

# TableTalk\_Ep12\_092424

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

church, building, tommy, ministry, relationship, work, years, partnership, community, united methodist church, space, james, part, nashville, wonderful, brian, antioch, neighborhood, move, ministries

## SPEAKERS

Lynn, Tommy, James, Brian

### Lynn 00:00

Lynn, welcome to The Table Talk podcast, a place where United Methodists across Tennessee and Western Kentucky can connect with one another in deeper conversation around life and faith. My name is Lynn Patterson and I serve at Liberty United Methodist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, and I will be your host for today's episode. The church is not the building, and yet many communities of faith find themselves navigating the burdens and celebrating the gifts of caring for Sacred Spaces. Today we're in conversation with church leaders who are learning to use their church buildings in new ways as an asset in their ministry. We'll also learn about new resources available to churches within our conference so that they too can explore how to leverage their building for ministry. Let us welcome James Cole Tommye Windsor and Brian Marcoulier, before we dive in, let's start with a question we ask all of our tabletop guests. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your current ministry contacts. Brian, would you like to start?

### Brian 01:14

Yeah, my name is Brian Marcoulier. I serve as the senior pastor of Calvary United Methodist Church in green hills, and I'm also the chaplain of faith and innovations mission spark sub team, which is speaking around this question and doing some of the work around this question of Alternative Building use.

### Lynn 01:31

Thank you, Brian. Let's go to Tommye.

### Tommye 01:35

Hi. My name is Tommye Windsor Cummings, and I am the Family Ministries director at Colonial Park, United Methodist Church. So basically, I'm over all the tiny humans and the people that made the tiny humans.

### Lynn 01:46

Tommye, where are you located?

**Tommye 01:47**

We're in Memphis, Tennessee.

**Lynn 01:49**

Wonderful. Thank you for that, James?

**James 01:53**

Good morning. My name is James Cole. I'm the pastor at Antioch, United Methodist Church in southeast Nashville, and have been there for almost 12 years. Now I'm in my 12th year of ministry, and it's a pleasure to be with you all.

**Lynn 02:07**

Thank you. Thank you very much. James, okay, now tell us about your church's historic relationship with their building, and what was the catalyst for them to look at their building differently?

**James 02:20**

Yeah, our church was established in 1891 along the Mill Creek in southeast Nashville on una Antioch Pike, and so they had many years there. But those of you who know Nashville history know that the Mill Creek has flooded quite a few times, and the church was flooded three times over the years. They finally made a decision in the 1980s and were able to purchase property on higher ground. So they moved up up the hill, and are located currently near the corner of Tusculum and Blue Hole road above Lighthouse Christian Academy. And so they built a new building on that property in the in the 80s, they worked on that, and then in the early 90s, they worked on a Christian Life Center. And the building itself is of great importance to the people and we, we were blessed years ago with the opportunity to welcome project transformation ministry here in Tennessee into our midst, and that really helped open the doors and the hearts and the minds of our people there to really reengage in the community itself.

**Lynn 03:37**

And project transformation is also a way for people in the conference to come and join and find your building. Absolutely,

**James 03:43**

yeah, that is. Thanks be to God for that. Absolutely.

**Lynn 03:45**

Tommye,

**Tommye 03:47**

so colonial Park is located in the heart of East Memphis, about 15 minutes from everywhere in the city of Memphis, and we have a big, beautiful building that was built in the mid in the mid 1950s so we still have members of the church that have been there since the building was was built. I had a wonderful conversation with a lady who is going to be a part of our confirmation coming up this fall, who remembers her very own confirmation at the church. So we've got a lot of wonderful history and a lot of

really wonderful people that have been there for a long time, but back in 2020 when everything shut down, the church started up a Mobile Food Pantry with the Mid South Food Bank and serves the first and third Thursday of every month. And while the church had a lot of things that they were already doing with their regular ministries within the building, that was one of the first ones that really just had so many of the community on the property at one time and kind of started opening up ideas of different things we could start doing excellent.

**Lynn 04:50**

Now continue down this road a little bit. Let's talk about how your congregation discerns new partners and then ways to use their. Building you might want to consider too, what's the importance of knowing your community?

