

The Common Table for Church Vitality

The Virginia Annual Conference

September 26, 2020

The Common Table met on September 26, 2020 by Zoom. Members taking part in the meeting were:

Bishop Sharma D. Lewis (Bishop)

Rev. Ted Smith (Director of Connectional Ministries and Chair)

Mr. Warren Harper (Conference Lay Leader)

Ms. Martha Stokes (Incoming Conference Lay Leader)

Rev. Steven Summers (Cabinet Representative)

Mr. John Dunning (Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries)

Mr. David Domnisse (Conference Treasurer)

Rev. Lyle Morton (Commission on Ethnic Minority Concerns and  
Advocacy Representative)

Rev. Jonathan Page (2020)

Rev. Harold White (2021)

Rev. Ashley Isernhagen (2022)

Ms. Susie Wolf (2022)

Rev. Megan Saucier (2023)

Ms. Terry Bain (2024)

Rev. Susan Reaves (Annual Conference Secretary, without vote)

Ms. Unsil Choi, Dr. Carlos Liceaga, Ms. Kimberly Young and Rev. Don Jamison were unable to attend.

Chairperson, Rev. Ted Smith opened the meeting at 10:00 with a word of welcome. He shared a devotion from the September/October Upper Room by Sherri Pickett

(September 25, 2020) that focused on Proverbs 31:30, "Charm is deceptive and beauty

is fleeting but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” Ms. Pickett described her struggle with breast cancer and how it had changed her outward appearance. She noted that “Beauty fades, but my relationship with God will last throughout eternity.” Rev. Smith led the group in prayer.

Bishop Lewis shared some thoughts on September 19<sup>th</sup>'s challenges that prevented the Virginia Annual Conference from taking place as planned. According to the Bishop, there will be an overlap of outgoing and incoming Common Table members since our new members have not been confirmed by Annual Conference action. Ms. Martha Stokes is attending as the incoming Conference Lay Leader.

Bishop Lewis thanked everyone for carrying on the work of the Conference while she was on renewal leave in August.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the April 30, May 8, May 13, May 27, June 10, June 24, July 8, July 22, July 29 and August 19, 2020 meetings. The minutes were approved as corrected.

Rev. Ted Smith discussed the events of September 19, 2020 and the difficulties caused by Options Technology's server crash. He also addressed registration issues and people who were not able to get on-line which was a significant number. Conference leadership is looking at new vendors who have worked with very large numbers of attendees/voters. There were many people who were not able to log in successfully. The system that is chosen for the voting process will need to be more user friendly. Changing to a new host site is also being considered.

Increased clarity of communications regarding the registration and credentialing process is necessary. Many people discovered they were not registered because they needed to set up a new zoom account using a vaumc.org email address. In the Chat, conference members remarked that the header “Practice Session” was confusing to people who were receiving credentials. Credential email should be very simple and plain. The

suggestion was made that non tech people should read through registration and voting instructions for clarity. Another suggestion was to have Ms. Madeline Pillow White, a communication expert, write the instructions for registration and voting. The Annual Conference help desk was overwhelmed by the number of questions that came in. More volunteers will be recruited for the Help Desk.

Ms. Kimberly Young, Chair of the Personnel Committee, was unable to attend the meeting but sent an update on filling the five vacant conference staff positions. The Personnel Committee has begun the recruiting and hiring process for those positions. There have been 52 responses to the advertised positions. There have been 9 interviews to date and there will be a second round of interviews. The committee has asked what the greatest needs of the stakeholders are to aid the search process. The Personnel Committee is looking at the resources needed by the Conference as this team is built.

Mr. David Domnisse gave the financial report. The Conference is down 6% in receipts compared to last year's performance over the same period. Given the decrease in expenses and the lack of meetings it will turn out to be a good year despite this year's difficult circumstances. Currently, the plan is not to prioritize the apportionments in 2021.

Rev. Smith reported on the reconfiguration of the grants process. Dr. Liceaga has been working on the reconfiguration. For 2020 the Conference did not have the funds available to send out the grants on a quarterly basis. First quarter grants have been sent out. Second quarter funds will be sent out after the financial reports are read. It is not known whether third and fourth quarter grants can be sent out.

Currently, the Grants Committee is now receiving reports from the grant recipients and these are being read so funds can be sent out. David Domnisse suggested going forward and paying them on schedule. Rev. Ashley Isernhagen asked for a list of the

Common Table subcommittees for 2020/2021. Rev. Smith said he would put together a list. Mr. Dommissie noted there are only three months left in the year. He felt with other areas being significantly under budget it was worth reviewing the approved grant awards from 2019 for 2020 to see if they can be paid out. The Council on Finance and Administration will meet at the end of the month and can verify if this is possible. Bishop Lewis reiterated the need for transparency and the need to let grant recipients know if they are or are not going to receive funds. Rev. Smith will recirculate the grant process document.

The question was raised “Can the Grants plan be adapted to this unusual season?” This could take the form of an interim plan to address the current situation brought on by the pandemic. At the next meeting after the grants process information is recirculated, the Common Table will adapt the process to the current situation. Members of the Common Table agree they would like to pay out 100% of grants.

Mr. John Dunning gave a report on Higher Education and Campus Ministries. He noted that ministry has actually expanded since March when students had to leave campuses. Most ministry continued in virtual form through the summer. The Campus Minister Association is meeting every other month now and has a formal relationship with the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (BHECM). BHECM has had to change plans due to cuts to their building maintenance budget. They are still considering how to deal with the cuts.

Mr. Dunning reported Director of the Association of Educational Institutions, Dr. John Peters, has retired. Dr. Peters attended the BHECM meetings and served as the connection with the schools and was the connection with the Conference Apportionment 406 Virginia Educational Fund that goes to the schools. When Dr. Peters retired, the position he held with the Association of Educational Institutions (AEI) was no longer funded. It is now filled by one of the college presidents. This person is not likely

to attend BHECM meetings. Rev. Smith and Mr. Dunning will discuss how to establish a realistic connection between AEI and BHECM.

Mr. Warren Harper suggested the possibility of two book of reports. One could be the print version with the official deadline of March but a timelier book of report could be issued closer to the time of annual conference. This could be an electronic document and could take the place of the addendum.

Bishop Lewis recommended that Rev. Susan Reaves monitor the chat at Zoom Common Table meetings. There was at times a sense of confusion in the meeting. She encouraged the group going forward try to minimize confusion.

Ms. Martha Stokes said a few words. She led the group in prayer. The meeting was dismissed at 12:14.

Next meeting will be on Tuesday, November 24<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m.