

Common Table for Church Vitality Minutes
Thursday, May 8, 2025
Virginia Conference United Methodist Church Office

The scheduled meeting of the Common Table for Church Vitality was held on Thursday, May 8, 2025, at the VA Conference Office.

In Attendance:

- Mr. Dwayne Stinson, Co-Chair (Director of Connectional Ministries for Discipleship and Congregational Vitality)
- Rev. Steve Summers, Clergy (Assistant to the Bishop)
- Ms. Martha Stokes, Lay (Conference Lay Leader)
- Rev. Amanda Miller Garber, Clergy (Director of Office of Missional Engagement)
- Rev. Beth Givens, Clergy (Cabinet Representative)
- Mr. David Dommissie, Ex Officio, (Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer)
- Rev. Amanda Webber, Clergy (At-Large Member)
- Ms. Terry Bain, Lay (At-Large Member)
- Rev. Lyle Morton, Clergy (At-Large Member)
- Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson (Resident Bishop of the Richmond Episcopal Area)
- Rev. Doug Forrester, Clergy (Incoming Assistant to the Bishop)
- Ms. Maddie White, Lay (Director of Communications)
- Dr. Carlos Liceaga, Lay (At Large Member)
- Rev. Jonathan Page, Co-Chair, (Director of Connectional Ministries for Creativity and Innovation)
- Rev. Hannah Bryn, Clergy (Outdoor Ministry, Camping and Retreat)
- Rev. Claire Miller, Clergy (Annual Conference Secretary)

Greetings and Prayer – Ms. Martha Stokes

The meeting was called to order by Ms. Martha Stokes at 10:03 AM. Ms. Stokes welcomed those in attendance. Joys were shared including the impending Doctoral graduations of several clergy members in the VAUMC.

Ms. Stokes shared a reading from the *Enfleshed* website related to a remix of 1 Corinthians 12. A prayer was offered by Rev. Beth Givens.

Approval of the Minutes of March 13, 2025

The minutes of the March 13, 2025, Common Table meeting were approved as amended.

Reports and Comments:

Bishop's Report – Resident Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson

The Council of Bishops – The Bishop referenced Al Hopkins, a very respected journalist and teacher at Pointer Institute. She stated that he did a great webinar a few years ago about the importance of not sending out inadequate information. His wife is a deacon in the Florida

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Conference. He made a recent video presentation about the importance and impact of “story”. He shared the stories of individuals affected by lack of water. He emphasized that we need to highlight what the people are caring about. The number one issue per Gallop in the US is “lack of government leadership”. So, how do we speak into that? Our question should be, “are you living in my world?”. Bishop Sue posted a letter on Social Media about a Governor in another state who vetoed a bill protecting transgender athletes. The Bishop thought this letter speaks to how we speak into what really matters. She quoted Pope Francis who said, “We have to have the scent of the sheep on us”. How do we as a church brace for hard financial times which seem to be on the horizon? How do we stand for people who are and will be affected? Let’s focus on what is meaningful and helpful to our people. The power of story is important.

Rev. Lyle Morton remarked that yesterday was a day of going to the office and seeing a truck with a big banner which said, “Trump 2024”. He thought, “are you a billionaire?” He shared about people in his church who don’t see the loss of benefits that they are experiencing because of their prejudices and sexual biases. They are blinded, He wonders where we should be making the most noise. Preaching love, justice and righteousness? We must love people where they are. The sad thing is that the history of the church tells of suicides in the church over these very issues.

Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer’s Report - Mr. David Dommis

Mr. David Dommis reported that April was a good month. Apportionments are starting to come in. He expects that this will not be a great apportionment year due to the economic climate and added that it would help if we had some clarity where the economy stands. No one can make projections because there is no stability.

As CFA announced, January 15th of next year will be the date for budget requests. Mr. Dommis hopes we can address that a little earlier. He would like to collaborate in the Fall regarding how we can build a better budget. He added that they are shooting a new video of the budget today and stated that there are many changes to the budget. Jonathan and Maddie helped with the narrative budget. The process is going well but there are many changes which bring concerns. We’re trying to alleviate concerns through communications and have begun a beta test phase for the clergy.