**Brian 05:05**

Yeah, so I just moved to Calvary a little over a year ago, so I'm still meeting the community that is green hills, if and in some ways, arguably, learning how to live in community that has radically changed since the church was started in the late 40s before coming to Calvary, though I served at Bellevue United Methodist Church for seven years, very much reflective of many of our Suburban churches. So it sat in the middle of a neighborhood. It was kind of the center of town, but town grew out on the sides and shifted away from that space, and so finding a sense of context for what was our ministry was a little unique. It took some work and practice, and for sure, like Tommy and maybe even James, a little bit the pandemic was a clarifying moment. We already had gotten clear about ministries that mattered to us. So homelessness, education and food insecurity were three core things. We just said. They've been a part of this church for decades, and it seems to be where people put their energy. That's where their passion is. So we just got kind of clarity around that, and then kept doing that work. So when the pandemic came and room in the end, that partnership ceased. We had to think through, or at least paused, maybe not ceased, paused. We thought, how do we do this better? Or how do we continue this ministry? And that's when we actually shifted to open our building for transitional housing. Be we had been in partnership with enough community organizations around us that we we heard the need, and when the opportunity arose for that, they called us, they said, We know that this, this work matters to you. Would you be willing to step out in faith and do this work alongside us? And so there is that benefit of as you get to know your community more, that when you when you're able to answer the the needs that they have, even small ones, that builds enough relationship and trust that they can call you when the larger ones

**Lynn 07:03**

emerge. Oh, that's wonderful. So you were ready to respond and to pick up on those relationships in

**Brian 07:08**

some ways. Yes, I would argue that whether we were fully ready for folks living in our building full time would be argued. That was the journey, for sure. But there was that part where we we didn't have to answer the question, is this a part of our mission? That was clear. So then we said, what are the barriers we have to overcome to do this? Well, so it was a different conversation. When you're clear about mission, the the other piece is, it suddenly doesn't become, is this what we should do or not? It's how should we do this faithfully? This does fit our mission. What are the challenges we have to figure

out and overcome? And some of the ones that most churches might get most stuck on, oh, well, we're going to displace the Sunday school class. Well, my chair of trustees was in that class. She said, I'll go when it came to presenting, presenting it to the congregation. Four of our lay leaders presented it to the church, and I ran sound that night, which was kind of my indicator that we were in the right place. When your lay leaders are standing up front saying, We believe this is a part of the mission God's called us to. Here's how we discern that, here's the concerns we have that we're trying to address. I kind of felt like we were moving in the right direction.

**Lynn 08:15**

Wonderful. Thank you. What kind of fruit. Have you seen within your congregation and community since your congregation began to use its building in these ways? Brian, you've already addressed that slightly. But James, if you want to talk about that a little bit, or Tommye, if you could, you could weigh in on that. It would be great.

**Tommye 08:35**

Absolutely. I can jump in real quick. So we have quite a like I said. We're in the located in the heart of Memphis, about 15 minutes from everything. So we have community partners, from the Memphis Grizzlies to the YMCA to our Mobile Food Pantry, and last year was one of my first big clarifying moments, not just for myself, but the rest of the staff, where we hosted a trunk or treat, just something simple that we had done for years and years and years, but at that trunk or treat, we saw a representation from everything we do, from people who go to the Mobile Food Pantry, from kids who were at the YMCA from the elementary school that's within a half mile of our church. It was a beautiful, beautiful representation of not just our neighborhood, but the ministries that we have on campus at any given point.

