The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

March 23, 2017

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

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

Rev. Kathleen Overby Webster (Cabinet Representative)

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

Mr. David Dommisse (Conference Treasurer)

Rev. Chris Bennett (2018)

Rev. Sherry Daniels (2017)

Rev. Larry Lenow (2019)

Ms. Rachel Miller (2019)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Ms. Martha Reed (2017)

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

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

Unable to attend were Bishop Sharma Lewis, Conference Lay Leader Warren Harper, Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns Advocacy Representative, Rev. Don Gibson, Ms. Jennifer Lee and Ms. Iris Gunter Smith.

Chair of the Common Table Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:06 with a word of welcome. He read Psalm 100 including verse 5, “For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” He pointed out that we are part of the biblical generations of faith. Whatever may happen, whatever lies ahead for the United Methodist Church, God is faithful. He mentioned the Annual Conference’s week of prayer from April 2 - April 8, 2017 and reminded us that the Bishop encourages us to be in prayer for God’s will to be done. Rev. Brown led in prayer.

Rev. Sherry Daniels brought the revised 2018 Conference Benevolence Grants report. The Grants committee had a meeting with Rev. Jonathan Barton, General Minister of Virginia Council of Churches. Rev. Daniels recommended that the Virginia Council of Churches (VCC) receive $40,000 and GraceInside receive $134,500. She asked that the record note that although we all have differences of opinion, we can sit down together and have critical conversations even when these may be difficult conversations. It was noted that Bishop Lewis is the Virginia Annual Conference’s primary representative to the VCC. The question was raised is Bishop Lewis aware the Common Table is considering cutting the funding to the VCC?

Rev. Rob Lough made a three part motion: 1) Approve $40,000 for the VCC. 2) Have Rev. Brown consult with Bishop Lewis. 3) If Bishop Lewis has concerns about reducing the grant, revisit the vote via email. There was no second. Rev. Jonathan Page suggested that GraceInside receive $134,500 and VCC receive $50,000. Rev. Larry Lenow seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. As Bishop Lewis is the primary representative to VCC, she should be informed that the VCC grant for 2018 has been reduced. The Common Table will ask the Virginia Council of Churches to explore and disclose their spiritual and social justice fruitfulness as well as the level of support given by other ecumenical partners.

A motion was made and seconded to approve, as corrected, the minutes from the February 23, 2017 meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality. They were approved.

Rev. Chris Bennett brought a report on the Ministry Accelerator and presented three possible proposals for changing the incubator:

1. Add a day to the incubator process.
2. Develop the Incubator on a District Level.
3. Develop a work group through the Common Table.

A motion was made and seconded to develop a work group from the Common Table to work through the three proposals. The motion was approved unanimously.

Director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership Excellence, Ms. Cheryl Edley-Worford reported that the Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy (CEMCA) and the Commission on the Status and Role of Women will work together to monitor inclusivity during Annual Conference. Director of Justice and Missional Excellence, Rev. Glen Rowley will work with CEMCA regarding Native American and Immigration concerns. All other areas of CEMCA’s work will be overseen by Ms. Edley-Worford.

Rev. Rowley shared a report about Immigration. There is a United Methodist taskforce on Immigration through the General Board of Church and Society. He attended a meeting held in Washington, D. C. His takeaway was that we cannot avoid dealing with immigration issues. He is receiving calls asking, “What can we do to reflect our faith, in relation to undocumented workers.” He recommends that there be a taskforce to look into issues around immigration. Any decision regarding the establishment of a taskforce must come from the Bishop.

Rev. Rowley gave a report on the disaster response within the Virginia Conference. The house in Tappahannock being built from the ground up will be completed in April. The house in Waverly is almost complete. There are three more houses to be built in Evergreen with tornado recovery wrapping up by July. There are 23 cases being worked in the Virginia Beach area for recovery from Hurricane Matthew.

Rev. Rowley asked for the blessing of the Common Table to form a committee of people who know how to deal with the financial and organizational aspects of disaster response. This would be largely an advisory committee that he could call on as needs arise. The Common Table gave their blessing to the endeavor.

The Director of Congregational Excellence, Rev. Mark Ogren brought a revised Church Development Team Grant Process. Before nonmembers of the Church Development Team are asked to leave a meeting so a vote can be taken, there will be a public vote to close the meeting – this must be approved by an affirmative public vote of at least ¾ of the voting members present. This is a recommendation of the Church Development Team. The recommendation was accepted.

The group broke for lunch and Rev. Larry Lenow prayed for the work of the Conference as he blessed the food.

Ms. Martha Reed reported on quadrennial emerging funds. She recommended a reduction of funds for Engaging New Pastors in Mission from $2000 to $1000. Funds allocated for this purpose were not being spent. The recommendation was accepted.

Voices of Youth has been using their funds to buy t-shirts. The Emerging Funds Committee is asking for an accounting of how they spend their funds in the future. Ms. Reed also noted that the allocation for the Bishop’s Convocation on Prayer is being reduced to $3,500.00

Ms. Martha Reed then reported on the current program ministry requests. The following groups requested funds:

Focus 2020 $10,000

Southeastern Jurisdiction Historical Society $3,000

Connections 21 Interns (formerly Conference Interns) $2,500

Young Peoples Ministry Lead Team Initiative $7,500

Also Ministry with Young People is requesting $ 5,000 for Small Group Leadership for Youth Retreats. Director of Ministries with Young People, Mr. Paulo Lopes came and answered questions about the youth retreats.

The Program Ministry Proposal committee recommends funding all five of the above programs for the stated amounts. The recommendation was accepted.

The Personnel Committee recommends changing the name of Office of Ministries with Young People to Center for Next Generation Ministry. This office includes Higher Education and Campus Ministry which is not reflected in the current name. The goal of the office is to develop next generation leaders. The proposed team name is Next Generation Leadership Team. The recommendation was accepted.

Treasurer David Dommisse reported that receipts are up. February is too early to make long term projections but things are going very well.

The Board of Discipleship is asking for Christian Education Sunday to be reinstated. It was noted that there was no information given as to how the collected funds would be used. If there is a real need the program fund can be increased. The request was not accepted. However, the Board of Discipleship should be encouraged to submit a ministry proposal if they have a specific request.

Jonathan Page gave a report on the Emerging Ministry Cooperative as it cycles through its first year.

It was noted that the Conference Programs budget had all but 6,400 spoken for. However, the outsourced Graphic Design line was included under personnel costs where it didn’t belong. Rev. Chris Bennet made a motion to accept the 2018 budget. The motion was approved (see report).

The Common Table presentation for the 2017 Annual Conference was discussed. Ms. Rachel Miller and Rev. Page volunteered to assist in putting the report together. Rev. Daniels pointed out that the Task Force for Strengthening the Black Church in the Virginia Conference is now known as Focus 20/20. A significant ministry of the Common Table lifted up for inclusion in the report was the Faithful Aging Conference. Also it was noted that the Virginia a Conference had the largest attendance at the Black Pastors’ Convocation held in Atlanta, January 2017. These three items will be added to the report.

Rev. Brown thanked Rev. Daniels and Ms. Reed for their faithful service to the Common Table. This will be their last meeting.

Rev. Brown led the group in prayer and adjourned the meeting at 2:53.