Denise Bates
- Coastal Virginia District – The Rev. Cecelia Brooks
- Living Waters District – The Rev. Jay Carey
- Shenandoah River District - The Rev. Dr. Victor Gomez
- Mission Rivers District – The Rev. Dr. Charles Bates
- Valley Ridge District – The Rev. Doug Forrester

The Rev. Rob Vaughn, Community of Faith UMC, Arlington District, moved that the Virginia Annual Conference petition the Judicial Council for the following declaratory decisions:

1) Request for a Declaratory Decision from the Virginia Annual Conference on the Meaning, Effect and Application of Paragraph 362.1(e) and Paragraph 2701.5 and Paragraph 2704.2 and Paragraph 2706.5, in determining if, and under what circumstances, the supervisory process can be extended beyond the 90-day limit of Paragraph 362.1(e), as well as what role a bishop has in facilitating a timely resolution of a complaint, as well as what role a bishop has in bringing about a just resolution after the matter has been referred to the counsel for the church as a judicial complaint, and whether the complainant and respondent and counsel for the church may reach a just resolution without the bishop's involvement.

2) *Request for a Declaratory Decision from the Virginia Annual Conference on the meaning, effect, and application of Paragraph 362.1, in determining the permissibility of a bishop, having received a signed written complaint, to solicit a second complaint on the same matter from a different complainant, as well as whether the complaint may be continued even after the original complainant withdraws that complaint.*

3) *Request for a Declaratory Decision from the Virginia Annual Conference on the meaning, effect and application of Paragraph 362.1, in determining the proper course for remediation when the process outlined in the Book of Discipline is not followed, and whether the annual conference may have some way to intervene along the lines of Judicial Council Memorandum 1189, which states in part, "In instances where appropriate process were not observed, the annual conference should consider taking appropriate steps to resolve any deviation from disciplinary process."*

After consulting with Mr. Steve Brown, chancellor, Mr. Scott Diamond, chair, Rules Committee, and Mr. Michael Wagner-Diggs, professional parliamentarian, Bishop Lewis "ruled that this motion falls outside the purview of this body and is affected by law and we will not be able to hear this motion." Bishop Lewis called for the report of the Minutes Committee. Following this, many Point of Orders were made, Bishop Lewis halted the proceedings for prayer, and a large crowd of clergy and laity gathered in front of the altar in affirmation of Vaughan's motion.

The Rev. Tom Berlin, Floris UMC, Arlington District, appealed to the Bishop to allow the decision to go to Judicial Council. Bishop Lewis called for a 10-minute recess.

Bishop Lewis called the body back to order from recess. She asked the body to be seated, and those that had gathered at the front were invited to remain if they wished. Bishop Lewis explained her position that she believes she is following the *Book of Discipline* as she vowed to uphold it.

Bishop Lewis stated that after prayer and consultation with the chancellor and parliamentarians, "the standing in which you have asked is not properly before this body." Bishop Lewis asked the Conference Secretary Rev. Joshua King "to add into the records what Rev. Vaughn has put before us." Bishop Lewis stated she will send Vaughn's request for a

Declaratory Decision to the Judicial Council for them to decide on the standing. A vote was cast by the Annual Conference so the declaratory decisions would be properly before the Judicial Council. The motion was approved and the large gathering in front of the altar dispersed.

Mission Service

A Mission Service, highlighting the many areas the Virginia Conference is in mission throughout Virginia, the country and the world. The Rev. Seungsoo, “RJ” Jun, Associate Director of Serving Ministries, and the Rev. Kendra Grimes, chaplain at Randolph-Macon College, preached on “Does Jesus See our Faith?”

“Mission is all about relationships,” Jun said. “Kendra and I have been a team. Throughout the pandemic, we learned we cannot do this alone. We are here to know and remember we are in this together and as a team, we hope God will change our hearts and minds so we can continue to serve in mission together.”

Grimes said, “Let’s jump into the context of Mark. It jumps right into Jesus being active in ministry. By Chapter 32, Jesus can’t go anywhere without crowds of people following him. So Jesus’ ministry is flourishing. But then when Jesus went home, the people were excited.”

