

Ghent UMC
The Open Table report – edited for privacy
April 11, 2021

A quick review: The Open Table is a transformational group of people who agree to come together to support a "friend" who has been identified as "at risk" of falling through society's cracks. The group meets on a weekly basis once training has occurred and supports the friend in accomplishing goals that they think will help them in their life. It is a commitment for a year.

I can speak to how quickly the year goes by. The Table has a structure that was established several years ago when a couple of guys decided to befriend a homeless man that kept showing up at their church. If you attend the first presentation, you will be given that history. The structure is very clear and helps all the members of the Table to do what is most needed in order to give the support needed. The members do not make the decision regarding what the goals are; but they do give guidance. What is needed to be on an Open Table is a loving heart, a love of God and a spirit of serving. Race, age, gender does not matter; I am advocating for inclusive Tables; diverse ones where I can make this process happen.

We are fortunate here at our church to have been asked to do The Open Table and we can have as many as we decide is good for us to have. The insurance company, Anthem, gave a very large grant to The Open Tables for Virginia. The one stipulation is that these tables would work with women who have substance abuse issues and either have children or are expecting to have one soon. Anthem is providing the licensing fee. There is, I have just learned, a \$120.00 fee for each individual that sits on a Table to pay. In talking with [name], who works for Anthem to help form these Tables, she confirmed to me that people could ask for a scholarship if that is unreasonable for them and the fee will be either lowered to what is reasonable or waived. This fee covers the training which is 8 weeks long (1 evening a week for 2 hours for 8 weeks) and a manual with all the training tools and rules.

The Open Table is not just transformational for "the friend" but also for each Table member. I have experienced that myself having served on a Table for a year. It is truly an opportunity to see first-hand the work that God does in these meetings. I can also say there are many levels of transformation; including getting to know your peers and feeling love swell from each one of them as you mutually work to serve another person. When the year is done, the expectation is that each member will in some way stay connected to the "friend". It may be just a call once in a while, a text message, and an email. For my friend in Virginia Beach, when our time on a weekly meeting schedule is no longer active, I plan to have coffee with her, take her to lunch, send her a book I think she might enjoy etc. Different people have different ways of staying connected; but for me, I view this relationship as "holy" and therefore, I will let God guide me in where it goes as long as my friend wants to continue it.

The first Open Table has begun at Ghent UMC. This Table, The Tidewater Open Table, is up and running and there is already success in that the friend has found housing. A great start but with many goals yet to be achieved! As I told you in our first meeting, there has been a change at the top of this Table. [name], who heads all the Tables in the States, will be overseeing this Table. Due to a conflict of interest I withdrew my supervision and [name] took over. Melody, as minister of our church and I will close the loop with [name] very soon; mainly to say hello and make sure she has all that she needs to continue. The second Table is in the process of birthing. Thanks go to Rev. Melody Tanner and Lisa King who have done much support to get

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this one going. Two people have confirmed that they will do the training and be on this Table; [name], my friend, and Lisa King. I have been on the phone talking to a number of people and we are going to have another viewing of the introduction of The Table soon. There are 5 people who have agreed to watch this time; most of them for this Table, but at least 2 for another Table a little further down the line. I will let you know once the presentation has been done, who is going to be on this second Table. I also have had 2 other people speak of their interest in the Table and to not get left out of the loop.

[name], who has been hired by Anthem to help get the Tables started in Virginia has offered to do a church wide zoom to introduce the concept if we would like that. We need to decide about that soon. I am asking that she run this introductory zoom meeting this coming week and that may be all we need. It is up to the Leadership Committee to decide if another one would be good to do. Have not heard back from her yet but think I will. I am giving her a list of emails for the people I have talked with and have said they would like to see that presentation. If you would like to see it please call, text, or email me with your email address ([phone number](#) or fayej5842@gmail.com) and I will send it to her along with the other 5 that have already asked.

I am so excited about the opportunity for us here at Ghent to be a part of this huge transformational experience. It will change us as a congregation. I look forward to talking to any of you, your family members or even your friends and/or neighbors to explain some of the process and to get you on board if you want this. It truly is a way to serve God. As you can probably already tell, I am passionate about this one and if you talk with me about it, you will witness my passion! Thanks for reading this report!

Respectfully submitted,
Faye Joseph