The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

February 22, 2018

The Common Table met on February 22, 2018 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 and Vice Chair)

Mr. David Dommisse (Treasurer)

Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster (Cabinet Representative)

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

Rev. Gary Miller (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and

Advocacy Representative)

Ms. Iris Gunter Smith (2018)

Rev. Larry Lenow (2019)

Rev. Rachel Chen (2019)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Ms. Unsil Choi (2020)

Dr. Carlos Liceaga (2021)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

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

Also present were Rev. Tom Joyce, Assistant to the Bishop, as the Bishop’s representative and Ms. Bev Myers, Executive Assistant, in the office of the Director of Connectional Ministries.

Bishop Sharma Lewis and Rev. Chris Bennett were unable to attend.

Chair of the Common Table, Rev. Marc Brown, opened the meeting at 10:04 with a word of welcome. He read from Mark 10:46-52 which recounts the healing of Bartimaeus. Rev. Brown pointed out that Jesus on his journey to the cross, stands still when he hears Bartimaeus cry out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” We are hearing cries for mercy from those in Parkland, Florida and others around the world. He encouraged the Common Table to listen for those in need of mercy. He then prayed over the group.

Members of the committee were invited to share how it was with their souls.

The minutes from the November 9, 2017 were approved with one spelling correction.

Rev. Brown updated the group on the Conference’s visioning process. The Strategic Collaboration Team made up of 45 people meets quarterly with the Bishop and Rev. Christian Washington, United Methodist pastor and founder of REAL Coaching. A smaller group of 15 people acts as a steering committee and uses the Spiritual Leadership Inc. (SLI) loving, learning, leading model. Mr. Paulo Lopes, Director of Next Gen Ministries is the facilitator for this group. This is an effort to change the culture of the Conference in a very intentional, organized way.

The Common Table received a report from Director of Congregational Excellence Mark Ogren. He described some of the different ways that new church plants are being developed and how existing churches are being strengthened through assessment and training efforts. He also discussed the funding of Church Development. A question was asked about the current model of Church Development and Hispanic church plants as there are currently no Hispanic new church plants. Rev. Ogren lifted up some of the Hispanic ministries that are connected to established faith communities. He noted that in planting Hispanic faith communities financial support from the Conference may need to be on an extended time table. At the conclusion of Rev. Ogren’s report, Rev. Rob Lough prayed for his ministry.

Treasurer David Dommisse delivered the financial report. There was a 2.33% increase in receipts collected in 2017 over the previous year. He attributed this to Bishop Lewis’s attention to apportionments, the strength of the stock market and the impending tax changes at the end of 2017. Second mile giving was up over 53% in 2017 which were largely in the General Board of Global Ministries category. In the past large numbers of disasters have been a drag on receipts but that was not the case in 2017. Conference reserve targets have been met. He complimented the Common Table on their attention to costs.

Dr. Carlos Liceaga updated the Program Ministry Committee’s report on the Clergy Women’s Event. He received answers from the event planners to the questions that were proposed by the Common Table at its previous meeting. The Clergy Women’s Event received $2,500 last year. The Program Ministry Committee recommends $7,500 for the Clergy Women’s event. The recommendation was accepted unanimously.

He presented the Program Ministry Committee’s report on developing a method for measuring results after grants are awarded. They propose requiring end of year reporting from all programs receiving funds. Reports would be made using the form titled “Report for Program Ministry.” No funds would be made available for the following year until a report on the previous year is submitted. The proposed deadline for 2018 would be March 1. A question was raised: would the March 1 deadline allow grant recipients enough time to fill out reports? A suggestion was made to use the March 1 deadline but build in flexibility to extend the deadline as needed. A deadline of January 1 was proposed for subsequent years. A suggestion was made to change the deadline to January 15 and add that these reports would be for ongoing ministry programs. The recommendation was approved with the change in language and the January 1 deadline changed to January 15.