**Lynn 09:25**

Oh, that's very cool. James

**James 09:29**

yeah. Well, I mentioned Antioch United Methodist came into existence in 1891 and at that time, southeast Nashville was rural farming community and railroad employees and educators. It became a suburb as growth emanated from Central Nashville out into the the outer environs and and then after it became a suburb in maybe the 70s, 80s and 90s, people started to move even further out and. The Southeast, Nashville became a hub of the immigrant and refugee community, and we celebrate that we are literally, I think, the most diverse zip code in Tennessee, 372, 03, and so our community is full of people from all over the world, literally and in years past, the church had a relationship with an Hispanic church that was for a season and went away. But then, as I mentioned, Project transformation came in, because the church had sort of grown inward, you know, that sort of inward looking mentality that many churches have. And so we experienced that, and project transformation came and helped us open the doors. And since then, we've been able to enter into relationships with other churches, and particularly another ministry called the branch of Nashville. So currently we live with a Nepali church, and we also live with an Arabic church. So we have those two churches with whom we celebrate in worship. Not all that, not every Sunday, but three or four times a year, have meals together, do things together, and then at the height of covid, or really, I guess, the beginning of covid, the branch of Nashville came and asked

us if they could use our space in our Christian life center to stage a response to the the the greatly increased need for people to have food. And so we said, Yeah, sure, come on. And so that was four years ago, and ever since then, we've been in partnership together, and it's been a beautiful, evolving ministry. Now we're looking at a 10 year lease with the branch of Nashville, and their vision for ministry has expanded beautifully. They not only do fit food distribution, they have about 240 English as a learning language students. They also have hired a really fabulous social worker who does what they call comprehensive care ministries. So they're addressing kind of the holistic needs of the people that come to the branch looking for help, and so it's just a wonderful partnership that we were really happy to be a part of. Thank

**Lynn 12:28**

you, James. Now after my short time being at Project transformation, it really is the kingdom of God. You see all the faces there. Thank you for that. That's wonderful. Now, what are some challenges. What are some points of tension that you have seen in some of these partnerships?

**Brian 12:47**

I really appreciated having some conversation with James and Tommye. I'm going to let them tag in. I've got a long list too. But why don't we go to Tommye first?

**Tommye**

Absolutely. So I mean, some of the things you typically think of, schedules and organization of utilizing the building, if you have so many different partners in your building at one time, things are going to get a little discombobulated. So making sure that you have a clear church calendar was was big for us. One of the things that we did as a church this summer is not only we had the church calendar, but for a specific organization like the YMCA that was there numerous hours during the day. We made them their own schedule, so that way they knew what parts the church were open to them. That way the kids could get their sillies out in the gym, stuff like that. And then other things like, you know, well, this has always been the insert class here, trying to make sure that we're honoring what the church has been, but also being able to move forward to what the church can be, and utilizing and sharing these spaces. Ironically enough, some of our youth were a little more discombobulated than others, because the YMCA used their room and things were moved from week to week, or their game console maybe got a little busted, but it's part of using the space, and it's the learning experience from that

**Lynn 14:06**

excellent example. Thank you for that, Tommye.

**James 14:08**

I concur wholeheartedly with Tommye, scheduling issues, space sharing, and you know, the people at Antioch love their church, and they they cherish and are good stewards of the buildings. So they always want to see things taken care of well. And inevitably, when you have, for instance, one summer with Project transformation, 140 kids running all through our entire physical plant there, are inevitably things that that, you know, get bumped and things that get changed, but feelings that get hurt. Feel some feelings that get hurt, but, but Antioch has been gracious and hospitable in almost every way. So despite the you know, expected hurdles and bumps in the road, you. They have open hearts.

