

Report from Delegates to Virginia Annual Conference 2019

Cynthia Lopynski:

When I reflect on Annual Conference 2020 there are a few key moments that come to mind. The first thing I think about is Tim Ward and Tom Berlin on stage being recognized for starting yet another Restoration campus. New church starts are not that common in Virginia and in the last five years, Floris has started four. That's pretty remarkable! Then I remember the joy the whole Floris delegation felt as we watched Rev. Ashley Allen be ordained. The road to ordination is long and takes many twists and turns and it was great to be able to celebrate the culmination of all Ashley's hard work with her. But perhaps the most memorable moments were when the Virginia Annual Conference as a body took significant steps towards pushing back against the decisions that were made at General Conference 2019. Both the laity and the clergy elected General Conference delegates who agreed to work for LBGTQIA inclusion. The Virginia Annual Conference also voted to send petitions to General Conference that recommend changing the "incompatibility language." These moves were just the first steps. There is still much work to be done but it was a hopeful moment to see Virginia stand together against the decision of GC 2019. As always, I am honored to have been a delegate to the 2019 Virginia Annual Conference and look forward to the continued good work of the conference.

Matt Mertz:

Floris encourages everyone to worship, give, grow, and serve (I know I'm forgetting a fifth key). The Virginia United Methodist Annual Conference in Roanoke provided opportunities for all these in just two and a half days. Even before the conference started, there was an opportunity to arrive early and donate food to hungry youth in the Roanoke area. In and of itself, AC is an opportunity to serve the UMC, as the Virginia Conference must have clergy and laity present to approve budgets and other administrative items. Also, delegates must be elected so that General Conference can conduct business and make decisions. It may seem like you're just a warm body in a (literally) cool coliseum, but together with fellow Methodists, everyone's impact is great. Interim Bishop for the Virginia Conference, Peter Weaver, and others including Bishop Tracy Malone from Eastern Ohio provided powerful worship sermons throughout the conference.

Bishop Weaver offered a powerful message, which was to not only grow within your church community, but to be someone who glows beyond the walls of the church. His message reminded me of so many who attend Floris. Our glow can be seen across the Toll Road at Hutchison Elementary, our new Restoration communities and as far away as Mercy Hospital in Sierra Leone. Some who've just driven by may know Floris as the big building atop a hill off Frying Pan Road. However, anyone who has stopped in knows that we worship God, not our building. The building is our place to welcome in the community, get weekly rejuvenation through worship, catch up with friends and make new friends. May we continue to be a congregation that glows, persistently and ever stronger.

Paul Harney:

This was my first experience as a delegate to the Virginia Annual Conference, and I learned a lot from attending. I was part of the process of electing lay delegates to Southeast Jurisdictional Conference and General Conference. Our own Rev. Tom Berlin (as well as Martha Stokes, 2019 General Conference delegation head) gave an overview of the 2019 General Conference. Pastor Ashley Allen was ordained an Elder in a Service for Ordering the Ministry- congratulations Ashley! Thank you for allowing me to represent Floris in the Virginia Annual Conference this year.

Pam Borland:

It was an honor to attend the 2019 Virginia Annual Conference representing Floris UMC. This was my fourth time as a delegate, and my first time attending during a GC voting year. Bishop Pete Weaver, interim bishop, presided. We heard inspiring preaching from guest preacher, Bishop Tracy Malone of the Ohio East area and Bishop Weaver. We conducted business such as approving the 2020 budget, recognizing retiring pastors and setting clergy appointments for the coming year. There were several highlights. The conference took steps to push back against the results of General Conference 2019 in a couple of ways. First, General Conference clergy and lay delegates were elected who wish to see LGBTQ+ inclusion in the UMC. Second, the body passed motions to delay any inquiry into the conduct of clergy members related to chargeable offenses as outlined in the Traditional Plan until after GC 2020 and also passed motions for the removal of the "incompatibility language" in the Book of Discipline. Tom Berlin and Tim Ward were up front as Floris/Restoration was recognized for another new church plant, which was a great moment. And Friday evening we were very excited to attend the Ordination Service and watch Ashley Allen be ordained as an Elder in full connection. We left Roanoke hopeful and look forward to seeing where God leads us here in Virginia in the coming year. Thank you for the opportunity to represent Floris UMC as a delegate.