The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

11/08/18

The Common Table met on 11/08/18 at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen, Virginia in room the Cabinet Room. Members present were:

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

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster (Cabinet Representative)

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 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 Ms. Shirley Cauffman (Chair, Conference Personnel Committee).

Unable to attend were Bishop Sharma D. Lewis, Rev. Larry Lenow, Rev. Rob Lough and Ms. Sandra Wilson-Blackwell.

Chairperson Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. with a word of welcome. He read the parable of the good Samaritan beginning at Luke 10:25. He shared excerpts from a letter that spoke about a Bible study on “Unexpected Love.” The letter declared that the important stuff doesn’t happen in our careful plans, but in the interruptions. Real love reaches across boundaries, and differences. What would it look like if in the midst of the carefully planned General Conference unexpected love would show up? Rev. Brown prayed. Then asked people to share as they felt called to share where they have experienced unexpected love.

Ms. Maddie Pillow, Director, Communications and Advocate Editor, reported on her current work. Currently she is developing crisis communications for the Conference and planning the future of the Advocate. Ms. Pillow is also developing strategies for covering the upcoming Special Called Session of General Conference in February 2019 as well as any follow-up afterward. The Communications Office is also working on redesigning the Conference Website. In the process of migrating to the new site they will evaluate the current pages to determine whether they are fulfilling their goals.

Ms. Pillow also noted that the Board of Communication, Inc is working with the Communications Office on a transition plan for the Advocate. The Board is working on this process with the Communications Office. Currently, the Advocate is only reaching one percent of its audience. The current goals are increasing the reach of the Advocate and doing more digitally by going from paper based to a digital publication. They have developed a three prong approach: learn from others, use focus groups, and employ a quantitative survey.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the September 20, 2018 Common Table meeting. The motion was approved.

Rev. Mark Ogren, Director of Congregational Excellence, reported to the Common Table. He noted that he has been serving in this role for eight years. He described the Stakeholder video calls for the new church starts. During these calls Rev. Ogren asks the church planter to talk about Glory Sightings, self-care, and benchmarks. The District Superintendent for that church plant is also part of the call and can makes comments. Calls take place every eight to ten weeks. The Church planter helps set the benchmarks. In addition, the church planter tracks weekly worship attendance.

Rev. Ogren also spoke about efforts to bring renewal to existing churches. These efforts include the 5 Talent Academy, “How to Reach New People” training for existing churches and the Church Leadership Institute. Fresh Expressions is another initiative that takes place outside of the church walls. Rev. Brown explained that funding comes from the New Church Initiative apportionment and does not come through the Common Table. Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster prayed for Rev. Ogren and his ministry.

Mr. David Dommisse, Treasurer, gave a financial update. There has been an overall decline in October receipts. This may be tied to the erratic nature of the stock market in October. We are currently down a half a percent from last year. However, 2017 was very good and the Conference Mission and Ministries apportionment has stayed strong. Mr. Dommisse believes that income and expenses for budget line 401, Conference Mission & Ministries, will break even by the end of the year. These are the costs which the Common Table controls.

Mr. Dommisse reported that the Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) is trying to be proactive in regard to what might happen following the Special Called Session of General Conference. They are asking groups to consider a budget request that is 10 to 20 % smaller than previous budget requests. In this way CFA could see where each group could make cuts and how this might impact their ministry. Each group will project three budgets: one with no decreases, one that incorporates a 10% decrease and one incorporating a 20% decrease. This will give CFA a better idea about how decisions involving revenue should be made after the Special Called Session and in the following 10 to 18 months. Preparing multiple budgets should help the Conference prepare for whatever the future brings.

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

Mr. Paulo Lopes, Director, Next Generation Ministries, came to discuss his ministry. Rev. Brown noted that Mr. Lopes has been in his position for three years. It has evolved over the years from two full time and one part time ministry into one position. He has responsibility for three ministry areas: children, youth and young adults. He has developed leadership teams in each of those areas. The first team was the Campus Ministry team. Currently, he is working on developing the children’s ministry team. People are invited to be on the teams. There are never more than 12 people. Each commit to giving eight hours of their time a month. They are not an official conference ministry but an extension of Mr. Lopes’ ministry. Out of these groups come task teams that do specific tasks. This year they had a NextGen Summit that took place in five geographical areas simultaneously. Part of the work of these teams is to cultivate leadership skills in others. He mentioned that the other conference directors have been meeting as an accountability group monthly in order to support one another in ministry.

