The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

February 23, 2017

The Common Table met on February 23, 2017at the United Methodist Conference Center in Glen Allen, Virginia in room 120. Members present were:

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

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

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

Mr. David Dommisse (Conference Treasurer)

Rev. Don Gibson (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and

Advocacy Representative)

Rev. Chris Bennett (2018)

Rev. Larry Lenow (2019)

Ms. Rachel Miller (2019)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Ms. Martha Reed (2017)

Ms. Iris Gunter Smith (2018)

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

Also present was Ms. Bev Myers (Executive Assistant in the office of Director of Connectional Ministries).

Not present were, Bishop Sharma Lewis, Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster, Ms. Jennifer Lee and Rev. Sherry Daniels. Bishop Lewis and Rev. Overby Webster were in a Cabinet meeting. Ms. Jennifer Lee had a work commitment.

Chairperson Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:01 with a word of welcome. He read from Matthew 5:2-16. Following this Rev. Brown prayed.

A motion was made and seconded to approve the minutes from the November 10, 2016 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality. They were approved as written.

Director of Ministries with Young People Paulo Lopes joined the meeting and reported on his work. Currently he has two active teams he is working with. The Ministry with Young People team meets for eight hours each month. This group is working with a coach but that relationship will be ending soon. The other group consists of campus ministers who have begun meeting monthly to share ideas and support one another. A children’s ministry operational team is starting up. There are now two volunteers leading this team using the ministry with young people as a model.

Chair of the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries Rob Lough spoke about Ignite which has been a hybrid campus ministry in Norfolk, VA. It needs to become a Wesley Foundation connected to Old Dominion University. A Wesley Foundation already exists at Old Dominion University. There will be a cost of $5000 to Higher Education and Campus Ministries.

He then spoke about Rev. Delano Douglas and his work as Campus Minister at Virginia State University (VSU) with F.L.O.W. as well as his work at Ettrick United Methodist Church. F.L.O.W. will become a Wesley Foundation. F.L.O.W. is currently the only campus ministry at VSU. This will be the first Wesley Foundation at a historically Black college in the Virginia Annual Conference.

The Committee on Higher Education and Campus Ministry recommends that the campus ministry F.L.O.W. at Virginia State University become a Wesley Foundation and Ignite Ministry at Old Dominion University become their Wesley Foundation. The recommendation was unanimously accepted. The two above changes would be at a cost at $17,500 to the Higher Education budget: $12,500 for F.L.O.W. and $5,000 for Ignite.

Rev. Lough also suggested that Mr. Lopes have an administrative assistant dedicated to his position. In the past, Rev. Lopes’ position was held by three different people. Rev. Chris Bennett suggested an overall review of staff positions that answer to the Common Table. There was discussion about the organizational structure of the Conference. Rev. Brown will speak with Ms. Shirley Cauffman, Chair of the Personnel Committee.

Director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership Excellence Cheryl Edley-Worford and Director of Justice and Missional Excellence Glenn Rowley joined the meeting. Rev. Rowley presented a draft of a letter composed by some members of the Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA). It addresses oppression and injustice especially as they are sanctioned through current policies affecting immigrants within the United States. Rev. Rowley asked for feedback. Common Table members noted, it would be helpful to include concrete actions for readers to take or resources for congregations who desire to take action. Also it was suggested that the letter be communicated in multiple language rather than English alone. The ways in which the completed letter would be disseminated were also discussed.

Rev. Rowley spoke about the recent two week mission trip to Cambodia. He shared a video from the trip. The team was asked to come to Cambodia and teach. He also went on to Viet Nam to connect with a missionary there.

At noon Ms. Rachel Miller blessed the food and the group broke for lunch.

Rev. Brown showed two videos from the series the Three Minute Stir: Stir #3 with Lindsey Baynham and Stir #1 with Paulo Lopes. These were put together by Mr. Nick Ruxton on the Communication Staff.

Director of Congregational Excellence, Rev. Mark Ogren brought a report. He spoke about the current status of new church starts. He reviewed the six different types of financial applications that have come out of his office’s experience with new faith communities.

The requests to fund new faith communities now exceed available funds. A decision making matrix has been created to evaluate requests for funding so decisions can be made about which new church starts to support. Rev. Ogren asked for input regarding the selection process. Rev. Lough cited ¶ 722. “Restrictions on Closed Meetings” in the *2016 Book of the Discipline*. *The Book of Discipline* prohibits closed meetings under certain circumstances.

Rev. Ogren explained that the presenter of the new faith community and the associated District Superintendent are not in attendance when the Church Development Team considers funding a proposal. Likewise, during the voting process only Church Development Team members are present. The possibility of creating an appeal process was discussed. Mr. David Dommisse pointed out that the appeal process is the Annual Conference. A sub-committee will be formed to look into this at greater length.

Rev. Bennett reported that the feedback summary from the 2017 Ministry Accelerator is available on the portal. Further discussion was tabled until the next meeting of the Common Table.

The Board of Communications is one of the few incorporated boards, other than the Trustees. The question was raised, “Why is this Board incorporated?” Virginia United Methodist Pension, Inc. and the Virginia United Methodist Foundation are incorporated, but they have assets and employees that are completely separate from the Annual Conference. Neither of those situations apply to the Board of Communications so there is no legal protection for the Board of Communications through incorporation.

Treasurer David Dommisse gave the Financial Report. In 2016, 87% of apportionments were collected. Before the end of the year Bishop Lewis called every church that had paid zero apportionments. Income was in excess of expenses for 2016. For the first time since the financial crisis the Conference exceeded its reserve target. The target is to have 15% of the budget in reserve.

Ms. Martha Reed chair of program ministries presented the Ministry Proposal for the 2017 Bishop’s Convocation on Prayer. This is the fifth year of the Convocation on Prayer. The request is for $6,000 which is about $3000 more than previous years. The cost is for the speaker, Rev. Juanita Rasmus and travel costs for the conveners. The Program Ministry Committee recommends approval. It was unanimously approved.

Rev. Bennett presented the Grants Committee Recommendations. The committee asked for the input of the Common Table in deciding on funding for GraceInside and the Virginia Council of Churches. Rev. Lough made a motion to maintain Virginia Council of Churches grant for $54,000 but it was tabled. It was recommended that the Grants Committee begin a conversation with them about the fruitfulness of their ministry. Their grant application did not supply those details. The Grants Committee recommended that the Society of St. Andrew receive, $8,000 and the Virginia Interfaith Center, $7500. The recommendation was approved. Funding for GraceInside and VCC was tabled until the next meeting of the Common Table in March.

The 2018 Common Table Budget was reviewed. The consensus was reached to put off voting on the 2018 budget until the March 23, 2017 meeting. It was suggested that someone approach Paulo about what funds he will need as he rolls out the new team he mentioned when he spoke with the group earlier.

Two motions need to be made at the upcoming Virginia Annual Conference. One is a motion to establish F.L.O.W. as a Wesley Foundation at Virginia State University. The second is a motion that the same delegates be used for a called General Conference if one occurs before the 2020 General Conference. They were seconded and approved unanimously.

Putting together a presentation on the work of the Common Table was discussed. Rev. Brown will place initial ideas in a document on the Common Table portal for the groups review and comments at the next meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality.

The Rev. Brown led the group in prayer and adjourned the meeting at 3:01.