

Common Table for Church Vitality Minutes

Thursday, September 19, 2024 – 6:30 PM

The scheduled meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality was held on Thursday, September 19, 2024 at 6:33 PM on Zoom.

In Attendance:

- Mr. Dwayne Stinson, Co-Chair, (Director of Connectional Ministries for Discipleship and Congregational Vitality)
- Rev. Jonathan Page, Co-Chair, (Director of Connectional Ministries for Creativity and Innovation)
- Ms. Martha Stokes, (Conference Lay Leader)
- Rev. Amanda Miller Garber, Clergy (Director Office of Missional Engagement)
- Ms. Terry Bain, Lay (At-Large Member)
- Rev. Beth Givens, Clergy (Cabinet Representative)
- Dr. Carlos Liceaga, Certified Lay Speaker (At-Large member)
- Rev. Lyle Morton, Clergy (At-Large Member)
- Rev. Amanda Webber, Clergy (At-Large Member)
- Rev. Claire Miller, Clergy (Conference Secretary)

Not in Attendance:

- Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson (Resident Bishop of the Richmond Episcopal Area)
- Mr. Steve Summers (Assistant to the Bishop)
- Rev. Ahnna Lise Jennings, Clergy (Board of Higher Education)
- Ms. Kristina Wilson, Lay (At-Large Member)
- Mr. David Dommissie, Ex Officio, (Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer)
- Ms. Katie Mueller, (Executive Administrator – Office of Connectional Ministries)

Greeting – Rev. Jonathan Page and Mr. Dwayne Stinson

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Dwayne Stinson at 6:33 PM. Mr. Stinson and Rev. Jonathan Page greeted the members and Mr. Stinson offered a prayer.

Approval of the Minutes of August 22, 2024

The minutes of the August 22, 2024, Common Table meeting were approved as amended.

Cabinet Report, District Superintendent Rev. Beth Givens

Rev. Givens highlighted that the Cabinet is continuing to work on the visioning done last year by the Extended-Extended Cabinet as well as the Bishop's emphasis on spiritual formation.

Lay Leader Report, Ms. Martha Stokes

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Ms. Stokes reported that she has been excited to receive emails and responses from individuals looking forward to the upcoming Soul Feast study. People seem excited about being a part of this study and practice. She encouraged all who were present to register.

Director of Connectional Ministries for Creativity and Innovation Report, Rev. Jonathan Page

Rev. Page stated that his report would be included in an upcoming discussion related to Leadership Standards. He commented that he is appreciative of the ways he sees leaders adapting to change and encouraged us to be a steadying leading force in the midst of change in the places in which we lead.

Director of Connectional Ministries for Discipleship and Congregational Vitality Report, Mr. Dwayne Stinson

Mr. Stinson reminded the members of a discussion at last month's meeting related to establishing leadership expectations and standards. Specifically, these standards would answer questions such as, "What do we expect from leaders in the Annual Conference?". He shared a document that Ms. Stokes had shared during the previous meeting. Mr. Stinson added that since our group was small at this meeting we would postpone finalizing any standards discussed.

Rev. Page stated that he believed the first item should be "Commitment to faith in Jesus Christ" as it sets the standard for who we are from the beginning.

Ms. Stokes indicated that these standards reminded her of the *Characteristics of Lay Leadership* document which was created some years ago by the Board of Laity.

Rev. Givens stated that the document referenced by Ms. Stokes was completed about the same time as the *Characteristics of Effective Clergy* guidelines.

Dr. Liceaga affirmed the "Commitment to faith in Jesus Christ" standard and shared a memory of a time when his church looked only at an individual's secular skills when determining whether they would be a good leader in the church. He added that while these skills are important, we need to consider first a potential leader's spiritual walk.

Rev. Page stated that he appreciated Dr. Liceaga's comments and added that something he doesn't often see is recognizing the whole-self as part of leadership. Often, we look at one skill-set and think an individual is suited to serve in one role when we really need people who are multi-focused. We need to look at the whole-self coming to the table. He added as an example that he and Mr. Stinson are opposite each other in many ways and therefore they are able to cover each other's weaknesses due to their different giftedness.

