

# 2016 VA Annual Conference Report

Submitted by Jill Ryan, Lay Delegate



Imagine a gathering of 4,000 United Methodists – Clergy and Laity, some families with children in strollers or coloring in the stadium seats during the presentations. There is a large stage on the floor of an arena with chairs filling the rest of the floor and people filling two sections up the sides. It does not sound like a church. Then you add the music, the prayer, and the Roanoke Berglund Center is transformed by the Holy Spirit blessing this 234<sup>th</sup> gathering of the VA Annual Conference.



That may seem like a flowery way to open this report. However, to be honest with you, I had no idea what Annual Conference would be like. I had no idea what to expect. I received the ["Book of Reports"](#) and it included an agenda, but what did that tell me?



Fortunately, I had my own "mentor" as Judy Craun, our previous AC Delegate is now part of the Rules Committee and also



attended. I won't regurgitate everything in the book or that might appear in the minutes as that is already well documented. These are the highlights of the conference and, most importantly, items that I felt were most relevant to Leesburg UMC.

## Day 1 – Opening Session

### Laity Session

We started with separate sessions – Clergy and Laity. The Laity session was a great starter reviewing some of the “rules of the road” so to speak on how the conference would run and the logistics.

Martha Stokes, Beth Christian and Alison Mallery presented their reflections from General Conference. The idea of the “connection” of the United Methodist Church was quite evident to them as they came together with others from around the world and recognized that we share a common faith, but the cultures and challenges of living that faith really are quite different. Alison noted her reminder of our “first world” perspective when she was curious about the need to discuss church legislation around Child Soldiers until she happened to find herself in a small group discussion with a former child soldier.

Beth shared an Asian greeting that she learned from one of the delegates.

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“The Image of God in me greets the Image of God in you.”

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### Opening Session – Bishop Cho

While this was my first conference, it also marked the retirement and last conference for Bishop Young Jin Cho. As the presentations, tributes, thanks and well wishes were expressed, I started to think about how Bishop Cho, and the conference itself, relates to me and LUMC. I recall Jim and Judy coming from Conference with invigorated eyes and excitement. I also recall many activities like the challenge of the prayer covenant, and working to become a prayer covenant church in order to grow our own spiritual relationships. The Adult Discipleship team used last year's theme in their work in proposing the new "membership to discipleship" plan. So, even though this is my first Annual Conference and Cho's last, I do look at his spiritual leadership and see that influence – the “connection” with the larger family. My attendance this year really made that part of the UMC a little more real as we say we are a connectional church - a network of classes, societies, and annual conferences designed to develop each other and hold us accountable.

The conference came immediately following the terrorist attack in Orlando. A table with 49 Candles in front of the stage was a beautiful tribute in memorial to the lives lost. Bishop Cho read the [statement from the President of the Council of Bishops](#) for the United Methodist Church. Side note, that while we don't have a “pope” the General Conference speaks for the United Methodist Church and Council of Bishops is the “executive” council.



From a business standpoint, Bishop Cho runs a very effective and efficient meeting. The two-days of activities were a mix of business presentations and worship and discipleship development. In general, we were never more than 20-30 minutes off from the published agenda. Several committees presented their reports with a few recommendations that were addressed by the body. For specific details of any of these, we can look to the Book of Reports and the minutes that will be published soon.

### Bishop's Episcopal Address

Bishop Cho reflected on how far we have come and the accomplishments of the entire conference during his tenure.

