

Common Table of Church Vitality Minutes

The scheduled meeting of the Common Table of Church Vitality was held on Thursday, May 12th, at 10:00 A.M. via Zoom.

For the record those present are as follows: Rev. Steven Summers (Director of Connectional Ministries and Chair), Ms. Martha Stokes (Conference Lay Leader), Bishop Sharma Lewis (Resident Bishop of the Richmond Episcopal Area (10:30 AM), Rev. Douglas Forrester (Cabinet Representative), Ms. Bev Myers (Executive Assistant in the office of Connectional Ministries), Ms. Carol Draper (Treasurer's Office Rep. for Mr. Dommissé), Mr. Eduardo Carrillo (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and Advocacy Representative), Rev. Ryan LaRock (Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries), Ms. Kimberly Young (2023), Ms. Terry Bain (2024), Rev. Don Jamison (2024), Rev. Aaron Fitch (2025), Rev. Joshua King (Annual Conference Secretary, without vote)

Guest: Rev. Tammy Estep (Board of Ordained Ministry)

Those who were unable to attend: Mr. David Dommissé (Conference Treasurer), Rev. Megan Saucier (2023)

Rev. Summers called the Common Table to order at 10:00 AM and opened us with a word of welcome. Before the devotion, Rev. Summers told the Common Table that Bishop Lewis was planning on being here but he had received word from her that the Council of Bishops' meeting is running late and she will be on as soon as she can. She did come into the meeting at 10:30 during the Board of Ordained Ministries Conversation.

Devotion, Rev. Steve Summers

Rev. Summers led the Common Table with scripture from Ephesians 2.

Opening Prayer and Conference Lay Leader Remarks, Ms. Martha Stokes

Ms. Stokes shared that in the time of preparing for Annual Conference she has added a new sign to her window for her to look at and invited us to reflect on that states, "Just Breathe". Also thanked the members of this Common Table as this is the last Common Table meeting of the conference year.

Director of Connectional Ministries/Assistant to the Bishop Comments

Rev. Summers shared his deep level of respect, thanksgiving, and love for the leadership that is represented around this group. He also stated that amid preparing for Annual Conference it is necessary to hear those words to just breathe. The virtual Book of Reports will be released this week for members to begin to prepare. While also there have been many discussions and meetings that are taking place around the disaffiliation process happening at this time.

Rev. Steve Summers presented the minutes for approval as attached to the agenda

Minutes were approved with no corrections.

Board of Ordained Ministries Proposed Rules Change, Rev. Tammy Estep (Chair)

Rev. Estep was invited to participate in this meeting as the Board of Ordained Ministry (BoOM) has recognized that the organizational structures of the Board of Ordained Ministries as written in the Standing Rules of Order and Procedure of the Virginia Annual Conference are not accurately portraying what is truly happening. In the process of revising that organization the line, "The Board of Ordained Ministry in cooperation with the General Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries and the Common Table for Church Vitality," came under scrutiny with the possibility of deleting from it, "Common Table for Church Vitality".

Rev. Estep was present today to have some open conversation about the connectional nature of the Board of Ordained Ministry with the conference and more specifically, with the Common Table. During this conversation, the historical relationship between BoOM and Common Table was discussed. The relationship and boundaries of the episcopacy and BoOm was also discussed.

In addition, Rev. Estep was excited to share that the Virginia BoOm was asked to be a part of a cohort that will envision new processes for credentialing clergy. She did ask for feedback from Common Table of dreams and hopes for this cohort to investigate for the future. Among the feedback was conversations about better intersection between the Lay Servant Ministries and their call into ordination. Also, how could this new staff position (JEDI: Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) work with BoOM to advocate and better communicate to those individuals discerning their call into ministry.

Rev. Estep closed by requesting a person/small workgroup to be formed from Common Table to work with BoOM in this re-writing of their section (V.B.14, 2021 Book of Reports) in the Standing Rules of Order and Procedure.

Financial Update, Ms. Carol Draper

Ms. Draper, present on behalf of Conference Treasurer, Mr. Dommissie, gave an update on the finances. She mentioned that she believes the conference seems to be sitting financially better than we were last year at this time, but though still not where we were pre-pandemic. She noted for evidence of this is the apportionments this year have had a higher collection than this time last year. At this time, we have collected 24.45% of the annual apportionments in comparison to 22.08% from last year. In addition, she reported that the line item for General Board of Global Ministries has seen quite a large increase this year. She conjectured this was largely due to the relief our congregations have given in response to the conflict in Ukraine.

Bishops Comments

Bishop Lewis gave a report primarily in response to the disaffiliation movement happening within the connection. She noted that the Council of Bishops knew that the disaffiliation was going to happen, but what she really wants everyone to hear from her is that neither the Council of Bishops nor her are trying to kick anybody out. Rather, she, along with the other Bishops are trying to work through the disaffiliation fairly and amicably.

As a part of her response to this movement, Bishop Lewis has created two teams to handle disaffiliations: Team Jeremiah (proactive strategies) and Team UMC (Outline Process). Through some questions, Bishop Lewis mentioned that Team Jeremiah is a team made up of 15

people who are clergy and lay, theologically and ethnically diverse that meet monthly. Their main purpose is to inform clergy and congregations proactive strategies about what is happening in the General Church Connection. The other team, Team UMC is a team that meets weekly to focus on the specifically the process for disaffiliation and being able to communicate that process clearly to our conference. The hope of these two teams, is that we can contextualize what is happening in the general church to our Virginia Conference.