Rev. Doug Forrester asked if it would be useful to have clergy who have served since 2008 be asked what kept them going when the bottom fell out of the economy in 2008. Mr. Dommis said, there are a few differences. The economy events in 2008 were mostly related to a housing crisis. It was a tough time. He added that this is a good idea. Rev. Forrester stressed that the common thread might be how it affects church giving. Bishop Haupt-Johnson noted that people step up in times of need. Ms. Stokes asked, “What if we asked the retirees from that

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period. If that might be a way to tell some of our stories in a different way". Mr. Dommissé may speak to Matt Charles, the new President of Philanthropy.

He added that he thinks it would be wise for the Conference to consider how AI will impact all of this. AI is going to be a long-term, systemic change to looking at life patterns in the future. We should start looking at this now rather than waiting until it impacts us. It will affect the church, giving, individuals and will affect all differently.

Bishop Haupt-Johnson encouraged Mr. Dommissé to create a new budget process if he thought that would help.

Assistant to the Bishop – Rev. Steven Summers

Rev. Summers stated that "Joy has been the word to describe our staff here lately and their gifts and commitment. There is so much great ministry going on in the Annual conference". He added that the challenge is to determine which stories to tell. Immigration is such a big topic, and we need to share stories of families in our conference who are being affected, As you hear about the new opportunity for endowment giving to help with immigrants in the Annual Conference, he encourages us to know that our gifts will have a profound impact

Communications Report – Ms. Maddie White

Ms. White reported that the Quarterly report is helping folks have a better sense for how the Conference is doing things together. The larger conversation is when we are seeing other news outlets reach other people – it's because they are working in lockstep with other outlets. She stated that we need to have the various ministries of the Conference work in lock step too. Internal structure modifications are needed. She is open to edits from any in the room and for comments on how this new structure might work. Hunter Bryn is going out to get stories from some of our Immigrant clergy before Annual Conference.

Bishop Sue stated that "We need to get out and talk to folks and let them know that leadership will not favor one group over another or large churches over small churches. We need our leadership to be visible." She added that she believes the the new vision statement presented by the Council of Bishops has gotten good press. Ms. White agreed and added that we need to find ways to continue to get that statement out.

Rev. Beth Givens suggested that she get with Ms. White and Bishop Haupt-Johnson to develop a worship resource/sermon series based upon the new vision. Martha Stokes agreed that this could be a great connection for the laity for use on Laity Sunday.

Incoming Assistant to the Bishop, Rev. Doug Forrester

Rev. Forrester stated that he is happy to be a part of the Common Table and is willing to help in any way he can.

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Office of Missional Engagement - Rev. Amanda Garber

Rev. Garber reported that Rev. Jo Ann Batteiger – is transitioning to be the Regional Director of Cross Connection in Virginia with a unique focus on racial integration. Her official transition date is July 1st.

Rev. Garber also reported that the Property Advisory Team met for first time last week. She added that it was a positive experience; there is some real skill on the team. They plan to meet again soon and are working on updating and creating processes. She hopes the team can hit ground running in July.

The Conference Development Team is in a period of discernment. A Changemaker Initiative partnership is possible.

She further announced that Rev. Lan Wilson has been hired as the new Director of Belonging and Advocacy and added that he will be at Annual Conference. Rev. Garber stated that with others, she has been working closely with Rev. Wilson to prepare for Annual Conference.

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

Rev. Page announced that “Five weeks from today – we will be concluding organizing motions.” We are getting very close to the Annual Conference session in Roanoke. He added that it is good to have such a solid team preparing. He has a lot of hope that this conference will be a time for us to be together in holy conferencing and leadership. He added his thanks to the Valley Ridge district for hosting Annual Conference this year.

Rev. Page further stated that he had the chance to travel to Nashville to hear about missional metrics. He discovered that many people are unclear as to what they are doing. This means that our work is pioneering. He added that we are in the process of selecting an Alpha cohort to determine how we measure vitality in the local church and what those metrics will look like.

He also traveled with Bishop Hauptert-Johnson to Loudoun County, to visit Crossroads church which will be the first Hub and Scope community. He hopes that this experience will translate Conference-wide. He added that he met yesterday about processes and how this can be expanded across the Conference.