- His time leading the conference has influenced a great deal of change encouraging more spiritual growth and intentional fruitfulness. *"We are more aware that ministry as usual is no longer an option."*
- Passed Goal for *Imagine No Malaria - 100,000+ lives* saved in just 15 months
- He is commissioning a task force to review the Strategic plan of "All Things New - Vital Congregations" adopted in '08 to ensure we don't lose steam. This report will be presented to the new bishop who takes the reins in September.
- Seeds have been sown. It can take time to see fruit, they need to be watered and tended to grow.
- Closed with video of the Korean Church that hosted the Pilgrim group that included Pastor Jim. This showed a massive church with a full orchestra and choir singing *"Hallelujah!"*

Following the encouraging and inspiring Episcopal Address, we turned to the Cabinet Report. This was a shock as we walked through the list of new churches opening, but also so many church closings! Several were in the Hampton Roads area where there are base closings, but that impression left me sad. It also reminds us of the conference as a whole connection. *When one new church begins, we share their joy; when one church closes, we all share their grief.*

The Historical Society presentation came close to home as he talked about the Old Stone Church and other items being cared for in our region.

### A Service of Remembrance and Holy Communion closed the day

The scripture Romans 12:9-21

The message was delivered by Rev. Myrtle Frances Hatcher, who also referenced Isaiah, spoke about how we are a people of waiting - we are always waiting for something. The faithful wait for the Lord. Life isn't always what we expect, but as the theme states, it is not our will...THY Will Be Done. She closed with a simple statement:

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May the work I've done speak for me.

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Trivia:  
Do you know why Brunswick Stew is called Brunswick stew? The first circuit of the Methodist society, yes, right here, was named the Brunswick Circuit, the so-called "cradle of Methodism".

## Day 2

### Bible Study - 8:30am

We started Saturday and Sunday mornings with Bible Study lead by Dr. L. Greg Jones - Duke University Divinity School

He opened with a story/joke about pilots losing their way, but they were excited that they were making great time. Correlating that theme to the church, he challenged us with the idea that "We are lost, but two hours ahead of schedule." Today, we as a people we are lost but getting there very fast.

Referencing bible verses from Numbers 10-21 his talk described the Israelite journey through the desert and some of the feelings that were felt then are also comparable to today. A few thoughts that captured my attention:

- Humble is NOT passive/aggressive! Moses was more "intimate" with God - closer, and yet humble. The closer to God you are the more majesty and awe you will see, the spiritual poverty (hunger) you feel will draw you more strongly into relationship with God.
- Moses was leading 600,000 people through the dessert. We face similar challenges with the church's journey. He described the Back to Egypt Committee. Those who began grumbling and thinking that maybe it wasn't so bad back in Egypt after all. Do we have a "Back to Egypt" committee? Am I in it? Change is hard, are we going to keep looking back or will we have the courage to look forward to where God is leading, even if the details are not known?
- 3 Favorite words of a 2 year old: Me, Mine and No. We need to change ours to *We, Ours and YES!*
- Ephesians - Paul outlines behaviors that distract us from the Yes - contrast these with fruit of the spirit

Change is hard - it cannot be imposed - those expected to change need to be invested - the Back to Egypt committee is not invested.

He closed with a prayer that his friend Maggie Prayed every day:

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Lord, Let your miracles break forth every day! Let me not be an obstacle in any way!

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### Business Session

Laity Report - Conference Lay Leader Warren Harper gave a great address and expanded a little bit on what it means to be a lay leader. We are not clergy, but we (not just me, but YOU and me) are part of the body of Christ in the church here to help clergy in the tasks of the Lord's work.

- Lay people are here to share the light of the Lord.
- We are called to live a disciple's life — Every day! Every Where!
- *HOPE - it is what discipleship is all about.*

## The LUMC Delegation

We stepped out of the reports for a short bit to meet the Wrays—Daniel, Heather and Baby Nora. Daniel is preaching in Round Hill.



## Worship 11am - Conference Mission Service - Rev. Eun Pa Hong

Scripture Isaiah 60:1-3

He is the Pastor from Bupyeong United Methodist Church, Incheon, Korea - where the "Hallelujah" video was shot. This is also the church that Jim visited in Korea and during this service he also sang in the Pilgrim Choir.

