

## **Common Table for Church Vitality Minutes**

The scheduled meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality was held on Thursday, May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 10:00 A.M in person and via Zoom.

For the record those present were as follows: Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson (Resident Bishop of the Richmond Episcopal Area), Rev. Steven Summers, (Assistant to the Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries and Chair), Ms. Martha Stokes (Conference Lay Leader), Rev. Douglas Forrester (Cabinet Representative)\*, Ms. Katie Mueller (Executive Administrator in the Office of Connectional Ministries), Rev. Ryan LaRock (Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries)\*, Mr. Eduardo Carrillo (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy)\*, Rev. Seungsoo “RJ” Jun (Serving Ministries), Rev. Megan Saucier (2023)\*, Rev. Don Jamison (2024), Rev. Aaron Fitch (2025)\*, Rev. Joshua King (Annual Conference Secretary, without vote.)

\* - Those who met virtually

Those who were unable to attend: Mr. David Dommissie, (Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer), Mr. Lester Kurtz (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy Representative), Ms. Kimberly Young (2023), Ms. Terry Bain (2024), LAY MEMBER VACANT (2025)

Rev. Summers called the Common Table to order at 10:00 AM and opened us with a word of welcome.

### **Devotion, Ms. Martha Stokes, Conference Lay Leader**

Ms. Stokes shared about her experience at worship this past week from Grace United Methodist Church in Manassas, VA. She shared about their celebration of Older Adult Sunday the week after Youth Sunday. Ironically, both weeks planned their service around the scripture 1 Corinthians 13. At the first service, there was a family that had come for baptism and new membership. In particular, the two-year-old was intrigued and was watching everything going on as mom and brother were baptized. When it was the two-year-old’s turn, she reflected on how he just leaned over the bowl as far as he could. “He was just ready,” she reflected.

During the children’s sermon, they spoke about being welcomed. And one little boy excited to answer replied, “I know why everyone is welcomed here, because it’s called Grace!” God’s presence was truly evident from the youngest to the oldest. Ms. Stokes then led us in a word of prayer.

### **Bishop's Report, Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson**

Bishop Sue shared that she continues to learn, visit, and listen to Virginia. She believes that the biggest work we have before us is the connection between the three silos of Common Table, Conference Staff, and Cabinet. And then the immediate focus needs to be on what do we need to start right as we are starting a “new” church. She mentions one of those needs is a focus on the “teaching office” to assist our congregations learn strong Wesleyan Theology. Another need is good leadership training, which she stated we certainly have the beginnings of already through our Lay Servant Trainings. And she sees the need for education around our identity as Methodists. She shared about her joy in a conversation she shared with Ashley Boggin, Director, General Secretary of Archives and History. From that conversation, at the heart of the Methodist movement’s founding is connection. And so, “How do we really use connection to our advantage?” Bishop Sue also sees the need for a focus on a theology centered on grace. The heart of the Methodist teaching is that we are all messed up and are being made whole through grace. Another identifying part of who we are is the itinerancy and what does that look like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a question we need to look at. We emphasize that personal piety and social holiness is always tied together. Recognizing that we are a local and global church. And finally, she recognized that our ecclesiology is really focused on sanctification, that everyone is on this journey together to be perfected in love. Bishop Sue wants us to really do some work about what bridges are built, and what are the pillars of the “new” church that is being re-formed. She then opened up for reflections on how do we set some goals, as she is not good in organizations that just “float” along.

Discussion ensued about building bridges within the organization and the excitement in this idea of building a “new” church. Agreement with the question, “How do we change the pattern of “floating along” as we have been so for so long?” There was some conversation that was about those who are congregationalist seem to be leaving the church which is allowing the remaining United Methodists to be more connected. There was further conversation about the disconnect between the local church and the conference that is present and needs to be addressed as well. Discussion ensued about the need for the “teaching office” in our connection. Dreams and visions were shared about the hope we have for the future in our connection.

### **Lay Leader's Report, Ms. Martha Stokes**

No report outside of having visited most of the conference since meeting last.