Mr. Lopes is also facilitating the Bishop’s steering committee using some of the leadership skills he has used in NextGen ministries. This is related to implementing the Bishop’s vision throughout the Conference. He talked briefly about the gaps, especially the gap between youth ministry in churches and campus ministry. Many people fall into the gap between these two ministry areas. He is looking at developing leadership to help connect people to community as they transition from one stage to the next. He spoke about how trust needs to be developed between campus ministry and local churches so there can be a hand off between local church and campus ministry rather than having a culture of possessiveness. Campus ministers are reminded that they are an extension of the church. He noted that he is more concerned about strategy than specific curriculum. Rev. Jonathan Page prayed for Mr. Lopes and his ministry.

A written vote was taken on the four directors of the Common Table ministries: Rev. Rowley, Ms. Pillow, Rev. Ogren and Mr. Lopes. They were unanimously re-elected to their positions.

Ms. Shirley Cauffman, Chair, Personnel Committee, reported that since the position of the director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership has been vacant the duties connected to that position has been divided as follows:

* Rev. Ogren is the resource for the Board of Laity
* Rev. Glen Rowley is the resource for the Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA).
* Rev. Brown is the resource person for the area of Disabilities and Inclusivity.
* Ms. Pillow is the resource person for the commission on the Status and Role of Women (COSROW).
* Mr. Lopes is the resource person for the Board of Discipleship

Currently this arrangement has not overburdened any particular person and so the Personnel Committee has decided to continue the current arrangement.

The Common Table looked at the budget for 2019 in order to consider the three different levels of budget for 2020 per Mr. Dommisse’s earlier remarks. A question was asked about how to treat the line for Campus Ministry, Capital Improvements. The response was that Common Table should prepare a budget that is reduced by $645,000 and by $322,500. Currently, there is no one from the Common Table on the committee that is considering what to do with the Campus Ministry buildings. Rev. Brown will speak to Bishop Lewis about placing someone from Common Table on that work group since the funds are under the Common Table budget. A consensus was reached that a sub-group should be formed that would communicate with the groups that report to the Common Table and then explore ways to project cuts based on that communication. Rev Brown asked for volunteers to be part of that sub-group and David Dommisse volunteered to help through historical reports of spending in the different areas.

The Asian American Ministers' Association submitted a proposal requesting $2,000 to help fund a retreat. The Program Committee recommends approval. The recommendation was accepted.

The Grants Committee request a change to the form for program grants which currently reads “Every conference ministry should advance the conference vision.” The new form would read: “*Every conference ministry should advance the conference mission.”* Under **Alignment** the change would add a new number 1. “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The current 1 and 2 would be renumbered. Under **Impact** there would be a new number 1. “How will this proposed ministry make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?” The current 1 and 2 would be renumbered. This new wording would better reflect the current Conference vision statement. The recommendation was approved.

Rev. Brown presented the Grants Committee report. The Committee made the follow recommendations: Una Familia, $10,000; Just Neighbor’s/Staunton, $1,000; Nurturing the Greater VCU Community, $5,000; and the Joseph Initiative, $2,500. The Redwood UMC NETworX made a request as well but no funds were recommended. The recommendations were approved.

Rev. Brown shared an update on the Judicial Council’s declaratory decision on the constitutionality of the three plans forth by the Commission on a Way Forward. The Judicial Council ruled the Traditional Plan contained multiple petitions that were unconstitutional. It was determined that the One Church Plan would require a change of 3 sentences in order to be constitutional. The Connectional Conference Plan proposed changes to the Constitution as well as the Discipline. The Judicial Council can decide on any proposed legislation but not on constitutional amendments.

Mr. Harper asked the Common Table to pray for the delegation and Bishops. He asked that everyone pray for the delegates that are meeting at Williamsburg United Methodist Church January 15-19.

The Common Table made a covenant to pray at 2:23 daily for the upcoming Special Session of General Conference.

The next meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality will be February 21, 2019. Mr. Harper closed the meeting with prayer. The meeting was adjourned at 2:39.