The message talked about the work of Methodist missionaries to Korea beginning in the 1800's and then looking at what a thriving and growing faith community is there now! The challenge of a disciple being one who shares the Good News. A seed was planted and Korea is an inspiring story of what happens when that seed dares to grow.

War, terrorism, evil are all over the world. Missionaries came to Korea in the 19th Century - a seed was planted and now Korea shines. He calls for Virginia and American Churches to once more:

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*Rise and Shine - Lead people into the light of Christ*

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## Laity Luncheon

Dr. Jones - President of Jefferson College spoke to the Laity

In horseracing, you can't bet after the race has ended, you have to bet while they are running in the mud. He shared a story about how one of his mentors when he was young saw something in him and encouraged him to consider a path that he would not have ever considered on his own. Now he is the president of this college.

*Does someone see something in you or you in someone that you need to "bet on them" to make it to the winner's circle?*

## Recognition of Bishop Cho

A fabulous tribute video was created of the Bishop and his term in leadership. He was presented with a donation of \$14,000 to the Cho Foundation for Discipleship & Spiritual Renewal. In case you didn't think we had any fun, the life-size cutout of Cho was then

Connection

Encourage

featured and a donation auction kicked off. It was sold to the "Cabinet" for an additional \$3,500 donation - Cho was then excited to tell them three more copies were available.

### Site Selection Report

The site selection committee provided a lesson in "discussion" on the floor but also on rules and how the business of the church is conducted. An amendment was presented for shifting conference to begin Sunday evening rather than over the weekend. Unfortunately, the phrasing of the discussion hinted that younger people were not really showing up so why try to cater to them. But, we do have young, working age people and youth who are still in school. Even with the best of intentions, how we present ideas can distract us from the task at hand. While a check of the discipline confirmed that the setting of dates is the responsibility of the bishop, the final approval of the selected date and location remains subject to approval by the conference.



Holy Rollers Bicycle troop and youth group collected the offering in the afternoon.

Temperament & Consideration

### Credit Union Report

Who knows that the VA conference has a credit union? Amongst the review of many benefits of the Credit Union, he highlighted a specific program to work with and help people get out of the PayDay Loan cycle/traps. Whether it is payday loans or a need for help in getting one's financial house in order, the VAUMCU has programs that can help. It is available to church, members and their families.

Also, all loans, etc that go through the union result in donations back to the member's church

### Resolutions Report

Three resolutions were presented

1. Ban the Box - regarding support for and advocacy to encourage legislation to remove the check box regarding felony conviction from employment applications – Passed
2. Supporting the establishment of a mentoring ministry for adolescents in our community – Passed
3. Responding to requests from Christians in the Holy Land was withdrawn as it was addressed at General Conference.

Not Alone

*Observation – amidst a formal process following Robert's Rules of Order, these are packed with heartfelt consideration and compassion.*

## Worship - Service of Ordering 7:30pm

The message was preached by Bishop Mark J. Webb of Upper New York (Finger Lakes) "Called and Connected" based on scriptures: John 15:1-11 and Ephesians 3:14-21

- When we hear someone say they "answered a call" do we really think about what that means. Knowing in the head and feeling in the heart are two different things
- *"Well, are you just going to sit there or are you going to fish?"* Can you imagine Jesus asking that question of the disciples, of you?
- What does it mean to make disciples? - check out this succinct answer:
  - How do we live out our call?
    - First – we must be willing to seek the reality of who God is - *Truth* - how do you Experience God?
    - Second - Be Willing to *Confess* who we are
    - Third - *Trust* what God Promises

He related a story of a custodian working in a church in Austria when a tourist came in wanting to see the pipe organ. Long story short, he almost stopped him, but eventually the tourist played the organ so beautifully. The tourist, Mendelssohn, was the master composer of organ music. He said, "I almost prevented the master from playing his instrument in the cathedral." *Do we stand in God's way in ordering our lives for His will?*

### *The Ordering...*

This was an incredible service. I had never really thought about the ceremony involved in becoming a local pastor, deacon, or elder. I didn't know there were so many variations either.



