The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

*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.*

February 13, 2020

The Common Table met on February 13, 2020 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)

Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster (Cabinet Representative)

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)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

Rev. Ashley Isernhagen (2022)

Ms. Kimberly Young (2022) attended through zoom

Ms. Susie Wolf (2023)

Rev. Meghan Saucier (2023)

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. Unable to attend were Bishop Sharma Lewis, Ms. Unsil Choi and Dr. Carlos Liceaga.

Chairperson Ted Smith opened the meeting at 10:04 with a word of welcome. Mr. Warren Harper, shared a devotion from Max Lucado’s book *Grace for the Moment*. He encouraged us to hear the voice of adventure and quoted Luke 17:33 “Those who try to keep their lives will lose them. But those who give up their lives will save them”. He noted that the goal is not to live long but to live. Mr. Harper followed this with prayer.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the November 19, 2019 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality. They were approved with two corrections.

Mr. David Dommisse brought the financial report. Revenue for 2019 was 84.39% which is down from the previous years. Revenue for 2018 was 88.13%. This was a 100th of a per cent lower than in 2010 which was our crisis year even though in general, 2019 was economically a good year. In 2019, the conference overspent by $139,000.00. Expenditure was on target for the budget but the decrease in revenue led to the shortfall. The Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) is looking to significantly cut budget. They are looking at a range. Anxiety about the future of the denomination will probably play a role in revenue for 2020 and 2021. CFA is looking to have boards and agencies cut budget by 20% for 2021.

Mr. John Dunning discussed what a 20% reduction would mean for Higher Education and Campus Ministry. He mentioned a 20% reduction would mean closing ministries or reducing all salaries by 20%. He felt that a 5% cut was more reasonable. Mr. Dommisse pointed out that making cuts is not a math problem, but a ministry challenge.

Higher Education and Campus Ministry could report on what a 20% budget would mean to their ministry, with the understanding that doing across the board cuts aren’t what’s called for. CFA will need to finalize the 2021 budget around April 1 after the Common Table meets again in March. Further changes may come about after General Conference takes place in May 2020, as changes that occur at General Conference 2020 may impact the 2021 budget.

A request for an updated budget impact analysis and priorities will be sent out to the Common Table Boards and Agencies. Responses should be in hand prior to the March 12th meeting. It was pointed out that the overall budget for Boards and Agencies is around $60,000 which is a fairly small portion of the overall Common Table budget.

The Common Table looked at the projected cuts discussed when the 2020 budget was projected with potential 10% and 20% cuts. Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster pointed out that the version of the budget being viewed with last year’s proposed cuts was not the same as the final budget.

Rev. Ted Smith brought a report on the Alignment Process. Rev. Smith asked members of the Common Table to affirm going forward with the proposed alignment.

A recommendation was made that the alignment document be approved subject to amendments and changes discussed by the Common Table.  However, the document should be released to personnel immediately so they can move forward.  Rev. Smith asked if consensus had been reached to accept the recommendation and took a voice vote. All voice votes were in the affirmative.  Rev. Meghan Saucier abstained. It was agreed that edits will go to a writing team and come back after seven days to the Common Table.

Rev. Smith reported that rule changes are coming from various boards and agencies. Rev. Smith, Rev. Joshua King, and Bishop Sharma Lewis will meet regarding rule changes.

Rev. Smith noted that the report of the Ecumenical Study Team will go onto the Common Table portal. Currently, there are no proposed funding changes related to the study.

There was no Grant Process & Criteria Update available as there was no sub-group created to go over the current process. Benevolence grants are not included. Questions regarding the five ministries discussed at the previous meeting of the Common Table that might have fallen more under church development, were considered. Rev. Ashley Isernhagen will write down the current criteria for the grant process and send it out before the next Common Table meeting.

Mr. John Dunning reported that every member of the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry will be a liaison to one of the Campus Ministries to aid communication. The current goal is to assist each campus ministry to become self-sustaining and improve property management oversight.

Rev. Smith brought the report for the Special Ministries Updates. The Truth and Reconciliation program was cancelled. It didn’t have the numbers and leadership necessary to go forward and it overlapped with the Laity Re-Connection event. Funding set aside for Truth and Reconciliation is no longer needed.

The Laity Reconnect reached over 400 people through six sites. There was a central email in which people could ask questions and make comments. There were problems with online communion and the way the elements were consecrated. The Bishop envisioned another event to take place after General Conference but before Annual Conference. Bishop Lewis sent a request for feedback on how that might happen.

Mr. Harper expressed a need for fast reliable information to be disseminated after General Conference. Rev. Smith proposed May 30th or June 6th as potential dates for an event using chat and chew as a model – clergy in the morning and laity in the afternoon with a primary site and 11 satellite sites around the conference. It was noted that while there is a desire for connection and fellowship, the logistics are difficult. A suggestion was made to incorporate this with Annual Conference or just before Annual Conference. There was agreement that disseminating accurate information as soon as possible after General Conference is necessary. It was also noted that May 30th might not be early enough to release information about events at General Conference. Suggestions for circulating information included the production of a 45-minute video, a pastoral letter from the Bishop, or a recorded video from the Bishop. Accurate information following General Conference is a fundamental need.

Mr. Harper brought the Delegation Information Report. The delegation is meeting soon. Among items being considered for General Conference is a revision of the Social Principles, issues surrounding the five Bishops being added the African Central Conferences and other information necessary to prepare new delegation members for next steps. This includes studying the recently issued Protocol and the 33 pages of associated legislation.

Rev. Jonathan Page prayed and the meeting was adjourned at 2:06.

The next meeting of the Common Table will be held, Thursday, March 12, 2020.