**Lynn 15:03**

They've they've risen to the occasion. Absolutely, that's lovely. It

**Brian 15:06**

is a growing edge, right? I mean, part of this You said this earlier, James, and I appreciate it. You said, we have been in meals together. We've been in worship together. We built relationships with one another, which means during that time, you can figure out what are the things that are that matter to us, and where are those vines of our faith and connection kind of intertwined? Sometimes it's in furniture and space, sometimes it's in relate. We hope it's in relationship too. And I think sometimes we have to pull that out of our folks, because they can get kind of rattled when certain furniture starts to move and it's not the same place, or it's got scuffs and scars from 140 kids walking by and touching it. And yet the beauty of that is that in that space, there is life emerging and connections emerging. We found some tension in our neighborhood when word got out, because this was a partnership for Metro Nashville housing navigation center. It was a partnership with the mayor's office, community care, fellowship and the church. So needless to say, the mayor wanted to win around addressing homelessness, and so before we knew it, we have a press conference in our parking lot, and the newspapers are showing up, and the new TV vans are showing up, and we're in these conversations trying to navigate it and quickly our neighborhood is is a little concerned about what are you trying to do? And so it took a lot of phone calls with moms and others in the neighborhood to try and help them understand how the program was going to be supported, how we planned on it being a part of the community, that these were our neighbors that were already in the neighborhood, maybe not as close as they realized. Some of them closer than they realized. And and also it helped that as a not only as the pastor, but as a dad, I could say, I live on the property. I'm here navigating this with you. I certainly want you to understand that we've, we've thought through some of these pieces, and that helped. It eased a lot of minds that I was willing to engage one to one with concerns that were there, but that also was the tension those partnerships we were up to six by the time I left, took a third of my time or more to manage, and so that meant that the expectations of the church had to change for how available I was throughout the week to just pivot, because sometimes managing those partnerships required me to be far more present in the building and meeting with those groups whenever they met. We weren't as good about pulling the meals together, I think, because they weren't necessarily connecting naturally. So we had to kind of think that through. And I will say looking back, that's something I think we could have done more intention with early in we figured it out. But, I mean, part of it is so many of these partnerships emerged post covid, so we were all still learning to be in space together, which added a complication, but it also meant that if I had to go back and do it again, I'd probably put more of those leaders from those various groups at the table with one another. More quickly,

**Lynn 18:06**

very interesting, very good. Now, this question really, really supports what you're just saying here. How does a church keep from seeing itself as a landlord when sharing its building space? What does it look like to be relational and not transactional? Now, Brian, you've already addressed that somewhat. Tommye James, do you have any thoughts? And we'll come back to you. Too Perfect.

**Tommye**

Oh, this is, this is my favorite question. You're building relationships, to quote a good friend of mine, relationships are the ultimate currency. You spend time with people, you find out their needs and wants and likes, and you build on that relationship. It's not you don't make it transactional. You make it to where you are involved in life and ministry together. It's not just you're coming and using our building. It's we know about you. We're checking on you. You just cultivate and build that relationship naturally

**Lynn 19:03**

Excellent. And that takes time, and that's what Brian pointed out. And I think those are things we need to remember. Thank you. Thank you. Tommye James,

**James 19:12**

yeah, I speak a lot about Project transformation because it's been such a vital part of the life of Antioch UMC. But one of their main themes is transformation through relationships and and so I really try to keep that front and center in and how we work with these other groups sharing space. And there was a book I read years ago, called how we the way we talk, can change the way we work. And so continually try to use a language that gets away from us and them to we are together in ministry. And so, like you said, away from the transactional kind of concept to. Relational being in ministry together. And that is that comes with some difficulties. You know, there are certain ways in which members of the church, and I understand this completely, they build it. They've lived there for 40 years. They have a great deal of pride and ownership in it. And in working with another group, there are certain, you know, real things that have to be taken care of, like replacing an HVAC and how's that going to happen, and who's going to pay for it? How are we going to so there are some landlordish things that have to be dealt with, but, but we're really working at building relationships, which includes having meals together, doing things together, meeting together, doing ministry together. So relationship is essential, so

**Lynn 20:53**

the landlord supports the relationship absolutely support and position. Yeah.

20:58

Good, definitely, good. That's

**Lynn 20:59**

wonderful. Brian, any more comments before we move on? I

**Brian 21:02**

would just simply say mutuality. I mean, there has to be a sense of mutuality that you're sharing, that that the space is more than just where we all move and exist and kind of cross paths with each other, but it's truly within that space that we're learning to share life together, to hold space for one another in the moments of great joy and the moments of real pain and grief. And a lot of these ministries we're talking about are existing and moving along very needed places within our community. I mean, whether that's Tommy talking about the partnerships the YMCA and places for little, whether it's talking about the branch and addressing needs of food insecurity and support and English learners, English language learners, or in our situation, homelessness. I mean, they're they're people with real needs and real stories, and the more we stop long enough to listen to them, the more we realize that we're going

to have Messier spaces and we're going to have to work at it, because we need those spaces to gather for those purposes and connections. So it was a beautiful thing most days. Certainly, I'm glad I shaved all my hair off in the pandemic, because I probably would have pulled it out, because there were definitely moments where it was like, why are people peopling so much?

