The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

September 21, 2017

The Common Table met on September 21, 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)

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

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. Chris Bennett (2018)

Rev. Rachel Miller (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, Rev. Larry Lenow and Mr. David Dommisse were unable to attend.

Chairperson Marc Brown opened the meeting at 10:09. Members of the Common Table introduced themselves. Rev. Brown welcomed everyone and reviewed the purpose of the Common Table which is to coordinate and prioritize the ministries and resources of the Virginia Conference. He briefly reviewed its history. Rev. Brown read Luke 4:17-21. He led the group in prayer.

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

Ms. Julie Cheatham and Ms. Judy Mann with Celebration Women came to request that their group become a recognized ministry of the Virginia Conference. This would allow Celebrate Women to set up a display table at Annual Conference. Ms. Cheatham then described the history and purpose of Celebration Women.

The question was posed, “Why was a women’s group needed that was unconnected to United Methodist Women (UMW)?” Ms. Cheatham answered, “Celebration Women focuses on worship and personal growth in faith while the UMW’s focus is on mission. She also noted that women from other denominations can participate; however, two thirds of the leadership board must be composed of United Methodists.

In order to display at the Virginia Annual Conference a group must be a part of an Annual Conference Board or Agency, or financially supported by the Virginia Annual Conference. There was discussion regarding the precedent that would be set if Celebration Women, which does not fall into any of those categories, received permission to display at conference. It was decided that Rev. Brown would have a conversation with Mary Jane Rawley, President of the United Methodist Women, and Rev. Don Jamison, Chair of the Board of Discipleship. Rev. Brown will contact Ms. Cheatham and Ms. Mann and encourage them to work with these two bodies.

Ms. Cheryl Edley-Worford, Director of Inclusivity and Lay Leadership, and Ms. Stacy Roberts, Director of Camp Rainbow Connection, came to propose a change to the Executive Committee of the Camp Rainbow Connection. The changes would stipulate that the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Executive Committee shall be members of the United Methodist Connection. The motion to accept the change was made and seconded. It was approved unanimously.

Rev. Brown gave an update on the conference vision of disciples being “life-long learners who influence others to serve.” An oversight group has been formed to facilitate the vision being carried out and members of the Common Table were included in this group.

Rev. Brown presented the Finance Report as Mr. David Dommissee was at a General Church meeting. On a Conference level there has been a significant increase in apportionments received.

Rev. Brown brought the Personnel Committee Report. Ms. Madeline Pillow has been working as the Advocate Editor and the Director of Communications with the understanding that the workload of the combined positions would be revisited. Ms. Pillow has written up a job description for a part time news associate. The Personnel Committee recommends hiring someone to fill this position. This position would not be restricted to working with print media. The recommendation was accepted unanimously.

A job description has come from the Data Group which consists of the primary users of the conference data bases, Ms. Pillow; Rev. Meredith NcNabb, Director of Clergy Excellence; Mr. John Fuller, executive director of Virginia United Methodist Pensions, Inc.; Mr. David Dommisse, Conference Treasurer; and Mr. Bryan Compton, Manager of Technology along with Rev. Peter Moon, the group’s cabinet representative. The job description is for the position of Data Manager. There is adequate funding for this position. This new position will need to be approved by the Virginia United Methodist Pensions Board and the Council on Finance and Administration as well. The Personnel Committee recommends the hiring of a Data Manager. The recommendation was approved unanimously.

Rev. Gary Miller prayed over the food and the group broke for lunch. It was proposed that the Personnel Committee explore the possibility of creating another administrative position.

Dr. Carlos Liceaga, Chair of Program Ministry Committee recommended the Lay Servant Academy receive $2,500. This would help offset the cost of housing the volunteer staff and instructors. The recommendation was approved unanimously.

