

Connectional Table 2023 Report

The work of the Connectional Table during the first year of being a new conference has been full of God's leading. The Connectional Table consists of fifteen people – both laity and clergy, volunteers and staff– who shepherd the work of more than 300 volunteer leaders in our connection and steward the mission, vision, and values of our Conference forward. The new Tennessee-Western Kentucky structure of teams has placed us at the table to listen to God and to hear one another in completely new ways. Conversations and collaborations have been honest, genuine, and fruitful. We have practiced listening to God and each other and we are learning so much in a new season of ministry.

God is calling us forward to unify to embody the love of Christ in Spirit-led actions. As we have paid attention to the ministry of the conference, we have seen this vision unfolding in many ways through the leadership of faithful disciples and local congregations and ministries. Through many conversations with ministry partners, ministry teams, local church laity and clergy, feedback groups, the cabinet and more, God has revealed the articulation of our conference vision in a new way.

TWK Vision Summary March 2023

VISION NOTE: Uniting to embody the love of Christ in Spirit-led actions one community at a time.” (for the transformation of one person, one family, one community at a time)

The Core Value “*Empowering and Enabling leaders*” was emphasized. There was a lot of discussion about “supporting and caring for lay and clergy leaders” and may have uncovered another core value.

WHO WE ARE TO BE:

1. A people who are rooted in Christ and Spirit-led.
2. A people who seeks to journey purposefully, humbly, and joyfully together, helping one another along The Way of Love prioritizing relationships over ideas.
3. We are to show the world another way; to be the Beloved Community through acts of love, reconciliation, and justice.

WHAT WE ARE TO DO:

1. **Equip & Empower Laity** to be disciples and to lead the church in the World for transformed lives; Nurture and empower spiritually-rooted lay leadership.
2. **Provide professional care and support for Lay and Clergy Leaders** who are suffering from burnout, fatigue, stress, trauma, healing needs. Soul care is needed. Rest and reflection time are needed. Help people rediscover their solid foundation and their community.
3. **Develop authentic loving relationship with God and others through the work of communal spiritual discernment.**
4. **Clarify, Teach, Reinforce Wesleyan Theology** with an emphasis on the essentials of Grace & Love; imago Dei, Open Table, baptismal vows, Scripture as Inspired and the need for Spirit-led, thoughtful interpretation.
5. **Following the lead of the Spirit, discover new ways of being Church:**
 - a. Transition to a **Parish Model** where the focus is on being in relationship with the community.
 - b. Utilize **online community** building and discipleship formation.
 - c. **Be the Beloved Community** in the world.
 - d. **Lighthouse/The Vine** - Helping those left behind by disaffiliating churches to find new community, to process trauma/hurt, to forgive, to deepen their faith, to have hope.
 - e. Change processes, systems, and practices to **be more organic/flexible/decentralized and less institutional/centralized.**
 - f. **Be open to radical change.** Have the courage to bring Spirit-led change and to be changed. Reimagine how we use buildings and space. Perhaps it's no longer Sunday-centric; smaller and deeper, more organic; not building-focused, being a movement. God is everywhere. Look for new places to cultivate community; Be the church in the streets.
 - g. **Identify Pathways to the new church that is emerging** – how do we get from here to there?
Next Steps

6. **Relaunch Campus Ministry** as the place where future leaders are formed; clarifying roles, providing resources, support and accountability, and correcting inequities. Encourage local church partnerships.

The Connectional Table will continue to communicate developments to this work throughout the year. And you will hear stories throughout TWK 2023 annual conference that convey this work.

While the Connectional Table is not doing a live “report” during the annual conference session, the body will be witnessing the ripple effect of the work the Connectional Table has done. Things to listen for that will show how the work of the Connectional Table has provided the environment for our conference to move into the future:

- + Stories of abiding in Christ - how relying on Christ has given us courage to be nimble, learn new things, lead through change, endure trauma, survive burnout and be Jesus' presence in the world. The Connectional Table has led, held meetings and conversations in a way that has created a space for this vulnerable leading to be "okay."
- + beautiful stories of connection with local churches, ministry teams, global partners, and higher ed institutions.
- +The Vine UMC report which will convey the faithful, innovative culture that the CT has worked hard to create.
- + The launch of the Faith and Innovation idea and team! A new beginning that was generated by so much of the visionary stewardship you have cultivated. Discover/Send at the heart of this.
- +The amazing work of the worship team and anti-racism coalition to help the conference celebrate Juneteenth and invite people into the work of antiracism. The collaborative focus of antiracism came from many Connect team conversations.
- + The development of a faithful and hopeful budget process that believes God’s resources for the TWK are abundant.
- + A report of the redistricting committee and its strategic conversations thus far.
- + A story of how the Cabinet has abided in Christ all year!
- + And undergirding the work... covenant has been a big part of each team - when things get challenging they have remembered their why and relied on God for faithful next steps.

An additional note from the Connect Strategy Team:

Covenant is an important aspect of our work and the Connect team has sought to clarify the covenant relationship with related health and welfare organizations. To further continue this work, an official adjustment of relationship must take place by action of the annual conference:

Paragraph 2517 of the 2016 Book of Discipline tasks the Annual Conference with designating a body responsible for establishing and maintaining the TWK relationship statements with related health and welfare organizations. Given the work that the Connect Strategy Team has already completed with our covenant entities and the relationships already established, the Connectional Table recommends the Connect Strategy team be designated as the body responsible for this important work.