The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

November 19, 2019

*The mission of the Virginia Conference is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church; all to the glory of God.*

The Common Table met on November 19, 2019 at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen, Virginia in the Cabinet Room. Members taking part in the meeting were:

Rev. Ted Smith (Director of Connectional Ministries and Chair)

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

Mr. John Dunning (Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries)

Mr. David Dommisse (Conference Treasurer)

Rev. Lyle Morton (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and

Advocacy Representative)

Ms. Unsil Choi (2020)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Dr. Carlos Liceaga (2021)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

Rev. Ashley Isernhagen (2022)

Rev. Megan Saucier (2023)

Ms. Kimberly Young (2023) attended by zoom.

Rev. Susan Reaves (Annual Conference Secretary, without vote)

Also present were Ms. Bev Myers, Executive Assistant in the office of Director of Connectional Ministries and Rev. Tom Joyce, Assistant to the Bishop. Those unable to attend were Bishop Sharma Lewis, Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster and Ms. Susie Wolf.

Chairperson Ted Smith opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. with a word of welcome. Introductions were made around the table.

Rev. Smith shared a devotion from the Upper Room with a focus on Colossians 3:17 “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Rev. Smith led the group in prayer.

Mr. David Dommisse gave the Financial Report, noting that receipts in October were down 2.94% over last year. However, this is an improvement over August 2019 when they were down 3.14% from the previous year. Mr. Dommisse reminded the Common Table that there will be no carryover of funds when the new quadrennium begins. Currently there is $59,000 available in Emerging Funds.

The Bishop’s Recalibrate event was discussed. Laity Reconnect is being planned. It will be a laity version of the clergy Recalibrate.

Rev. Smith discussed Conference realignment. He explained the office of Connectional Ministries is serving as the “steward of the vision” for the annual conference, charged with aligning the total resources of the conference with its vision, and with enabling the “connections among the local, district, annual conference, and general church ministries.” The office of Connectional Ministries has been talking to the staff, the leadership steering committee, the Council on Finance and Administration and others. This is the first step in a planning process that will pick up speed in January. There will be a cyberspace that will allow people to feed in information about disconnects that exist within living out the vision of the Conference. Rev. Smith is seeking out the disconnects that exist between local churches and the district and conference ministries that are supposed to be resources for them.

Rev. Smith did note that levels of anxiety have increased among Conference Staff. He felt that this is, in part, because of the change of leadership in Connectional Ministries, as well as the anticipation of future realignment.

There are 3 bishop appointed leadership groups.

1) The Vital Team, which serves as an executive board and is a small quick action team. 2) The Way Forward which deals with church disaffiliation.

3) The Steering Team which was created to help with the conference vision that all churches have a disciple building plan in place by 2020. Mr. Dommisse spoke about the excitement in these leadership groups around the Bishop’s vision. It was noted that the Vital Team was established by Bishop Weaver to aid efficiency and deal with day-to-day issues. Rev. Smith said he would make of list of who was in each of the leadership groups for the members of the Common Table.

These three groups are bishop called groups, that coordinate the work of the conference by sharing ideas, planning, assessing visions and dealing with organizational efficiency. The existence of these groups isn’t common knowledge. It was mentioned that the ethnic caucuses and large church pastors should be invited to the conversations shared within these groups. The Bishop’s Chat and Chews were the starting point for the formation of these leadership groups and the goal has been to make the organization nimbler. A suggestion was made to have a connectional ministry coordinator in every church that could be trained and informed to communicate the resources available.

Rev. Smith reported that the Ecumenical Study Team has been put in place. This team was formed in response to the Swadley motion adopted at the 2019 Annual Conference. The team is studying the history of ecumenicism and will meet with the Virginia Council of Churches and will have a report prepared following their January meeting.

Dr. Carlos Liceaga brought the report of the Ministry Proposal Committee. He spoke to Rev. Mark Ogren, Chair of Congregational Excellence, prior to the November meeting of the Common Table because there are proposals that may belong under the umbrella of congregational development. There was a request for funding for Acts 11:15 that was sent out to multiple places including special grants and church development. The request is for $10,000.00. It is not clear whether this ministry should be categorized as a ministry proposal or a new church start. It was noted that special and sustaining grants do not support brick and mortar costs, including rent; equipment; or salary. This proposal could fit the description of a chartered church since this is a second site for Bridgewater United Methodist Church. Emerging Funds programs are supposed to be for ministry programs that would have an impact on the whole conference. Later grants from Emerging Funds were opened up to include more local programs if they could be used to train others to set up similar programs. The special and sustaining grants are for local ministry.