Rev. Chris Bennett gave a brief description of the work of the Grants Committee. Special grants fund the first three years of innovative programs aimed at outreach. Sustaining grants are for ministries that are in need of support beyond the three year time frame. Benevolence grants are for groups outside of the United Methodist Church and are funded through the Conference Benevolence apportionment. Special and sustaining grants are funded through the Conference Benevolence apportionment, the United Methodist Women, and the Church Extension Fund. Grants are not for personnel costs or capital funding. The FaithJustice Forum requested funding for a one time conversation. The committee does not recommend supporting this because it is not an outreach. Also Staunton Helping Staunton did not meet the qualifications of an outreach ministry.

The Grants Committee presented the 2018 Special and Sustaining Grants reports and recommended the ministries as per their report. The recommendations were accepted as presented unanimously. (See Report)

Rev. Bennett presented a proposal requesting $15,200 to fund the Ministry Accelerator Program. A motion was made to fund the Accelerator through the remaining funds of the grants committee. The motion was approved.

Rev. Bennett reported on the discussion that he, Rev. Brown and Rev. John Barton, General Minister of the Virginia Council of Churches (VCC), had regarding the funding VCC receives from The Virginia Annual Conference. With the anticipated retirement of Rev. Barton, VCC seems to be seeking an identity and a direction. Currently, The Virginia Annual Conference is the biggest financial supporter of the VCC. Ways to help the VCC were discussed. Rev. Brown will talk to Rev. Larry Lenow and ask him to become involved in the process of discernment as the fruitfulness of the connection between the Annual Conference and the VCC is considered. This would inform decisions about funding VCC in the future.

Rev. Marc Brown raised questions about what should be posted and advertised on the mail list servers ClergyNet and LaityNet. A posting about a meeting of the Wesleyan Covenant Association by Rev. Keith Boyette raised the question. A suggestion was made to send a disclaimer through ClergyNet and LaityNet, that postings on these two entities are not endorsed by the Conference. Rev. Brown will share this with the Board of Communications.

The Goodson Academy for Preaching is meeting on October 3. The Bishop’s Foundation revived it, but does not feel that its oversight should be their on-going responsibility. This leaves the Goodson Academy without organizational oversight. The Goodson Academy for Preaching has a board but the members are not officially elected. Following the departures of Bishop’s Goodson, Stockton and Pennel from the Conference, people donated money in honor of the individual bishops. The donations were collected in three separate funds each earmarked for a particular purpose. The money donated in honor of Bishop Goodson was earmarked to encourage preaching and a board was attached to administer the fund. Eventually a suggestion was made to fold the three funds into one and call it the Bishops’ Foundation. The Bishops’ Foundation does not want to be a program group. They want to be a funding group. However Goodson Academy is a program. It was suggested that the discussion be tabled until after the Goodson Academy convenes on October 3. It may fit into the Bishop’s Vision of Life Long Learning. General consensus was that the Goodson Academy appears to be a good fit with the mission of Clergy Excellence.

Ms. Angie Williams, Volunteer Coordinator for UMFS and Rev. Glenn Rowley, Director of the Center for Justice and Missional Excellence, came and brought a report about the Open Table: From Poverty to Community. Ms. Williams explained some of the programs that inspired Open Table. She described the high fidelity wraparound model of care which brings multiple agencies together to assist individual families and children, particularly to keep children in families and out of institutions. Mr. John Katov is using the social services’ wraparound model to a faith based setting to assist people in breaking free of poverty. Transactional ministries with the poor are what we usually have. We lack a model of how to have a transformational relationship instead. The program calls for a local church to recruit 6-12 people who will meet for one hour a week for one year.

UMFS is using the Open Table with children about to age out of foster care and with families at risk of losing custody of their children. The entire cost of Open Table is around $1,500 to $2,000 per table. The Open Table is looking for the endorsement of the Conference. Rev. Lough made a motion that the Common Table recognize and endorse the Open Table. It was seconded. It passed unanimously.

Rev. Brown reread the passage Luke 4:17-19 with which we began the meeting. He then led in prayer and adjourned the meeting at 3:04.