**Lynn 22:18**

I hate that when that

**Brian 22:21**

happens, it is sometimes hard to manage relationships. All of our good comes with some of our mess and our bad, right? So, and we see that, and churches can also see their jagged edges in the midst of that work as well.

**James 22:34**

Yeah, I'm thinking of a book, I think it was Mike yaconelli or Mark yakinelli, called Messy spirituality. And I love that book, but it points to what you're saying, that we bring our humanity into these relationships, and there are going to be some ragged edges, jagged edges, and plain human stuff, absolutely,

**Lynn 22:56**

absolutely excellent. And building relationships really supports our mission, rather than the transaction, so that that's really an important part. What do you see as the future of sacred spaces, and how does our Wesleyan practice of faith prepare us for this?

**Brian 23:14**

Who wants to take up that question? First, we're gonna we're gonna point to Tommye

**Tommye**

Okay, so something that, when I first heard that question, the first thing I thought of is, we're providing the understanding that the church is a place for people to feel safe and loved. So that was my first initial thought when hearing that is, we want to make sure that people are coming into our buildings and knowing that they're loved, that they're cared for, that they're in a place that is going to support them and take care of them, because that's huge for them, whether they're coming in on Sunday mornings or coming in for whatever ministries we have offering during the week to go on into their lives in The future. I know I speak a lot from the perspective of kids, because I do work with kids more, but it's it's such a huge thing for people in their lives. I grew up going to church. I grew up in the family that was Church and the safety that that felt. But I also know that I'm that not everyone has gotten that so providing the spaces for the community to make sure that they understand and have that feeling and security, I think, is huge.

**Lynn 24:27**

It really is. Tommye, thank you for that. And sometimes that seems obvious, but we don't always, always demonstrate that. Very nice.

**James 24:37**



Well, the question, I believe, was the future of sacred space correct when I think, you know, at the micro level with the church I serve, I hope and pray that there will be a church there for many years to come, I think it will involve being in partnership with the entities that were already in partnership and. Be more and if it changes over the years, if one of these groups leaves, I hope and pray that another group will step in and we'll be able to creatively be together and move the mission of the kingdom of God, the reign of God, forward in that particular place. So that's it for for Antioch UMC, but I think for the United Methodist Church, we have too many churches that are struggling with keeping up costs in the of the physical plant. And I think the the church has to get creative about what we do with all these churches. Because, of course, we all know the church is in decline. The tectonic plates have shifted in our religious landscape and and things are different. So we've got to be different and think differently how we use all of these assets. We can't keep them all, in my opinion, and so we have to really think creatively, fresh expressions about how to utilize all the beautiful gifts God has given us in all these churches.

**Lynn 26:13**

Amen, absolutely. But James, I'm going to say I think the church is evolving, not declining.

26:18

That's a good point.

**Lynn 26:19**

That's a we're gonna be in a different I love that.

26:23

Thank you. Yeah, thank you. Well,

**Brian 26:26**

Wendell Berry made a comment that comes to mind every time I hear sacred space. He said, There's no unsacred places. There are only sacred places and desecrated places. And so part of that work is reclaiming that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, that we are caretakers. So I would say part of our challenge has been we've sought too long to be owners instead of caretakers, and so sometimes we hold tightly to the building as though it somehow is ours, not recognizing we're meant to be caretakers of that, and ultimately caretakers of the whole of creation around us. And so maybe one of the things I hope for the future of the church is that we will, we will get rid of some of our Western thinking of ownership like this is ours. We own it. We hold the deed all these pieces, and start thinking about how we hold that more mutually with our communities. They have shown for the last decade, and I think it's going to only increase in the decade ahead, that the future of addressing the needs of our community will be government, nonprofit, religious communities and for profit, working together. The only way forward is all organizations have to have a stake in the work, and having done that work a little bit with Metro, it's messy. No, you know, I found I had more off the record conversations than I've ever had my life. And I was like, Can we go on record that we had the conversation? And they would look at me and but, I mean, there was this reality that that we're gonna have to find a way to bring all of those to bear, to address the needs in our community. And those aren't always just the needs on the margins when we talk about homelessness and food insecurity, but the need for community. I mean, isolation is

