



Summary Report for the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

Conference Theme

The theme for the 2024 Virginia Annual Conference, held June 20-22, 2024 at the Hampton Roads Convention Center in Hampton, Va., was “A Conference in Three Movements” with Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson as the officiating bishop. This theme emerged from the belief that there are three principal movements of the Holy Spirit taking place in the present era of the church:

- The theological movement from prevenient grace to sanctification. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in the human heart.
- The historical movement of Methodism captured in our past, lived in our present, and pointed toward our future. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in the church.
- The missional movement from gathered spaces into all the world. This is the movement of the Holy Spirit in community.

These movements build upon each other, intertwining together to demonstrate what has been, what is, and what will be as God continues to move amongst God’s people.

Opening Remarks by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson

Our bishop opened the conference with a story of her family living through Hurricane Charlie in Florida. She described feeling all alone and wondering if the rest of the world even knew about the devastation that just happened. Bishop Sue then shared that later she was able to see the emergency operations center for the area and know that people were very much aware of what was going on. She was joyful to learn that “There’s a grid and we on it!” In stormy times, we may feel that no one knows what we are going through, but God is in command and present with us. There is a grid, and we are on it. We just don’t see it; we forget it. Sometimes we’re not paying attention to God, and we certainly aren’t hearing from God, because *you only hear what you pay attention to*. She called on the conference this year to work on our spiritual disciplines and spend time with God.

“ When have you spent 30 minutes sitting in silence and listening to what God has to say to you? ”

Bishop Sue asked this question of each of us, and reminded us that those who spend time with God daily

are the ones that receive the fruit of the Spirit - - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. If you aren’t exhibiting the fruit of the spirit in your daily life,

perhaps you aren't spending enough time with God. *To hear Bishop Sue's full opening remarks, scan this QR code:*



Laity Session

Our Virginia Conference Lay Leader, Martha Stokes, opened the laity session by asking us to remember God's call upon our lives and act upon it. Each of the conference guest speakers spoke briefly to the laity and offered a one-word benediction as we closed this laity session.

YOU

Don't wait for anyone else. You are worthy. You have a unique story that uniquely equips you to serve others in ways that can have a lasting impact.

GO

The Great Commission says to GO and make disciples. We need to remember the GO part. We cannot wait for people to come to us and receive the Gospel. Our Methodist tradition in fact encourages us to take church out to where the people are. 1 Peter 2:9 reminds us that we, the laity, are a royal priesthood.

NOW

The harvest is plenty, but the workers are few. We need to make decisions based on those who are not here and who do not know the love of God. Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz said, **"If we change nothing, then nothing is going to change."** We are the hope for the gospel and we need to go and do what we are all called to do.

To listen to the remarks made during the laity session, scan this QR code:



Teaching Session Summaries

Inspiring teaching was provided for each of the three principal movements that constituted the theme for the Annual Conference. These were offered by three pastors in the United Methodist Church. Below are some highlights of each teaching session, as well as links to hear the full teaching session. We encourage you to take some time and listen to them.

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz

Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz opened with a gut-wrenching story of the very beginning of his ministry: the day after his very first sermon, he received a call to visit a mom who just lost her 12 year old son in a tragic accident. The mom asked many difficult questions about whether her son is now in heaven, even though he never went to church. Dr. Cruz shared with her that through God's prevenient grace, her son is with God even though he may not have known about his need for God's grace.

Rev. Dr. Cruz shared how the role of the church matters when people are looking for Jesus. We can be a credible witness for God's love and allow God to use us, or God will work in spite of us and we might as well get out of the way.



Living your faith on Sunday morning? That isn't hard. Living your faith Monday to Saturday -- that's when it becomes real. Showing your true identity, how you walk the talk, that's when things matter.



Rev. Dr. Jonathan Page, Director of Connectional Ministry for Innovation and Creativity, sat down with Dr. Cruz for a dialogue afterwards. What does it mean to establish a credible witness of God's love to the community? First, you have to go out and listen to their story. Second, it is important to intentionally interact with people who are not like you. Even if your community context is not racially diverse, there are probably people who are different socio-economically or politically.