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

Mr. Stinson reported that they are currently seeking two campus ministers – one at Virginia State University and one with BSU. They conducted a survey of the school regarding what students are looking for in terms of their spiritual life,

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The positions would be part-time, and it would be possible for someone who is in a part-time appointment to also be appointed to one of these positions.

He added that Campus ministry at Mary Washington is very early in the search process for a minister to lead their campus ministry.

Speaking about Annual Conference Awards, Mr. Stinson reported that the One Church Matters award will be presented at Annual Conference. He added that we have three Denman award winners. One winner is a student at Virginia Tech. Mr. Stinson stated that this award is being phased out and the Conference will be considering a new way to recognize churches with a more current vision than is presented by the Denman Award. Bishop Sue suggested a "Body of Christ" award.

Mr. Stinson added that the Francis Asbury award is going to a non-United Methodist this year, Ms. Stokes stated that all the nominees will be recognized at the Laity session.

Outdoor Ministry/Camping and Retreat Report, Ms. Hannah Bryn

Ms. Bryn reported that the Hatching Faith Cohort – Lily Endowment work is funded toward more fully engaging young people. She added that they recently had about fifty people most under the age of twelve. They focused on children engaging and experiencing worship. The first cohort kicked off with eight churches including a wide range with some churches having a solo pastor and some with multiple pastors. From now until next year they will work with Rev. Jennifer Coffee to find ways to more fully engage children. She added that they received lots of positive feedback from attendees.

Ms. Bryn also reported that last year the Camp and Retreat task force was formed and proposed getting a consultant. They hired *Healthy Camp Leadership* who started in 2024. The proposal was a four phased project that would walk through listening sessions, covenant groups and other stages.

She stated that they are now proposing to end the partnership with *Healthy Camp Leadership*. The main piece is the timeline we asked them to work within has not been met. Very little work has been completed, and they have not received any updated reports from *Health Camp Leadership*. She added that the Camp and Retreat task force will work with Ms. White if this proposal is approved and Rev. Garber has agreed to help with the transition. She also added that Rev. Joshua King suggested that some folks may think we are ending the contract because we didn't like the results received, and so we need to stress that we have not received results.

Ms. Bryn added that we need to look at our covenants with our Outdoor ministry partners. Rev. Garber and she are still trying to piece that together. The Bishop suggested they contact

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Russell Davis, from Camp Glisten in North Georgia. She added that they started a United Methodist Church in their chapel which is very results driven.

Rev. Givens moved to end the contract. The motion was seconded and with no further discussion was upon and approved

Proposed Changes to the Common Table Charter, Ms. Martha Stokes

Ms. Stokes stated that at our last meeting we talked about an experimental leadership structure. Following that meeting Rev. Page did some redlining on the original charter and came up with a preliminary draft. Ms. Stokes thought this is more complicated than we need to present this year. She anticipates that if we say we're living into this experimental structure people may question what the conference is really trying to do. She recommends waiting another year to present one finalized proposal. Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson might even be inclined to push it to 2027 when we will also have redistricting. Ms. Stokes stated that as we look at redlined version, it is complicated. We don't have to act on anything today, but we can discuss any questions.

Dr. Carlos Liceaga asked if in the redline the ethnic minority advocacy concerns were replaced by Religion and Race. He wondered if this was typo and if not, what was the intention? Ms. Stokes responded that this was a typo and should have included additional info.

At the last Annual Conference, the Rules committee offered a recommendation to reinstate the Conference Commission on Religion and Race (CCORR) and the Conference Committee on Ethnic Concerns . Rev. Amanda Garber asked if this is replacing CEMCA? Amanda doesn't think this is entirely clear. She added that CCORR should be in the proposal as it is a currently functioning group. She also thinks that CEMCA is now using the new name: CELCC – Committee on Ethnic Leadership Church Concerns. Ms. Stokes reminded the gathering to be aware that there will be other name changes before this goes to Conference,

Dr. Liceaga stated that beyond the name changes, it is confusing trying to figure out what the functions of these teams are. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson suggested that he go to Book of Discipline (BoD) as Ethnic Concerns and CCORR are both called out in the BOD. Para 631.