one of the largest concerns in our country right now, social isolation is topping the list, and so we're talking about building relationships that are transformational. Well, we might have an answer. And when agnostics are writing articles in The Atlantic that talk about maybe the eroding of the church is problematic for our whole society, I think we should pay attention that there was something about the church's ability to build relationships that we really don't need to lose as a society. Lots of criticism. He could add to that, but I mean, he was really writing beautifully to say maybe we shouldn't ignore that. It was holding us up in ways that we maybe didn't realize in relationship building. So I'm really intrigued by that, but that's going to mean we have to rethink some of our buildings we need to let go of so that we make sure we don't lose focus on the relationship work, because those buildings can be black holes of needs and so evaluating that is, I think, the work of our conference and in our whole denomination. But I do think that the core of our mission was never about building buildings, and the more we remember that the better off that said we've got to be good caretakers, good stewards of what we have been given. To use

**Lynn 29:28**

that disconnect between the sacred spaces or our churches and our relationship mission is something that that is very interesting. Will look look differently going forward. Tommy, anything else you want to chip in before we move on?

**Brian 29:42**

Oh, no, I just, I completely agree with, with all of that. It's so important to be able to look at church differently, um, a fresh expression, like James said, it's, it's incredibly important to be able to look through and find those fresh expressions of church and. How we can utilize the buildings we have, how we can combine and how we can ultimately be there as we need to be for our neighborhoods.

**James 30:11**

Yes, one other thing I'm thinking of is in our Wesleyan tradition, the Wesley brothers left the building to go out into ministry to be with coal miners coming out of the mines and preaching at six o'clock in the morning. So I think churches will help themselves if they get out of their buildings, connect with a local school, and I know many churches already do that, and that's wonderful, but find the ways to be in the community and claim that as sacred space, and I think that's a part of the future of sacred space.

**Lynn 30:46**

Well said, well said, very nice, very nice. Okay, we're going to shift gears a little bit here, and Brian, we're going to ask you to tell us a little bit about the work faith and innovation has been doing this year to help congregations in our conference, rethink their church buildings.

**Brian 31:03**

Yeah. So faith and innovation in the last year has created three sub teams, of which I'm a part of one of those called Mission spark. And I don't know who gave the full definition, but we're the research arm. They called us the brain trust. And I said, Well, maybe not use brain trust. Can we just go with the research arm that's curious. And so we have been really allowing our process to drive us with curious questions. And the first question we felt we needed to help the conference answer was, what are options for alternative building use? How can we support Alternative Building use? So we've worked

since the last fall till now to develop a resource to help with that. We're rolling that out right now. In fact, when I finished recording this podcast, I'm meeting with the conference trustees to present that very resource to try and help churches that are at the very beginning of this journey, saying we want to use our building we don't know where to start. We've created a guide to help walk through some of those steps. One of the learnings that we did in that though, that flipped it for us, was we realized that we started checking off the list, from zoning to building usage to facility use agreements and memorandums of understanding, all these technical terms, and tried to give examples, and at the end, put all these aspects of how you would vet a potential partner, What would be some relationship building strategies. And we paused and went, we've got the order wrong, because if the relationship isn't there, all the other pieces will not help, that they will make it transactional. So we shifted our whole resource to where the front of it is guiding you through do some real discernment work as you're building relationship with a potential partner. Here's some ways to spend time with that. Here's the human capital that would be needed to support that partnership with building care with problems that come up, because that HVAC unit that James mentioned earlier will fail at some point at the least convenient moment. And so that resource is coming online over the next month or so, as we finish kind of presenting that, and our hope is that will be a way to help a congregation that's considering this and know that myself and others that are a part of this work are happy to help with some of that handholding, because it can be a little overwhelming to first enter into this work. Last I checked, there is no class in seminary that says how to rethink your building use and how to become a property manager overnight. It doesn't it's not there. There's no curriculum. And so we want to try and make it to where you don't feel like you're alone in that learning. So that's the first question we've been working on answering was around Alternative Building use. So that is available. You'll see some of that resources on the conference website. We have a webinar coming up as well that will introduce that October 3. Yeah, on October 3. So you know, know that if you're hearing this podcast after that date, to look for that punch that into the TWK website, and that's another way for you to engage and hear more about that.