Mr. Stinson advised that he had created a 2024 Leadership Standards document in the Google share drive for Common Table members to build upon. He also stated that the Lay Leadership Guidelines document that Ms. Stokes provided was created during the "All Things New" Annual

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Conference timeframe and that people are expected to come to the table with a willingness to learn – to be future oriented. Mr. Stinson proposed that two or three members create a draft of recommended standards to bring to the October meeting. Members willing to serve are Ms. Stokes, Rev. Webber and Rev. Page, who will run point. Mr. Stinson will contribute when he is able.

Safer Sanctuaries Update

Mr. Stinson reminded the membership that he had sent out the updated policy following the August meeting, and that Dr. Liceaga had sent in some technical edits. He added that many people have worked on this document at so many points and then it went back to the Chancellor for review. During that process, Mr. Stinson and Ms. Hannah Bryn reviewed both the previous and the updated policy and sent it to the Chancellor for feedback on format, language and clarity. He noted that the policy states that the Common Table will review the policy very five years. The previous policy dictated a review every three years. He added that we really should do an informal review every year with a formal review every five years. This has not previously been done. He stated further that some of the tone has changed in the new material and that possibly there is too much legalese. The purpose is for a church ministry to be able to create safe spaces for children and vulnerable adults. He added that a section has been added on Digital Ministry. He also stated that overall, the updated policy is pretty consistent with the previous policy.

Mr. Stinson asked if the members were comfortable supporting the updated Safer Sanctuaries policy and the consensus of those present was that they are.

Office of Missional Engagement Report

Reverend Garber reported that the Common Table had tasked the Office of Missional Engagement to create a task force to see clarity around relationships with our camp and retreat centers and the VAUMC. She referenced a draft proposal and stated that the task force would be making some adjustments and that they are on track to have final a proposal to the Common Table by the October meeting.

Reverend Garber added that she had a financial request as part of the proposal. She stated that a new Outdoor Ministry Prioritization and Implementation team would be formed which would function as the team doing the data-driven/detailed work. She added that the proposal outlines who will serve on this team and what their representation will be.

Rev. Garber added that the Camp Retreat Task Force (CRTF) has been journeying with a designated advisor, Mr. David Burkey who has helped the CRTF discern what should go into the proposal related to next steps and the end goal. With Mr. Burkey, the Task Force met on August

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28th with the Board Representatives and Camp Advisors from all the camps. She added that they hope to have a more robust proposal to the Annual Conference by June 2025.

Rev. Garber further reported that Mr. Burkey advised that Outdoor Ministries in the Annual Conference would greatly benefit from contracting a consulting firm specializing in this kind of work. She stated that he had offered to recommend two or three firms to interview and choose from. The cost for this engagement would be approximately \$30,000.00 for eight to nine months of work by a consultant. Rev. Garber added that Mr. Burkey had shared that he had journeyed with an Annual Conference that did not utilize a consultant and stated that the Annual Conference regretted not doing so.

Dr. Liceaga asked if Rev. Garber was asking for full or partial funding for this endeavor. Rev. Garber stated that she is asking for full funding in the amount of \$30,000.00.

Mr. Stinson stated that based upon expected apportionments of approximately \$65,000.00 coming in we have allocated \$23,000.00 this year and there is currently a balance of \$42,600.00. He added that we are not expecting any additional requests from the Connectional Ministries office, so he thinks the funds are available to cover this request.

Rev. Page stated that given the importance of this project and that we have an expert in the field strongly recommending an outside consultant we really need to consider this.

Rev. Givens added that those who have an institutional memory of Blackstone would agree that we need someone to do an unbiased report.

Dr. Liceaga if there was any other need for these funds and added that we have not heard an update on current grant requests.

Rev. Page noted that he Mr. David Dommissie is not on the call as he could probably offer other pools that we could pull from for the grants pool. He added that the grants piece is budgeted separately from the Common Table pool – they are separate pools of money.