The Program Ministry Committee recommends approval of the Next Gen Summit (Young People's Ministry on Tour) ministry grant for $7,000. It was approved.

Rev. Jonathan Page prayed for Mr. Dommisse and his department and then blessed the food as the group broke for lunch.

After lunch, Director of Communications and Advocate Editor, Ms. Madeline Pillow, presented a report on the work of Communications. One of the areas she was concerned with was crisis communications. She is working with a consultant for a year as she gains experience in this area. The future of the Advocate has been reviewed. Communications is going to take a year to collect data and work through what the Advocate could look like in the 21st century. Mr. Forrest White has been hired as a part time news associate. The communications staff also includes Ms. Brenda Capen, Webmaster; Ms. Pam Culler, Administrative Assistant; and Mr. Nick Ruxton, Videographer.

Ms. Pillow said that a comprehensive redesign of the website is in the works. Currently, information is dispersed through the Advocate, e-Advocate, Sunday Advocate, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest and Vimeo. In the future, instead of offering training in communication through district training events, Ms. Pillow will start working with district superintendents to come up with training that is tailor made for individual districts. Different districts have different needs.

The Daily Advocate is going away due to the increased cost of publication. In its place there will be a report put out the day after Conference that members of Conference can use to report back to their congregations. Rev. Brown complimented Ms. Pillow for her calm presence and leadership during Annual Conference.

Mr. Chris Malak came and described his role as the newly hired data base manager. He reports to three areas: the Council on Finance and Administration, the Common Table, and Pensions and Benefits. The current data base has four distinct areas that hold data: the treasurer’s office, Pensions and Benefits, EVC and Raiser’s Edge which contains donor information. Currently any changes to the database need to be entered into four different places. The proposed solution is to create a custom built system that is a combination data warehouse and data entry application. It will cater to the data fields that the conference needs. There will be a five phase plan of implementation. The program has the working title Unity.

Mr. Warren Harper gave a report from the Board of Discipleship recommending that the Discipleship Circles be allowed to die a peaceful death. The Board acknowledges that Circles have worked well in some places and suggest that there be a review of what went wrong and what worked. The Board of Discipleship will no longer take oversight of the program. Ms. Iris Gunter Smith said she hopes that churches will continue to offer small groups that look at the needs of their communities – going beyond offering Bible study.

Rev. Brown asked for volunteers to look at the 2019 proposed budget and see if it needs to be adjusted up or down. Rev. Page and Ms. Chen will review the budget and report at the March Common Table meeting.

Rev. Brown brought up the presentation of the 2019 Annual Conference Common Table Report. He asked if it would be appropriate to recognize Ms. Pat Hickman’s forty years of service to the Conference in the Common Table Report. There was agreement that because of the length of her service, it would be reasonable to recognize her at Conference.

The Virginia Conference Historical Society will consider a motion at Annual Conference to designate William Watters’ Grave in McLean, VA as a Historic Landmark and will present the motion at the March Common Table. Paragraph 1712.1.a of the Discipline states:  “historic sites are designated by formal action of the annual conference within whose regions the site is located.”  The William Watters’ Grave, formally known as United Methodist Historic Site No. 7 was designated a historic site by the United Methodist Church on July 11, 1969.

The recommendation that the submission of resolutions be abolished was discussed. Rev. Brown noted that the motion could be presented with the information that the cost of annual conference per minute is $930.00. This figure was reached by estimating a $300.00 cost plus mileage per lay member and the Annual Conference budget for conference. There was discussion about groups who might want to present information at conference. However, any decision about what is presented from the platform is the Bishop’s. Rev. Brown will discuss this with Bishop Lewis.

Rev. Overby Webster suggested that Rev. Chris Bennett’s presentation on the Accelerator Program for the Roanoke District Board of Missions be included in the report of the Common Table’ Annual Conference report.

Ms. Smith led in prayer and Rev. Brown adjourned the meeting at 3:03.