

2022 Virginia Annual Conference: United as One in Worship

Andy and Linda Garlington attended the 2022 Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church as Ebenezer's lay representatives and provided this report:

The 2022 Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church was held June 16-18, 2022 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va. The theme this year was "United as One in Worship," based on John 4:24. You can view all the proceedings of AC 2022 by visiting the archived livestream of the 240th session: <https://vimeo.com/vaumc>.

Conference Business

The Conference Statistician and Treasurer David Dommissie reported that in 2021, many churches continued with virtual and hybrid worship services. Even during the second full year of COVID, 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, which is actually positive news due to the continuing economic effects of COVID. Churches spent more on mission and less on administration. Dommissie then brought the report of the conference treasurer. Apportionment receipts were \$22,451,085. 2nd-mile benevolences increased more than 35 percent from 2020. The 2023 budget was approved for \$27,730,000, a reduction from the 2022 budget.

By an overwhelming 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 an honor to "stand here in this moment." He asked 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."

"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."

One of the saddest parts of AC was the discontinuance or abandonment of churches. Eight churches were discontinued in five districts – meaning they no longer had the congregation or financial ability to continue. An additional three churches were closed under Paragraph 2549.3 of the Book of Discipline, transferring all real and personal, tangible and intangible property to the VA Annual Conference.

In brighter news, two new faith communities in Vienna and Springfield and their pastors were introduced.

Clergy and lay members approved the District Initiative - a motion to create eight new districts from the current 16-district structure. The new structure took effect on July 1, 2022. Ebenezer UMC is in the Mission Rivers District under the Rev. Dr. Charles Bates. This new district spans from Stafford to

Hampton and encompasses the previous Rappahannock River and York River districts. A map of these new districts may be found at: <https://vaumc.org/districtoffices/>

A particularly contentious issue brought before the Annual Conference dealt with disciplinary issues of clergy by the bishop, and whether the Annual Conference had a say in resolving them. After much discussion and prayerful consideration, this issue will be sent to the higher Judicial Council for determination.

A motion was made for funds to be directed toward children and youth ministries. Districts and churches pledged over \$66k for this!

Retirement Service

42 persons were part of the 2022 Retirement Class, including Pastor Mark Miller, who was Ebenezer UMC's lead pastor for 22 years! These individuals have a combined total of 1,154.5 years of service. The Rev. Clarence Brown, representing the retiring class, used Philippians 4:1-9 to preach his sermon titled, "Whatever..."

"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..."

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. Rev. Han said, "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."

"But what we'll also see tonight is 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 recognized the classes of 2020 and 2021 that were licensed, commissioned, ordained during the pandemic. 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/>. A list of all ministry appointments in the Virginia Conference is posted at: <https://doc.vaumc.org/AC2022/2022appointments.pdf>.

Offerings and Missions

The conference hosted a 5K Walk/Run to encourage members to be intentional in their well-being by attending to their spiritual, emotional, and physical health. Several awards were presented to individuals in both clergy and laity with significant impact on the lives and ministries around them. UMCOR Kits were collected prior to and during Annual Conference. Totals as of Friday, June 17 were 18,560 total kits valued at \$298,724. Some 12,611 pounds of food have also been collected for food banks across the conference. 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.