Jun picked up the story saying, “I pray this is the same kind of excitement we can have today. We are grateful we are able to come together. We are eager to see what God has done during the pandemic. We want to see what God brings to this world through our churches.”

Retirement Service

Forty-two persons were part of the 2022 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 1,154.5 years of service. The Rev. Clarence Brown, representing the retiring class, used the Scripture Philippians 4:1-9 to preach his sermon titled, “Whatever...”

“I want to say ‘thank you’ for all the ways you have blessed my life and all those who sit here... to cry with you when you are sad, laugh with you when you are happy, baptize your babies, marry your sons and daughters. This has been a marvelous journey,” Brown said.

He continued, “But now that I reflect one word comes to me... whatever. As a pronoun, this means a lack of structure. As an adverb, it means closing down, a sense of exasperation.”

Brown said he never imagined that his last few years of itinerant ministry would look like this. “The pandemic shut us down, left us isolated: mask on, mask off, and all kinds of other challenges. Black lives matter, blue lives matter, all lives matter. Shall we stay, shall we go, shall we affiliate, should we disaffiliate? You just get overwhelmed. Whatever, whatever, whatever... but I’m retired now, so whatever!”

But, Brown said, who had more reason to be exasperated than the Apostle Paul? Some of the members of the flock were fussing and fighting. “When we have the mind of Christ, and when we order our lives as the example of Christ, we can sit at the table as brothers and sisters. And what happens when we sit at the table together. Joy! I have Joy! The world can’t give it and the world can’t give it away!”

“Then,” he said, “you know what happens when he gets that all straight. He hits them with ‘whatever.’ This means confess your sins and get all the junk out. We fool ourselves and what I’ve discovered is that human beings have an incredible capacity for self-deception. You need to get on your knees and confess to Jesus because he already knows.”

Brown concluded, “We spend too much time majoring in minors and minoring in majors. Help me to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We are so busy fighting with each other that we can’t tend to the world. Think on these things and the peace of God will be with us.”

Service of Remembrance

The Rev. Grace Han, pastor of Trinity UMC, Alexandria District, preached for the Service of Remembrance in which 77 conference clergy and laity who died since the last Annual Conference were remembered. Those who have passed since 2020 due to Covid were also remembered.

Han began her sermon, “Friends, we gather tonight for our Service of Remembrance. Each year, we begin Annual Conference with a worship service dedicated to remembering. We remember specifically those people in our Annual Conference who have died in the past year. We celebrate their incredible lives and ministries. We remember their legacies, stories, and journeys and proclaim the promise of resurrection that claims them and us.” “But,” she

continued, “we also recognize that tonight’s service comes in the midst of an extended season of pain and loss. We gather in person for the first time in three years because a global pandemic completely changed our world. We come heavy with grief mourning 6 million lives worldwide (and that’s thought to be a significant undercount). We gather as violence motivated by racism continues to plague our country. We gather in the wake of school shootings and mass shootings. We gather as war rages on in Europe. And we gather as our churches and our denomination face division, struggling to find a path forward.”

Han continued, “In many ways, this would be a good year to skip over remembering and just fast forward to looking ahead to five years down the road when COVID is a distant memory and all our denominational schisms are resolved.

“But what we’ll also see tonight that it is precisely in our most difficult moments in the shadows of the darkest valleys that God is with us,” Han said. “And just as God’s presence was a Balm for the Israelite people in our Scriptures generations ago, God’s presence is a Balm for us today. And that is worth remembering.”

A Service for the Ordering of Ministry

This year’s Service for the Ordering of Ministry began with Bishop Sharma Lewis recognizing the classes of 2020 and 2021 that were licensed, commissioned, ordained during the pandemic. She prayed, “Healing God, we thank you for bringing us to this moment in time when we can be together as the body of Christ to recognize the calling upon those who have previously been licensed, commissioned, and ordained. We acknowledge the many lives that have already been changed and blessed through their ministry. Continue to bless them, Almighty God, as they continue forward, making disciples for the transformation of the world. In the precious name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.”

The bishop then reaffirmed the baptism of all.

