The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

March 21, 2019

The Common Table met on March 21, 2019 through a ZOOM online meeting. Members taking part in the meeting were:

Bishop Peter D. Weaver (Bishop)

Rev. Marc Brown (Director of Connectional Ministries and Chair)

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster (Cabinet Representative)

Rev. Rob Lough (Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries)

Mr. David Dommisse (Conference Treasurer)

Rev. Lyle Morton (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and

Advocacy Representative)

Rev. Rachel Chen (2019)

Rev. Larry Lenow (2019)

Ms. Unsil Choi (2020)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Dr. Carlos Liceaga (2021)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

Rev. Ashley Roth (2022)

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

Also present were Ms. Bev Myers, Executive Assistant in the office of Director of Connectional Ministries; Rev. Tom Joyce , Assistant to the Bishop; and Rev. Ted Smith, incoming Director of Connectional Ministries.

Chairperson Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:03 with a word of welcome. Everyone introduced themselves for the benefit of Bishop Peter D. Weaver. Rev. Brown read Psalm 121 which begins, “I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?” He noted that God who created the hills is present with us now. Then Rev. Brown led the group in prayer.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the February 21, 2019 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality. They were approved as written.

Rev. Brown invited people who attended the Special Session of the General Conference to comment on their experience. Rev. Ted Smith noted that there was a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty as the General Conference began. He said that opening General Conference with an extended time of prayer was very helpful. Rev. Jonathan Page mentioned how Rev. Tom Berlin asked people to stand for unity within the church and everyone stood together. However, five hours later there were two separate groups on the floor with one group in lament and the other celebrating victory. Rev. Rob Lough shared some of the experience he had pre and post conference as people rose above the divisiveness.

Bishop Weaver appreciated Psalm 121 being shared by Rev. Brown. It reminded him of viewing the Rocky Mountains and that God sees the larger picture. God loves all of us and calls us to live out our love in a reconciling way. Bishop Weaver noted that the ultimate outcome for United Methodists is not the legislation that is passed but in being brothers and sisters in Christ.

Bishop Weaver reported that Bishop Lewis had planned to do a series of Chat and Chews across the Conference. She has postponed her plans because of her six-month medical leave. Bishop Weaver is considering holding eight bi-district meetings over the course of three weekends. Tentatively, on the first Wednesday in June the Bishop would lead a live stream from the Conference Center on what he has heard. Bishop Weaver then asked for the Common Table’s perspective. A question was raised about the possibility of polling people and gathering data about their response to the Called Special Session of General Conference.

A Way Forward Work Group was started before the Special Called Session of General Conference. It includes the heads of the General Conference delegation, Ms. Martha Stokes and Rev. Tom Berlin; Dean of the Cabinet, Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster; the Head of the Council on Finance and Administration, Ms. Betty Forbes; VUMPI’s Executive Director, Mr. John Fuller; Conference Treasurer, Mr. David Dommisse, Director of Communications, Ms. Madeline Pillow; Director of Center for Clergy Excellence, Rev. Lindsey Baynham, Director of Connectional Ministries, Rev. Marc Brown; Chief Executive Officer of the United Methodist Credit Union, Mr. Jim Eades; Representatives from the Foundation Office, Rev. Tommy Herndon and Mr. Randy Shelton; President and Vice President of the Conference Trustees, Mr. Carl Moravitz and Ms. Kathy Lutman, respectively; Conference Trustees Attorney, Mr. Andrew White, and the Chancellor, Mr. Steven Brown. The work group is investigating the possibility of polling people’s reactions to the General Conference. To do a full poll would require submitting contact information for each member of the church. Conducting focus groups would cost $10,000 per group. The possibility of having four or five focus groups is being considered.

There is a need to help people understand the complicated and nuanced issue before the United Methodist Church because of the cultural and global differences across the denomination. Bishop Weaver pointed out that our journey did not end at General Conference.

It was pointed out that following General Conference, people of various ethnicities may be wondering if these events will “push their seats back.” There is a need to love our neighbor but also appreciate diversity and recognize there are various points of view. The members of the Common Table were encouraged to pass on information to the leadership of the conference, when they hear concerns about General Conference being voiced.

Treasurer David Dommisse presented the report on finance. The Council on Finance and Administration has not met since General Conference. Currently the Council is not looking to cut apportionments. However, if there are large changes going forward, they would be ready to make strategic adjustments to adapt to whatever comes next. Up to this point in 2019 the general payment of apportionments has been in the 88-89% range.

Mr. Carlos Liceaga brought a report on Emerging Fund Requests. A request was received for $10,000 for a Park Pilgrimage to Alaska for young clergy. There was a similar pilgrimage last year to Yellowstone National Park sponsored in part by the Center for Clergy Excellence. The Program Committee recommended granting the request.

The outcome of the trip is to foster collegiality among younger clergy. Mr. Dommisse reminded the group that fund grants are not to benefit an individual but to benefit the conference. The Center for Clergy Excellence hopes to impact clergy through park pilgrimages just as Bishop Cho impacted the clergy through the pilgrimages to Korea.

It was suggested that funding could come from the Center for Clergy Excellence and continuing education funds. Currently the Ministerial Education Fund provides $400.00 to clergy making less than $50,000 and $200.00 for those earning more than $50,000. It was noted that this pilgrimage is about developing clergy leadership by providing a transformational experience.

Rev. Morton made a motion that the amount of the grant be reduced to $5,200. There was no second.

A vote was taken on the original recommendation. It was approved. Dr. Liceaga will inform the group of the Common Table’s discussion about seeking future funding elsewhere.

Rev. Chen brought the report of the grants committee. She recommended that funding remain the same as it was in 2019:

Society of Saint Andrew $8,000

VA Interfaith Public Policy Center $15,000

Grace Inside $167,000

Virginia Council of Churches $10,000.

The Grants Committee did not receive a response from the Virginia Council of Churches until after the deadline for requests. However, with the recent transition in leadership, they are in a time of rebuilding.

The recommendation was approved.

Anyone who would like to participate in presenting the Common Table report at Annual Conference should contact Rev. Brown.

A task force led by Rev. Peter Moon has been working with the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry. That group will report to the Council on Finance and Administration at a future date.

Friday morning of Annual Conference will include a presentation by Rev. Berlin and Ms. Stokes.

Bishop Weaver led the group in prayer and adjourned the meeting at 12:15.