The most important thing that Bishop Lewis wanted to be known is that we pray and ask God to help those considering disaffiliating to discern where God wants them to be, so that we can continue to make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World. And for us here in the Virginia Annual Conference to make Disciples who are life-long learners, influencing others to serve.

Bishop Lewis also responded to a question about what is going to take place when a clergy member and a local church disagree on their future. Bishop Lewis instructed clergy to be in contact with their District Superintendents, especially in such a case like this.

Bishop Lewis also responded to the concerns about the special called Annual Conference in Oct. 29th that this was not about wanting to kick people out, but rather it is about the desire to allow congregations the time to consider, discern, and pray about disaffiliating.

Bishop Lewis encouraged every clergy member present to be familiar with Judicial Council Decision 1444, to go and read it as it is very well written. In addition, she encouraged clergy to read and understand ¶2553 of the Book of Discipline. Finally, in response to disaffiliation, she encourages anyone with questions to reach out to their District Superintendents as they are a very well-informed resource to our clergy and congregations. Bishop Lewis is thankful for the hard work that is being done by Team Jeremiah, Team UMC, and the cabinet and asks for your prayers during this process.

Bishop Lewis did mention that though the Boy Scouts of America is out of courts, we are still wading through the outcomes of this as well.

Rev. Forrester, Representative of the Cabinet to Common Table, mentioned for full transparency and understanding, that though there are going to be no disaffiliations handled from ¶2553 at the June 2022 Annual Conferences, that there are some churches exiting through the Minutes Questions, but they are doing so through a process that they have been doing for quite some time through ¶2549.

Cabinet Report, Rev. Douglas Forrester

Rev. Forrester reported that the Cabinet is excited and appreciative about the District Initiative that is done and being done. He encouraged those who were present to explore what their own districts are doing as they are very different around the conference.

Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries (BHECM), Rev. Ryan LaRock (Chair)

Rev. LaRock reported that BHECM is working with a consultant, UM Commission. The Core Team working with this consultant is composed of Nicki Moreno, the Campus Ministers, and himself. The purpose of this consultant is to evaluate and reflect on the fruitfulness of the ministries being provided at our Campus Ministries. As a part of this evaluative work, they have done some surveys to establish both strengths and learning curves. The strengths that were

reflected were in areas of leadership development, student empowerment, mentoring programs, working with those exploring calls into ministry, and in areas of diversity/inclusion. The primary learning curve that was reflected in these surveys was in Outreach.

Rev. LaRock also reported that at the upcoming board meeting, they will be receiving the annual evaluations that their local boards do with their campus ministers. They will also be looking at the financials of those local boards as well.

Rev. LaRock was excited to announce that through the UM Commission, that Old Dominion University's Board will be attending a Campus Ministry Board Summit this summer to be able to connect and learn with other campus ministries throughout the connection.

And in closing, Rev. LaRock announced that at the 2022 Annual Conference, the BHECM will be announcing that Rev. Deborah Lewis of UVA Campus Ministry will be receiving the 2022 Francis Asbury Award. Also, because it was not able to be done last year, they will be recognizing Rev. Justin Allen, the recipient of this award from 2021.

Personnel Committee, Ms. Young

Ms. Young had no report.

Rev. Summers updated Common Table on the process for hiring the Executive Administrative Assistant position as Ms. Bev Myers will be retiring.

Rev. Summers updated Common Table on the JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion) position. The listening posts have been completed and are now working through the notes and reflections to give over to the Personnel Committee to start working on putting together the Job Description and search for this position.

Grants Committee, Rev. Jamison

Rev. Jamison reported that three requests for Grants came before that the Grants Committee. They have been reviewed and recommended for approval to Common Table. The following are those grants:

Mission Encounter:

Mission Encounter is an opportunity to study current issues impacting society based on current social justice and mission-related topics. Participants grow in understanding the mission of the church in the current world context. Mission Encounter prepares United Methodists for faithful living and action by participating in a transformational educational program based on biblically grounded curricula in order to be in ministry for a more just and equitable world—locally and globally. This year's event is virtual, one evening a week for seven weeks. Among other things, this grant will allow for honorariums for the study leaders. \$ 5,000

UMVIM:

United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM) provides an official channel for lay and clergy to offer their skills and talents for Christian service at home and around the world on short term assignments at their own expense. This grant will provide support to cover the UMVIM Leader training events (6 events a year). The grant will provide travel reimbursement, lunch, etc. needed for the event. \$ 3,000

Disaster Response

The Disaster Response Program provides Disaster Response, Relief and Recovery to the geographical area of the Annual Conference following a disaster and supports neighboring annual conferences through our UM Connection with resources if available. There are costs involved in maintaining this level of readiness for everything from equipment maintenance to continuous training cycles. Where we can apply for funding from UMCOR for grants following a disaster in order to fund those response and recovery efforts; the cost of normal operations and administration are met by the Annual Conference.

\$ 10,000

The Common Table has approved unanimously all three grants.

Other Items

The meeting adjourned at 11:07 am with Bishop Lewis closing us in prayer.

Joshua King, Secretary