Bishop Lewis, said, “Beloved, I believe that everyone is ‘called’ by God.’ I believe that God has a calling on individuals, ministries, and churches. For example, Henry Blackaby, author of the Experiencing God Bible Study series – believes that God is constantly at work around us. He believes that God accomplishes this work through the local churches by communicating God’s will and inviting each church to join in His activity in specific ways. Blackaby concludes

that when we hear God’s call and respond appropriately – there will be NO limit to what God can and will do through God’s people.”

She continued, “What we must come to understand is that before we existed on earth. God was shaping you for God’s purpose. God knows us intimately and intricately. ‘To know’ someone intimately means that you have a personal commitment and stake in the relationship. God knows every detail and nuisances about us (the color of your eyes, your hair, your size, your race, your smile, and even your laughter.) God took the time to form each of you precious in His sight despite our faults.”

Lewis said, “Beloved, God is calling all of us to be ‘fully committed to the work of ministry.’ How many of you know that with commitment comes a cost and sacrifice? You have probably never been told that ministry is costly and a sacrifice. The question remains Class of 2022 are you fully committed?”

Twenty-two persons were licensed. Three persons were commissioned provisional deacons. Fifteen persons were commissioned provisional elders. Two persons had orders recognized. One person was ordained as a deacon in full connection. Seven persons were ordained elders in full connection. See full list of names here: <https://vaumc.org/ac-2022-friday-evening-june-17-2022/>.

Following the service, Bishop Lewis invited individuals who were sensing a call to ministry to come to the altar and be prayed for.

5K Walk/ Run

The conference hosted a 5K Walk/Run on June 18. #BeingTogether encouraged members to be intentional in their well-being by attending to their spiritual, emotional, and physical health. All proceeds of this event will be donated to #NurturingTogether, an Annual Conference offering that supports leadership development around the world.

Awards

The Harry Denman Awards are named for Dr. Harry Denman, founder of The Foundation for Evangelism. The Board of Discipleship presents this award to individuals who impact their lives and ministries have on those around them.

The clergy Denman award went to the Rev. Betsey Davis, director of Journey Community Center, James River District. She took over as lay pastor when her husband, the Rev. Mike Davis died in February 2019. Betsey was licensed as a Local Pastor in 2021.

While COVID restrictions made it difficult for churches to reach out in ministry as they normally would, Davis offered many innovative church services by Zoom when they were unable to meet in person. Once they were able to reopen, a few of the evangelistic programs to reach out to the community during 2021 were vaccine clinics, a free weekly community dinner, and a small group for those dealing with loss.

Laity award went to Earl and Geneice Kemper. They freely share with others about the power of God in their lives, how God's love is offered to all, and the blessings of worshipping and serving at their Bethel UMC. For the past six years, a woman with many health, financial, and social problems has been cared for by Earl and Geneice. Her multiple problems make it difficult for her to hold on to a caretaker or aid. Each time Pastor Faith goes with them to her house, this woman talks about how she sees God's love in both Earl and Geneice.

The Green Church Award is presented by the Caretakers of God's Creation team, a branch of the conference Board of Church and Society, for a church or churches who are answering God's call to be caretakers of God's creation. 2022 Green Church Award went to Ivey Memorial UMC, James River District. The first inaugural Sustaining Green Church award went to Bethlehem UMC, Lynchburg District.

The Francis Asbury Award, from the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry, was presented to the Rev. Deborah Lewis, once a student involved in the same Wesley Foundation of which she has been director for 21 years at the University of Virginia She has shepherded students in a space that is "a place to be and a place to become." Throughout her many years at UVA, Lewis has been instrumental in walking with students through some of the most challenging times in our recent history, including one that directly affected the Charlottesville community in 2017, when white supremacists and neo-Nazis stormed the

University and town with messages of hate. Lewis is a longtime advocate for social justice, taking students every year to the Fluvanna Correctional Center to share in worship with the women there, to creating lasting friendships with Hillel and the Muslim Student Association, supporting students in the wake of sexual assault on grounds, and in recent years, encouraging students in their desire to take the steps to become a reconciling community in our denomination. Not to mention, there is no doubt that Lewis' ministry continues to be a reminder to all of us of the importance of women's voices in the pulpit. Lewis has also fostered a culture of calling that has raised up several lay and clergy leaders in our conference. In her new appointment, Lewis will be starting graduate work in Mental Health Counseling at William and Mary.