It is something like a combination of becoming a new member, being baptized, going through commencement, and oh by the way, the Bishop hands you your deployment orders. For the Elders, the Bishop lays his hands on each Provisional Elder and blesses them and then the Ordanand "*takes authority as an elder to preach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, and to order the life of the Church.*"

As a spectator in this service, I was reminded that when we accept Christ into our lives, our baptism is also an acceptance not only of God's grace, but of his mission - we are given our orders to Go, make disciples.

At the end of the service, the Bishop opened the altar for any who wish to answer the call to service. Our own Judy Craun answered her call that night, not to become a pastor, but to deepen her relationship and role in the ministry of Christ through one of the diaconal paths within the church.



## Day 3

### Bible Study – Dr. Jones again.

Theme of conference - "Thy Will Be Done" - not mine

Talking about workaholism – One time when he had the flu, his wife reminded him that *if you don't observe the Sabbath, sickness becomes your Sabbath*. If we ignore the need for rest and refreshment, we weaken ourselves to the point of illness.

That leads to the question of sins we come to love. These are sins we brag about being guilty of without recognizing them as sins and that we should change. "I can't be 5-feet from my phone without breaking out in hives!"

The Holy Spirit affirms a gift that we are not ready to claim.

In looking at the word "Thy" – God's Will is SOOO much more than we are capable of imagining.

### Back to Business Meeting

In the final session, it was a cleanup of open items. Bishop Cho reminded us that Annual Conference should be more than a business meeting and I think the reflections I've shared so far demonstrate that.

Report of the Statistician showed significant declines across the board in church numbers. A reminder from Day 1 about closings, are we falling short of our duty?

## General Conference Summary - Tom Berlin

Unfortunately, due to traffic snares, I was not able to get there in time for the special presentation on the General Conference by Tom Berlin and Martha Stokes. However, Tom wrote a very good [blog post](#) that is the recap that he shared on Sunday when we had a little extra time.

This presentation is a very effective analogy of how the church body is processing the issues of human sexuality and the task set for the bishops. It describes how we interact and collaborate with each other on this topic and that quite often it is more about integrity than about sexuality.

## Closing Worship - Bishop Cho

Scripture: Matthew 26:36-46 – Passage about Jesus in the garden praying while the disciples slept.

Jesus submitted – “I give you my will” - completely - not holding anything back. Evil's victory only lasted 3-days. God's way is the best way - death was not the end.

Recommended book: "Becoming a Blessed Church" by Graham Standish - Just released; a guide in discerning God's will for the Church.

Cho talked about his faith journey to bishop and how many times he said no before giving God all his will and saying yes. How many no's does it take God to get to your yes? His will is always best even when the road is bumpy or dark...Seek God's will for your life!

Bishop Cho had one prayer throughout the conference that he prayed expanding the theme.

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*"Thy will be done! Nothing More, Nothing Less, Nothing Else."*

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## News

- Rev. Jim Wishmyer has been reappointed by Bishop Cho to serve as Lead Pastor of LUMC for another year.
- Rev. Heather Wray, our new Director of Children's Ministry, has been appointed to serve LUMC for 2016-2017!
- Rev. Larry Thomson, Winchester District Superintendent has become Dean of the Cabinet!
- Judy Craun said, "Yes!" to the invitation to answer God's call following the *Ordering of Ministry* worship service!

## ##By the Numbers#

The total number of Kits 4 Conference collected for UMCOR was 51,935.

Specifically:

- Bedding kits: 55
- Birthing kits: 2,634
- Cleaning kits: 303
- Health kits: 29,625
- Layette kits: 1,347
- School kits: 17,612
- Sewing kits: 359

## 2016 Cans 4 Conference

- Each attendee was asked to bring 4 cans to donate.
- Approximately 9300 lbs. were collected!