Rev. Garber stated that assuming the consensus was to move forward they would need to start interviewing consultants as soon as possible. She added that in November the Board of Discipleship will become the body journeying with the next team because per the Book of Discipline, the Board of Discipleship has oversight of the Camp and Retreat Ministries.

Ms. Stokes moved that we set aside \$30,000.00 for the Camp and Retreat Task Force and others similar groups within the Common table as we move forward. The motion was seconded by Rev. Webber.

The consensus was to move forward with this request. After the final proposal is received and a decision made to move forward, the Common Table's work on this matter will be complete.

The membership was advised to watch their inboxes for the proposal in October.

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Rev. Garber reported that the Camp Rainbow journey continues and that they are making really good progress.

October 10, 2024 Addendum: An email vote was taken by the Common Table on October 10, 2024. The decision to move forward with the Camp and Retreat Task Force proposal was approved.

Grants Update

Rev. Page reported that we are working toward a collective grant making effort between Common Table, the United Methodist Foundation and the Church Development Team. Ms. Melissa Nabe at the Foundation has collected all of the grant history to look at the commonalities amongst grant recipients. He added that we have a robust opportunity in this appointment year for the UM Foundation, the Church Development Team and the Common table to continue offering grants as we have been while also setting aside an amount of funds for larger scale opportunities that arise. He stated that there is a real desire to accept applications from congregations working together to transform a local community. Currently, individual pools are for individual churches. The hope is to move toward doing things more connectionally. He added that rather than fund 100 different things, the goal is to narrow down the pool to a few projects that can be funded generously to grant applicants that can make a big impact. He suggested that we may find that we have one or two applications of this sort that are worth funding. He further stated that we don't yet know the total amount of funding that will be available for us as there is no representation from the Business Office at this meeting, so we don't know how much we can put forth. He recommended that the members be prepared this month for emails with recommendations and stated that he expects a similar scenario at the UM Foundation and the Church Development Team.

Rev. Page stated that we will be looking for one or two people to serve from the Common table on the grants making team. He feels confident that applications will go live during the first week in October, and he expects to have information on the availability of funds and a listing of grants available from the Annual Conference to come through the last week of September or first week in October.

He added that he expects that if grants go live by October 7th, they will run through Nov. 20th for selecting grant applicants for interviews. His hope is that we will give out at least \$100,000.00 in funding. Currently he needs to hear from the UM Foundation, Church Development Team and the business office. Rev Page added that if we could fund three connectional projects for about \$35,000.00 each that would be a good thing. The expectation is that this is a pilot program, and we will be able to put more significant funding forth in future years.

Mr. Morton asked how soon this committee will be formed and active?

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Rev. Page stated that it will be formed before grant applications go live but that the team will have a short-term convening process starting around Thanksgiving and going into December. He added that the Common Table members should watch their inboxes for a dollar amount proposal. He further suggested that if we wanted to contribute \$50,000.00 and other entities wanted to do likewise this would be \$50,000.00 that we would not have for a Special/Sustaining grant. He added that it is the cost of doing larger transformational endeavors.

Other Business

Ms. Stokes reminded the members of the upcoming Soul Feast study she and Bishop Hauptert-Johnson will be leading. She stated that they received a request from AAMA looking for translation services to offer the study in the Korean and Spanish languages. She added that they had an offer from a subscription-based service which costs \$400.00 per year to translate resources into those languages. She added that they are having some of our Korean and Spanish speakers verify accuracy before making a decision.

Dr. Liceaga asked who from will be looking at it from the Spanish-speaking side? He added that they will need to keep in mind that slang is different in every country. Rev. Page stated that he could not remember who will be doing the accuracy verifications.

Rev. Page thank all in attendance for their leadership in the Conference and for having an expeditious meeting.

Closing Prayer and Adjournment

Ms. Stokes requested prayer for Rev. Ahnna Lise Jennings who is having some pregnancy-related health concerns.

Rev. Morton offered a closing prayer.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 PM

Upcoming Meeting times/dates:

Thursday, October 17 at 6:30 PM on Zoom

Thursday, November 14th at 10:00 AM

Respectfully Submitted,



Rev. Claire B. Miller, Conference Secretary