To hear Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz's full teaching, use this QR code:



Rev. Dr. Michael Beck

Rev. Dr. Michael Beck focused on the historical movement of Methodism and its role in the future. He spoke on the Fresh Expressions movement, where churches move out of the confines of their building and into the normal spaces and rhythms where people do life. Beck asked the conference to think about the things we enjoy doing in our everyday life, and who we choose to do those things with. Fresh expressions of church can be created out of these shared experiences.

He shared stories with us of Dog Park Church, Tattoo Parlor Church, and Burrito Church. It is in these types of spaces, where "the world is our parish," that laity are able to reach those who will not come into our building. Rev. Dr. Beck's church is not sustained by plate offerings but has grants and other funding as a shelter.

“ We know that up to 40% of people have no interest in church and will not walk into one on Sunday morning. ”

Dr. Page joined Dr. Beck for a dialogue. The best way to begin Fresh Expressions is to just experiment. Try doing something like dinner church for 3 months and then evaluate. They discussed how everyone can have a part; for example, very introverted people can really

blossom in a digital space such as a gaming church. These incarnational spaces provide opportunities for people who were harmed by the church to share about that experience. Dr. Page shared that most churches claim to be "Welcoming" but they are often not as welcoming as they think they are. Rev. Dr. Rodrigo Cruz shared that **"People go where they are welcomed; they stay where they are valued"**. He also shared that **"following Jesus is not complicated, but it is hard."** Rev. Woo Kang shared, **"When you break bread together, you typically aren't going to do so in silence"** – by doing so it creates an opportunity for dialogue and sharing life together. Dr. Beck reminded us that we are in a loneliness epidemic and the one critical thing that we have to share is the communal life with Jesus. Bishop Sue challenged us to "go do some history" – all of our churches have "Fresh Expressions" in our history.

To hear Rev. Dr. Michael Beck's full teaching, use this QR code:



Rev. Woo Kang

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What does it look like for us to experience other cultures, other ways of doing things, even if that costs us our comfort?

Rev. Kang shared that at his church, The NETT Church, which is known for its diversity, they intentionally sing songs in different languages. He said it's not just for people who speak other languages to feel *comfortable* hearing their own language, but for the rest of us to be *uncomfortable* speaking different

languages. It's to enable us to partake in something that meets someone where they are, even though it may be uncomfortable for us.

Rev. Kang said the main reason he became Methodist was because of the open table, where all are welcome. Building on the value of gathering around a table together, he began a dinner worship experience at his church, called "At the Table." Realizing that there was a sizable percentage of young adults in their community who no longer attended church, this worship opportunity was created to reach them. In this space people are able to break bread together and talk together and have community together.

To hear Rev. Woo Kang's full teaching, use this QR code:



The Next Faithful Step: A Quadrennial Focus

Conference leadership began to gather in January of 2024 to develop a common focus for the work of the Virginia Annual Conference in the next quadrennium. As Bishop Sue commented, "We all need to be rowing in the same direction and in the same boat."

“ The first thing we felt was important was that we need to return to the church as a spiritual enterprise. It is not an organization of doing good. At its heart, it is the body of Christ, and the members of the body of Christ need to behave and live out their lives in a Christ-like manner. And so we agree, we need first of all, to really focus on our spiritual practices together, to make that a high priority in the annual conference life, and to expect that we will manifest the fruits of the spirit and that we will dedicate our lives to prayer. I've asked the clergy, in the clergy session, to highlight the prayer of individuals, the spiritual cultivation in the individual life, and I invite your churches to really be in a season of prayer. A lot of times we do a lot of spiritual activity, but God is not quite sure what we are doing. So I am hoping that you will take time this year with the leadership of your church, to really pray and discern where God is leading you. ”

The Bishop also stressed that the Annual Conference exists to serve the local church, not vice versa. The conference is dedicated to connection – connection between the conference and the local church, connection between churches, connection between churches and the community. It is our Wesleyan heritage and that is where leadership is putting focus in the next quadrennium.

In addition, this team also examined moving in step with our personal piety and into social holiness. How do we work together in areas of mission, advocacy, and justice for an inclusive church that meets the needs of our community?