### **District Superintendent's Report, Rev. Doug Forrester**

As a cabinet we have been through COVID restrictions, been through the many steps that was taken around the Boy Scouts, and then we have been spending a good deal of time with disaffiliations. Rev. Forrester believes there is so much light and life and hope in this “Bridge

Church Ministry”. These are churches who are choosing to be United Methodists. To be a part of this great work that this cabinet has done, it is a great gift. The cabinet is excited to have moved through these difficult seasons and is looking forward to what God is doing next.

Conversation ensued about disaffiliation and how the conference is experiencing ministry in this time.

### **Approval of the Minutes of March 30, 2023, Rev. Steve Summers**

The minutes were approved by consensus with corrections.

### **Assistant to the Bishop/Director of Connectional Ministries Comments, Rev. Steven Summers**

Rev. Summers began with comments from Mr. Stinson as he coming in as DCM beginning in July. He shared that the priority is to set an overall strategy for how to equip local churches and their leaders to assist in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World. We need to set direction for all programming under Common Table’s purview as a way of unifying us. Secondly, the ministry with children, youth, and young adult needs strengthening. This includes adapting cultures to make space for these areas of growth. Third, Common Table needs to take the opportunity it has to emphasize the call that God places on all persons, not just clergy. And then equipping them to fulfill that call.

Rev. Jamison raised the question about who is in charge as the staff changes from one DCM to two DCMs. The Rules Committee did already discuss this question, and it was reported that they did not believe that there was language in our *Discipline* that said this role negates the plurality of this role. In other words, the *Discipline* does not specifically state that this role cannot be held by two people. The Rules Committee felt they were comfortable with being in an exploratory stage for the next year and this enables them to be able to digest any potential changes that may come.

Rev. Summers asked Rev. King to lift up a prayer for Ms. Young who was not with us today for medical reasons. Rev. Summers went on to quote Bishop Sue, that this is a season of joy and that he is living into this joy. Rev. Summers recognized the struggle that Common Table has experienced with the hiring and staff/structural changes. But he has heard from others and now reports that he looks forward to Common Table meetings. Rev. Summers shared that he doesn’t want Common Table to be “coasting” either. He also celebrated a conversation he had with Mr. Domnisse, Conference Treasurer, about looking ahead in a great abundance for God’s will to be done.

### **Financial Update, Rev. Summers**

Financial impact won’t be catastrophic after disaffiliations.

### **Personnel Committee, Rev. Steve Summers**

As of Friday, last week, the Assistant Director of missional engagement, five applicants have been found with the proper minimum requirements for the job and have begun the process. Interviews are now being scheduled. For the Director of Missional Engagement, we have 10 applicants who have met minimum requirements. Seven of those applicants have made it through the phone interviews. For the Director of Advocacy, there were nine applicants. Eight applicants met the minimum requirements. The closing date will be tomorrow. For the Assistant Director of Discipleship and Congregational Vitality, 10 applicants met minimum requirements, seven applicants passed the phone interviews.

There is a 50-50 split between laity and clergy for all these positions. Interviews are scheduled to begin next week.

As to the Directors of Connectional Ministries, beginning in June, Mr. Stinson's salary is being raised as he is doing three positions currently. Rev. Summers felt that this process for change has been well thought out and feels comfortable with what is happening. Rev. Jun shared that he is thankful that as he leaves his position, he has been happy to be a part of helping with finding the next Director of Missional Engagement.

### **Grants Update, Rev. Don Jamison, Chair of Grants Committee**

No report.

### **Other Items Discussion**

Rev. Megan Saucier thanked the Common Table for being present on this committee as this is her last meeting as she is scheduled to roll off the committee.

Rev. LaRock, Chair of Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries, shared as colleges are in finals week, that UVA and ODU have done a lot of rebuilding this last year. He also shared that he is thankful that Bishop Sue has been help building connections with our institutions. Conversations have started about how the conference can be present during times of trauma on our campuses. Rev. Jun mentioned that UMCOR has an Emergency Response Team Training that is dedicated to spiritual and emotional support after traumatic events.

### **Closing Prayer and Adjournment**

A closing prayer was offered by Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson at 11:39 AM.

**Upcoming Meeting dates/times:**

July 20, 2023 – 10:00 a.m. (Thursday)

September 21, 2023 – 10:00 a.m. (Thursday)

November 16, 2023 – 10:00 a.m. (Thursday)

Rev. Joshua King, Secretary