Closing Worship

The Rev. Tizzy von Trapp Walker invited the clergy and lay members to "channel their inner Pentecostal life" to learn the ASL version of a hymn. At the end of the service, the whole Annual Conference body sang and signed using ASL the hymn "Together we Serve." The Galilee UMC Dance Team performed a liturgical dance.

The Rev. Dr. Steve Summers, Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries, gave the closing sermon.

"I've titled my sermon, From Mess, to Bless, he said. "I know it's not a best practice to begin a sermon on a negative note, but let's be unconventional in the interest of getting the skunk on the table, to borrow a Bishop Lewis-ism. If you are willing... will you raise your hand if you believe that we have some pretty significant struggles in the world today? YES! It seems to me that the world is in quite a mess right now."

Summers expounded on the many problems facing the country and the world. "Even preparing for the annual conference has been a mess," he said. He cited the technical difficulties experienced by the staff at the UM Center and worrying about all the things that need to come together.

"Like I said – it's tough out there," Summers repeated. "In fact, we live in what some leadership experts have termed a VUCA world." He explained VUCA is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity.

“I share this VUCA metaphor to simply speak to the present needs in our lives and communities,” Summers said. “We need to move from mess to bless.”

“I don’t want to insult anyone here,” he said, “but I think we are ALL messed up. Doesn’t the Bible say that we ‘have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God?’ Aren’t we all moving on to Christian perfection? My point is not to be insulting; it’s to claim the Truth that WE have in common our messed-upness.”

Here’s the Good News, he continued, “We Move from Mess to Bless when we fully embrace that we are all sinners in need of God’s grace. In fact, the reality of that very confessional unites us as one, giving us a blessing, we are way too willing to not acknowledge out of our selfishness and self-centeredness. Why does this confession unite us? Because we all need Jesus, just like they did in Ephesus. We all need Jesus, not just you or you or you or you or you or me.”

Wrap-up stats

As part of the Common Table report, Connectional Ministries staff members Bev Myers, Brenda Capen, and Bryan Compton were recognized for their combined 81.5 years of service to the Virginia Conference. The body rose to their feet and applauded. Myers and Compton will retire as of July 1, 2022 and Capen will retire in January 2023.

UMCOR Kits totals as of Friday, June 17 were 18,560 total kits valued at \$298,724. Some 12,611 pounds have also been collected for food banks across the conference.

The Conference Statistician and Treasurer David Dommissse reported that in 2021, many churches continued with virtual and hybrid worship services. Over 2,000 people were welcomed on professions of faith, an increase, along with an increase in baptisms. Over 1.3 million people were reached through missions. Revenues have been flat. Churches spent more on mission and less on administration.

Dommissse then brought the report of the conference treasurer. Apportionment receipts were \$22,451,085. 2nd-mile benevolences increased more than 35 percent from 2020. He thanked the conference Serving office for promoting 2nd-mile giving throughout the year.

The 2023 budget was approved for \$27,730,000, a reduction from the 2022 budget.

A motion was made for funds to be directed toward children and youth ministries. The request came too late to be considered by the conference but districts and churches started pledging funds. The motion carried and \$66, 200 was pledged toward this purpose.

At last count, \$122,000 was collected for the conference offering. The offering will benefit both local and international mission projects to nurture leadership. This annual conference offering will directly sponsor the D.Min Program at Wesley Theological Seminary whose graduates serve to nurture soldiers all over the world. Also, Partnerships of Hope will continue to be the recipient of this annual conference offering. Most of the Partnerships of Hope projects focus on leadership development and their countries.

The conference's new district superintendent, the Rev. Cecelia Brooks, was introduced and the appointments for the eight districts were approved. Appointments are posted at: <https://doc.vaumc.org/AC2022/2022appointments.pdf>.