In their conversation, Rev. Ogren relayed concerns about the sustainability of the program to Dr. Liceaga. Mr. Dommisse noted that we have multiple pots of ministry money. He suggested having fewer rules governing how we allocate funds, as this would make us nimbler and less bogged down by bureaucracy. The Church Development Fund has declined to fund the Acts 11:15 ministry.

Rev. Isernhagen pointed out that there were other requests that were turned down that were similar to Acts 11:15.

Rev. Isernhagen made a motion to reconsider Acts 11.15 alongside the other three similar ministry proposals with Rev. Mark Ogren. The motion was approved.

Rev. Lyle Morton prayed over the food and the group broke for lunch.

Rev. Smith brought the following information on changes to the Special and Sustaining grants policy:

1. Prioritize grants to local chartered churches over district sponsored ministry and new church starts. District sponsored ministries and new church starts are eligible for funding from other sources.

2. Change the date from summer to fall for applications.

3. New programs will be defined as programs that have not existed before the year of application

4. Equipment costs will not be funded.

5. There will be a lifetime cap of three years starting with the 2020 Quadrennium.

There will be quarterly reports on how funds are being used. It was noted that the policy has been to support sustaining grants for a quadrennium but that was not how the rules were structured.

Rev. Smith encouraged the Common Table to find ways to fund as many ministries as possible. The guidelines will help in sending out a follow up letter when a request is denied. This will help clarify the criteria for grants. There was consensus to accept the changes.

The Common Table is currently not funding district projects.

The 2020 Special Grants recommendations were presented by Rev. Smith. There was a motion to accept the recommendations for $16,220 in grants. Also, Restoration: Loudon has submitted a grant request for funding to purchase a computer for live streaming and to expand their Pour Theology. Restoration will be added to the spread sheet for further consideration.

The Personnel committee will meet and then make recommendations on staff compensation for 2020. Staff evaluations are in process. Because some emails from the conference have been going directly to spam or trash, the follow up will go up on the portal. Personnel policy has specific questions for administrative, technical personnel and separate questions for directors.

Mr. John Dunning brought the report of the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry. Rev. John Peters, executive director of the Association of Educational Institutions will be retiring next June.

The Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry wants to include a college chaplain as a member of the board as none are currently serving on it. The Board Is looking at proposed policy changes but is not quite ready to put them forward. When it is ready it will go up on the portal. This will Include a desire to include more people with property experience. Changes will be voted on by the Common Table, and if affirmed sent to the rules committee and finally to the Annual Conference for a vote.

Rev. Smith brought the Re-Calibrate report that came out of Bishop Lewis’ prayer time. There were around 660 people in attendance. Surveys indicate it was a successful event. Conversation about the event began while Bishop Weaver was acting bishop. The effect of Re-calibrate, held October 24, on the attendance at the clergy-only session of 5 Talent Academy on November 13. The complexity of finding a venue for an event that could accommodate close to 700 people while working with the schedules of the General Conference Delegation and Bishop Lewis, led to Re-Calibrate’s placement on the calendar.

There will be a Laity Re-Connection event. The name has not been decided on. It would be similar to the clergy Re-Calibrate. It will have a price tag of around $30,000.

The Truth and Reconciliation event will have a cost of around $4,000. That may come before the Common Table. It was mentioned that it should come before the Common Table because it would indicate the importance of reconciliation to the Conference.

Mr. Warren Harper brought the General Conference Delegation Information Report. The General Conference delegation met last week. They participated in worship conducted by the Latino Caucus. There are three more meetings scheduled. They focused on why they are delegates and what they are doing. There was a report on the meeting with Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy. Mr. Harper is considering a four-year educational process about General and Jurisdictional Conference. The delegation considered six candidates for bishops. Rev. Tom Berlin was put forth as the Conference nomination for Bishop. The Delegation will meet again in January at the Conference Center.

Rev. Jonathan Page closed the meeting in prayer and the meeting was dismissed at 1:55 p.m.

The next meeting will be on February 13, 2020.