Finally, part of the leadership's work together was in truth-telling, and they invited local churches to share in truth-telling, confession, and the sharing of the realities in which we find ourselves. These conversations can also help us focus on both *real values* and *perceived values*, and how we have or have not been living them out.

To hear the Bishop's comments on this team's work and the focus for the next quadrennium, scan the QR on the right .



To access the full report in the 2024 Official Packet, scan the QR code to the left. The "Extended Cabinet Extended Cabinet" Report is on page 9.

Commission of Truth Telling & Reconciliation and Creation Care Work Group Formed

Rev. Andrew Ensz made a motion June 20 that the Annual Conference make a Resolution of Apology to LGBTQ+ persons. After a number of discussions for and against, there was a motion to table the recommendation until June 21 for members to have time to review. On June 22, a motion was made to create a Commission of Truth Telling and Reconciliation to allow for space to hear, hold, and begin to heal the harms experienced by individuals and groups during the long period of denominational discord. Members who had spoken both for and against the apology resolution made this motion. The Commission would report at the next Annual Conference. The motion passed and Bishop Sue offered prayer.

Brian Christoffersen presented a motion on June 22 for the Annual Conference to create a Work Group to study how Virginia can go Net Zero by 2050 for all churches. The motion passed. Bishop Sue called on the Creation Care Team to have a summit before the next Annual Conference.

Numbers and Statistics

Budget

Our 2025 annual budget was reduced in line with the number of churches that disaffiliated; this work was done collaboratively with the ministries of the Annual Conference.

This effort resulted in a budget that reflects a decrease of \$2,742,000 or 10% of the total budget. The general church budget as approved at the conference reflected a significant decrease over prior budgets. Countering this decrease is the



Virginia is now the largest apportioned annual conference in the nation; it's share of the general church budget is 4.4%.



fact that the Virginia Annual conference is now the largest apportioned annual conference in our denomination. Our share of the general church budget is 4.4%. The net of these 2 factors resulted in a decrease of \$340,000 or 7.73% of the general and jurisdictional apportionments.

Wrap-Up Statistics

The Conference Statistician and Treasurer David Dommissie reported the statistics for 2023: 876 churches, 257,777 members, 85,568 in average worship attendance, 1,864 professions of faith, 1,172 baptisms, and 43,458 small group participants. He also reported 39,000 served in missions (reaching over 1,400,000) and 6.6 % of church revenue was used in missions. The effect of 227 disaffiliated churches from the Virginia Conference results in the following statistical declines:

8.2 % of local church revenues	10.6% of membership	10.9% of professions of faith
11.2% of apportionments	14.4% of average worship attendance	

Apportionments receipts totaled \$22,541,060 with a collection percentage of 81.29%. Second-mile benevolences totaled \$1,0004,502.

As of Monday June 24 , over \$82,000 was collected for the conference offering. The offering benefits: Partnerships of Hope Countries (50% of goal) which supports Brazil, Cambodia, Mozambique, Native Americans, Haiti, and Vietnam; and UnDue Medical Debt (50%). Undue Medical Debt is a non-profit organization that purchases medical debt for pennies on the dollar and then cancels the debt for people who desperately need this opportunity.

Service of Recognition and Call

Thirty-one persons were part of the 2024 Retirement Class. These individuals have a combined total of 763.50 years of service.

In the service of recognition and call, the following numbers of persons were recognized in the call of the laity: **10 Certified Lay Ministers, 9 Lay Supply Pastors, and 1 Deaconess**

In the service of recognition and call, the following number of persons were recognized or ordained: **26 Local Pastors, 3 Provisional Deacons, 11 Provisional Elders, 2 Ordained Deacons, and 9 Ordained Elders.**

To view the Annual Conference's full wrap-up report or to find the full archived livestream of the Annual Conference, use this QR code:



For questions, contact Matthew Smith, Geitra Mickelson, or Phil Mohr as our clergy delegates. For lay delegates, you can contact Helen Gillikin, Kim Proppe, Joy Rangel (district delegate) , Jesse Stapleton, or Kim Wu (district delegate).



CENTREVILLE
United Methodist Church

Note: Portions of this content were adapted from "The Virginia Annual Conference: Wrap-Up" prepared by Sam Duenckel.