Rev. Page asked, if someone were to make a motion from the floor regarding this would it be before the Annual Conference? Bishop Hauptert-Johnson stated that it would not as it would automatically be referred to the commission.

The Common Table recessed for lunch at 11:45 AM and Jonathan offered the blessing. The Common Table reconvened at 12:26 PM.

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Continued Discussion on Envisioning Future Annual Conference Leadership, Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson, Rev. Jonathan Page, Mr. Dwayne Stinson, Ms. Martha Stokes

Rev. Page stated that in the original iteration there was nothing on the Appointed Cabinet. In each sub team there is a solid line around Appointive Cabinet, and the Convener is the Assistant to the Bishop. In all the other sub teams the Convener is a different person. In Operations it is the Chief Operating Officer, in Leadership Development it is the Director of Call and Candidacy, in Church and Community Engagement it is a Developer. The Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) membership includes, the Bishop, Lay Leader, Assistant to the Bishop, Director of Belonging and Advocacy, the OPS Convener, CCE Convener, LD convener, Clergy Rep, Lay Rep, Cabinet Rep, Facilitator (non-voting), Conference Staff as needed (non-voting).

The Bishop suggested that the Treasurer should be on the SLT under Operations. The Bishop further suggested changing names of Extended and Appointive Cabinet – to Cabinet and Conference Leadership Team or something similar.

Rev. Givens reminded the membership that putting this forth as an experiment will likely make some folks in the Annual Conference nervous. The Bishop suggested we “live into this” and take it to the Annual Conference next year. Mr. David Dommissie suggested that if we have a group that just has a focus and keep going back to other groups to tell them what we’re doing we usurp our authority. If we are meeting as a group conceived by the Bishop to have a focus, there should not be an issue. Ms. Stokes – thinks we need to be intentional about collaborating with the Annual Conference. The Bishop suggested we send it out a month in advance and invite comments/input at Annual Conference – have a room set up to take input. We can take input and work that on throughout the year. Rev. Page offered that the main group is the Connectional Table, and the sub teams are the Tactical Connectional entities.

Ms. Stokes asked if the sense of the group was to share this at Annual Conference and if so, where? Under the Extended Extended Cabinet report. Include this in the Book of Reports. The Bishop suggested that we figure out where/how folks will come to ask questions. Rev. Page noted that there is no space for the work of Connection and Innovation in this plan. Rev. Givens thinks it makes sense to put it under Leadership Development. The Bishop suggest that we identify that person as a Facilitator who would be a voting member. Any group is free to hire someone to be a facilitator. Ms. Stokes read what she has put in the Book of Reports, and it was agreed that her verbiage was appropriate.

Mr. Neal Wise and Rev. Page are creating “end caps” for the display area for representatives to provide “listening posts” for folks to ask questions during breaks and lunch. We need to figure out if there is room for another end cap to field questions/accept feedback there. Are there folks who are willing to take part of their lunch time to man the table for short periods?

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Rev. Forrester added that making sure that all areas of the Annual Conference are represented is extremely important. Dr. Liceaga added that we need to consider the representation of lay and clergy persons. The charter included three at large laity and three at large clergy in classes. Bishop Hauptert-Johnson stated that she thinks we can open it up to the Annual Conference to determine how many we include. Mr. Dommissie asked how many are mandatory lay and clergy.

Ms. Stokes added that sub teams need to be aware that they need lots of representation from lay and clergy.

Rev. Summers – prayed for the newly elected Pope, Robert Prevost – Pope Leo XIV

Other Business

Closing Prayer and Adjournment - Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson

Bishop Hauptert-Johnson offered a closing prayer, and the meeting adjourned at 1:28 PM.

Upcoming Meeting Schedule for 2025:

Meetings will be held virtually and in person at the Virginia Conference Center

- Thursday, August 21, 2025 - IN PERSON - 10AM
- Thursday, September 18, 2025 - VIRTUAL - 6PM
- Thursday, October 30, 2025 - IN PERSON - 10AM

Respectfully Submitted,



Rev. Claire B. Miller, Conference Secretary