Virginia Annual Conference 2026 Report

The 244th Session of the Virginia Annual Conference met in a new location this year. The June 17 – 20 meeting was held at the Atlantic Union Bank Center on the campus of James Madison University (JMU) in Harrisonburg, Va. It continued under the banner of "A Conference in Three Movements." This year marked the second movement, the historical movement, by focusing on "Reclaiming the Heart of Methodism."

At the start of each day, the body began with "Sacred Starts," a time of recognition and celebration highlighting specific stories that are part of the larger story of United Methodism in the Virginia Conference.
These Sacred Starts were:
Thursday, June 18: Asian Ministry Celebration
Friday, June 19: Recognition of Full Clergy Women's Rights 70th Anniversary
Saturday, June 20: Deacons 30th Anniversary

During the Opening Worship, Bishop Sue Haupert-Johnson talked about the heart of identity in Methodism and who we are as United Methodists. "Because the beauty of our identity, as Wesleyan United Methodists, is that one cannot exist without the other. You cannot have the spirit of Christ in you and not be desperately concerned about others in the community. But if the church doesn't have a voice in the concern for others, where does the church have a voice? Her hope was that the Annual Conference would challenge all to develop a clearer understanding of who we are as United Methodists."
There were 66 clergy, lay members and clergy spouses recognized during the Memorial Service. And in the Recognition of Retirees Service, 35 clergy persons retired who had a combined 695 years of ministry. Rev. Dr. Youtha Hardman-Cromwell and Rev. Sam NeSmith were recognized during the Juneteenth Worship as individuals whose lives exemplified the courage necessary in telling the truth when the truth was dangerous.

Martha Stokes, conference lay leader, gave the **Laity Address** and reflected on themes of faith, identity, and spiritual mentorship through the lens of 2 Timothy 1:4–7, emphasizing the importance of remembering and reviving the authentic faith passed down through generations.

The Board of Church & Society honored eight churches for outstanding Creation Care and Justice Ministries: Aldersgate UMC, Northern Virginia; Church of the Good Shepherd, Northern Virginia; Crossroads UMC, Northern Virginia; Madison Rose Park UMC, Three Notch'd; Charlottesville First UMC, Three Notch'd ; Cranford UMC, Northern Virginia; St. Stephen's UMC, Northern Virginia; and **Bethlehem UMC, Mountain View.**

Dr. Ashley Boggan, General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History, taught on "The Heart of our Mission." Boggan explored the theological and historical foundations of loving boldly and serving joyfully within the Wesleyan tradition, emphasizing that authentic Christian discipleship requires both a deep love of God and an active commitment to loving and serving others. Drawing on the lives and ministries of John Wesley, the early Methodists, and influential Methodist lay leaders, she illustrated how the movement was built through courageous acts of compassion, advocacy, community-building, and outreach to marginalized populations. The presentation

highlighted the importance of small-group discipleship, contextual mission, and a willingness to challenge unjust systems in order to embody God's liberating love.
She urged attendees to reclaim the Methodist tradition of bold faith, joyful service, and lay-led transformation, calling the church to prioritize mercy, community, justice, and mission over institutional preservation and personal comfort.

Rev. Dr. Candace M. Lewis, President and CEO of Gammon Theological Seminary, taught on "Reclaiming the Heart of our Mission." She emphasized that all attendees need to reclaim the heart of their mission by first examining their own spiritual, emotional, and personal well-being. She concluded her remarks by challenging clergy and laity alike to seek God's vision for their context, engage faithfully in mission, and embody the love and hope of Christ through creative and transformative action.

Additional takeaways:

- The conference body voted to approve the 2027 conference budget, an almost flattened budget; the recommendations from Equitable Compensation as well as voted to approve the Single Party Clergy Pay recommendation.
- Twelve churches were closed during the Cabinet report.
- UMM and Society of St. Andrew Crop Drop bagged 20,000 pounds of potatoes.
- UMCOR kits collected prior to Annual Conference had an estimated $301,000 in value
- The Center for Belonging and Advocacy is the newest ministry area of our Conference. Led by the Rev. Lan Davis Wilson, this ministry will focus on equipping our congregations and our Conference to develop and deploy resources and strategies to create a true culture of inclusion in Virginia and beyond.
- Annual Conference offering of over $70,000 to be shared by the MJ Kim Fund for Immigrant Clergy and Virginia Conference Center for Belonging and Advocacy.
- The 2027 Virginia Annual Conference will be held in Harrisonburg at the same venue, June 16 – 19.

Additional Conference information and videos are available at: https://vaumc.org/ac2026/

Respectfully submitted,

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