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 21, 2019

The Common Table met on February 21, 2019 at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen, Virginia in 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)

Rev. Larry Lenow (2019)

Ms. Unsil Choi (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). Unable to attend were Rev. Jonathan Page, Rev. Rachel Chen, Rev. Rob Lough and Bishop Sharma D. Lewis.

Chairperson Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:04 with a word of welcome. He read 2 Corinthians 15:58: “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” He asked those present to break into groups and consider the question, “What difference does it make to know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain?” Responses from the group included: It can relieve anxiety, it reminds us that the Church of Jesus Christ will prevail and it assures us beyond our present labor, God prevails. Rev Brown prayed.

Rev. Brown introduced Rev. Ted Smith, who will take over as Director of Connectional Ministries in July of 2019.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the November 8, 2018 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality with two corrections. The motion was approved.

Rev. Larry Lenow, gave a report on the Virginia Council of Churches (VCC). This year a new interim General Minister, Rev. Mary Anne Glover, was installed. The Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church has been a member of the Council for over seventy years. VCC is in a period of rebuilding and reconnecting with the 30 plus denominations that make up the Council. Rev. Glover hopes to focus on issues of race relations, conditions for migrant workers and inclusivity. The current level of support at $10,000 is comparable to the other large denominations such as the Roman Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church.

Rev. Brown noted that the VCC has not applied for a grant this year. The deadline was February 1, 2019. A motion was made to grant an exception to the deadline for VCC. The motion was approved.

Rev. Brown announced that the PTSD Work Group led by Rev. Darin Busé will have a report at the next Common Table meeting.

Ms. MaryKaye Cochran brought a report from Congregational Excellence. Director of the Congregational Excellence, Rev. Mark Ogren, is a delegate to General Conference and on his way to the special session of General Conference. She reported that one Fresh Expressions Vision Day has been held and five more Vision Days are planned throughout the Conference. Fresh Expression is for churches that are mission shaped and want to increase their community engagement. The Virginia Conference has partnered with Fresh Expressions, US. Their goal is to reach those who are not yet part of any church.

Director of NextGen Ministries Paulo Lopes brought a report from the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries. All of the Campus Ministries in the Conference received ministry reviews from the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries. There will be quarterly reviews going forward. There is excellent ministry happening among the Campus Ministries but it is only reaching a small number of people.

Among existing Campus Ministries: George Mason does not have a building, the Pace Center has a building that is “in a prime location but is not a prime building,” the University of Mary Washington campus ministry has a building owned by the Conference but the ministry is struggling and Virginia Tech has a flourishing ministry but a crumbling building. After a three-year study, it appears that renovating the Virginia Tech building would be more cost effective and more feasible than building new.

The Council on Finance and Administration reported at the 2018 Annual Conference that the bishop would appoint a task force to determine the feasibility of maintaining and improving the existing Wesley Foundation properties currently used for the purpose of campus ministry. A report will be made to the to the 2019 Annual Conference.

Director of Communications Madeline Pillow is on her way to General Conference. Rev. Brown brought a report in her absence. The Advocate is one of the oldest publications in the United States; however, on February 12 the Board of Communications voted to cease producing the Advocate in print and on-line as of December 2019. Currently, there are 2,500 subscribers, down 50 % from ten years ago. Going forward, the focus should be on what can be done in the future to improve communication. A motion was made to support the decision of the Board of Communications to cease production of the Advocate. The motion was approved.

Treasurer David Dommisse brought the financial report for 2018. Receipts were down 2.65% from 2017. A large drop came from a single church with an apportionment over $200,000 going from paying 100 per cent of its apportionment in 2017, to paying almost none in 2018. He noted that in 2017, a large volume of receipts was paid in December which was likely related to changes in the tax law. Second mile giving was down 5.58 % in 2018. Mr. Dommisse noted this may reflect a new reality for the Conference.

The meeting broke for lunch and Rev. Ted Smith blessed the food.

Rev. Brown reported on the Common Table Budget for 2020. The Personnel Committee has recommended that the position of Director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership Excellence not be filled. This reduces the personnel budget. The recommendation to discontinue the print Advocate also reduces the 2020 budget. Currently the Conference Missional Ministries Board supports 3 people working in the field. This can be reduced to two people, one on the Eastern Shore and one at the Henry Fork Center. Connections 21 interns will be eliminated. This budget is $158,800 lower than the 2018 budget. It reflects no adjustments to grant funding.

The Common Table was asked by the Council on Finance and Administration to project an additional budget that is reduced by ten per cent. This budget would reduce the line for Campus Ministry by $85,000. It was suggested that Board and Agency administration could be reduced as they usually return some of their budgeted amount every year. A reduction of Special and Sustaining Grants as well as Benevolence Grants would then take the budget down the rest of the way to reach a goal of a 10 % reduction. Further reductions in all of these areas would be necessary to reduce the budget by a total of 20 %.

The 2020 budget for the Common Table was proposed with contingencies for 10% and 20% reductions if either is needed. The proposed total 401 budget was $2,816,200 (see report). The budget was approved.

Rev. Brown presented a report on ministry assignments. This report shows the director and the administrative assistant assigned to each board or agency. The Personnel Committee recommends approval of the report. It was approved.

The Conference has a legal defense fund. A lawsuit has been filed against the Conference. Conference Lawyer Steven Brown has not been served with papers yet. A legal defense is being prepared, and preparations have a cost.

Rev. Brown noted that a draft of the Report of the Common Table for Annual Conference has been made available to the members of the Common Table. He asked everyone to read it and send him comments.

Rev. Brown noted that on March 4,2019 Bishop Lewis will share a state of the church address through Live Streaming about the results of the Special Called Session of General Conference. This will include an hour set aside for questions and answers. Ms. Pillow and Ms. Stokes will screen the questions.

The next meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality is scheduled for March 21, 2019. Rev. Lyle Morton prayed over the group and Rev. Brown adjourned the meeting at 1:57 p.m.