The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

September 26, 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 September 26, 2019 at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen, Virginia in the Cabinet Room. Members taking part in the meeting were:

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis (Bishop)

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

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader and Vice Chair)

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)

Dr. Carlos Liceaga (2021)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

Ms. Susie Wolf (2022)

Ms. Kimberly Young (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 Rev. Ashley Isernhagen, Rev. Jonathan Page and Ms. Unsil Choi.

Co-Chairperson Warren Harper opened the meeting at 10:03 with a word of welcome.

Rev. Smith led a devotion from the Upper Room, asked for prayer concerns and led the group in prayer.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the March 21, 2019 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality. They were approved with one correction.

Mr. David Dommisse presented the financial report. Receipts through August were down 3.14%. Mr. Dommisse expects there will be a 5% decrease overall in 2019. The most likely cause of the decrease is denominational uncertainty. He noted that when giving decreases on the local level and churches are struggling financially, the first thing that gets cut is often apportionments. Fortunately, the conference is better prepared for lean times than it has been in the past.

Mr. Harper read the Swadley Motion adopted at the 2019 Annual Conference. It called for

the Common Table [to] conduct a study on how to improve the relationship of the Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church with the Virginia Council of Churches regarding the aspirations to strengthen the ties with the larger Body of Christ in Virginia, the extending of holy conversations, worship, and ministries that effect the ministry of love and grace of our Lord, and the encouraging of a positive witness of Christian unity and hope to our neighbors in Virginia. I ask that this study involve a diverse team to include the grants committee, the Common Table, and others appointed who have interests and familiarity with ecumenical matters. This study with recommendations should report to the 2020 Virginia Annual Conference.

Rev. Smith suggested that Rev. Charles Swadley chair the committee that is to be formed in response to the motion. Rev. Joyce suggested that Rev. Larry Thompson be a part of the group because of his past interest in ecumenical matters. Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster suggested that Rev. Larry Lenow be a part of the group since he had been a liaison between the Virginia Council of Churches and the Common Table. Rev. Smith suggested that Ms. Susie Wolf would add some gender diversity to the committee and bring the perspective of the Grants Committee to the group. Ms. Kimberly Young suggested that in addition to visual diversity there should be intellectual diversity. Rev. Smith will contact Rev. Swadley, Rev. Lennow and Rev. Thompson to see if they will participate. Rev. Harold White agreed to be a part of the group and Rev. Smith will tap someone from the Grants Committee. The hope is that the committee will have a report compiled by mid-January.

Rev. Smith presented the Special & Sustaining Grant recommendations. It was decided that Just Neighbors did not meet the criteria for a Special Grant because its ministry is not shared with a local church. Last year Just Neighbors did receive funding, but it had a connection to a local church that was assisting in its start-up. The grants were divided into $5,600.00 units per project request. The MOPS request only had one part of its proposal that was eligible for grant money. Skipwith only requested $4,500 so they received less than $5,600.00. Special Program grants are only available for three consecutive years.

Mr. Dommisse raised a question about grant money requested for the Learning Garden and Una Familia. These programs are connected to Districtsnot to local churches. The current narrower definition of eligibility for special and sustaining grants might preclude grants to district sponsored ministries. It was also noted that the Pace Center is a Campus Ministry which already receives conference funding. They are providing food for a food pantry and for a multicultural Thanksgiving event.

At the November meeting the Grants committee would bring recommendations on policy. Rev. Overby Webster suggested a decline in support over the three years of eligibility. Rev. Smith responded that the decline starts with 2020. Mr. Dommisse predicts that next year there will be $90,000 available for special and sustaining grants. The question was raised, “How do we want to handle program grant requests that come from districts going forward?” The charter for the Common Table states special and sustaining grants are for “local ministry projects.” Dr. Liceaga suggested holding off making a decision on the district sponsored ministries or on all of the special program grants.

Rev. Overby Webster made a motion to approve the recommendation of the Grants Committee regarding the special grants, but hold off approving the grants for the Pace Center, Una Familia and the Learning Garden. The motion was approved. See attached report.

Rev. Smith brought the recommendations of the Grant Committee for the sustaining grants. The question was asked, “How long will we sustain a project.” Ms. Bev Myers was asked to report on how long we have sustained some of the programs at the November meeting of the Common Table. Her records go back 15 years. Some of the programs receiving money from sustained grants receive financial support from Advanced Specials. Henry Fork Service Center has received grant money for a long time. However, there seems to be a tacit understanding that this is a favorite ministry of the United Methodist Women and they give $30,000 to the Grants program which is a third of its funding. There will be a conversation with the leadership of the United Methodist Women. The recommendation on the sustaining grants of the Grant Committee were approved.

Mr. John Dunning presented the report on Higher Education and Campus Ministry. There are four new campus ministers. Salaries are supplied by grants. The campus ministers are doing well. The buildings of these ministries are the main concern. At Old Dominion there was a decision to do a new church start rather than campus ministries and they are struggling. The buildings and boards are the current focus of the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry.

The William and Mary Campus Ministry is self-sustaining but the building is very old. The recommendation is that Mary Washington’s building will be sold. Old Dominion’s building is not self-sustaining. The Virginia Tech building needs a million dollars in repairs. They have two potential plans to become self-sustaining.

Dr. Liceaga presented the report on Ministry Proposals. The three ministry proposals under review were the Asian American Ministry Association Proposal, $5000.00; the Latino Clergy Caucus Proposal, $4,000.00; and the Bishop’s Clergy Re-calibrate Proposal, $14,786.47. It was suggested that the amount be rounded up to $14,800.00. The recommendations of the Ministry Proposals were accepted with the suggested change.

Rev. Smith noted that there is a multiprong approach to communicate with written material in multiple languages and videos in people’s first languages.

Rev. Smith brought the Personnel Committee report. He noted that the personnel committee had a check in with all of the directors. He reports that all was well.

Rev. Morton spoke briefly about the Commission on Ethnic and Minority Concerns and Advocacy event that is happening on Oct. 5, 2019. There will be a professional negotiator coming in for the event.

Rev. Smith reported there is a new Annual Conference Contract Negotiator, Mr. Neal Wise, who will negotiate contracts for the Annual Conference. The Blue Ridge Hotel struggled to provide adequate meals and accommodations during the 2019 Annual Conference. The Hotel does not plan to improve the facility between now and next year. Currently, Mr. Wise does not have a signed contract with the Annual Conference but terms are being worked out. He will no longer be the site selection committee chair to avoid a conflict of interest.

Rev. Smith led the group in prayer and adjourned the meeting at 1:36 p.m.

The next meeting of the Common Table will be held on November 19, 2019.