**Lynn 33:56**

Thank you. That's wonderful to have some nuts and bolts things that we can use to apply to this situation. Wonderful. Any other comments? Okay, we have some lightning round questions, so just want to say what comes off the top of your head? Let's see what we can do. What most excites you about ministry right now,

**Brian 34:19**

go for it, James, and we'll let Tommy. Let Tommy go next. Yeah. Well, I

**James 34:22**

love what's happening at the Antioch church. We're small in number, but mighty in spirit, and I've heard one of our longtime members say that with 60 people, we're doing more than we did with 300 people in terms of reaching out into the community and being a part of that sacred space. So that's something that excites me very much. Project transformation, Habitat for Humanity, Room in the Inn, a blessing box, a food or a clothing gathering. Ministry, which is really cool that gets the clothing out of landfills and to people that need it. So there's just a lot of good stuff happening. Thanks be to God.

**Lynn 35:04**

Thanks be to God. Thank you so much. James Tommye, what you got?

**Tommye 35:08**

Oh, it's absolutely seeing the community in action in the church today alone at Colonial Park, there's a food bank going on, and there's hundreds of people from the neighborhood getting food, and it's just wonderful to see, because the volunteers that we have there are not just volunteers from our church, they're volunteers from the entire neighborhood, and seeing the ministry from not just colonial Park United Methodist Church, but a synagogue that's right down the street come together to be able to make sure we're meeting the needs of people. That's just absolutely beautiful, wonderful. What

**Lynn 35:43**

a community. That's, that's, that's great. Tommy, thank you so much. Okay, Brian, well,

**Brian 35:48**

I always love being in conversations like these. It can be easy sometimes to get sucked into where you're living, your context, so much so that you don't look up. And so one of the things that excites me about ministry is doing this work with Mission Spark, not because I don't see that at work in Calvary and churches I've served, but in some ways, I'm seeing it grow beyond those places and connect them. So I'm getting more emails and phone calls than I thought I would be getting this quickly, since we haven't really rolled it out, but people are interested, which excites me, because I've always felt there was a season where it felt like I'm the only one. I knew that wasn't the case, but you can feel isolated in this work, and so I love the idea of building some community of you know, if there's a church that's coming online doing some of the work like Antioch has been doing, I'm going to connect them with James. If there's a church that's in Memphis, it's like we just don't know where to start. And I go, you need to talk to Tommy. I think she can help you. She may, you know, and Tommy doesn't have to be the expert, but can be somebody who says you're going to run into some walls, but don't run into them alone. And maybe call somebody, and we can help you and remind you it's not as big as it feels. So that excites me to see the connection of our United Methodist Church actually work

**Lynn 37:01**

wonderful. So building relationships within the connection Wonderful. Thank you for that. Brian, that's great. Okay, what are you learning and where are you learning it? So

**Brian 37:12**

I went to Colorado last week to do a sermon planning retreat, something I've never done in 20 years of ministry, and I learned that in the midst of this work, I have got to take a rest. It is easy to be kind of, you know, nose to the grindstone going at it. And most especially after seven years at Bellevue watching those partnerships explode, it was really tiring, and I was not so good at taking rest and tagging in some of my best lay people. They were there to support, and they came alongside. I could have done a better job of balancing that for my own sake. So I'm learning that as I'm starting in a new place that has a lot of activity, and we're only going to increase that in the coming years. And so I'm going to be a little bit more intentional about making sure I'm finding rest, making sure that I'm not wearing out myself, or the staff around me, or the lay leaders around me, that we gotta do this in a sustainable way.

**Lynn 38:08**

Such an important reminder that's that's really, really excellent. Such a good importance.

**James 38:14**

Yesterday we had a united women in faith meeting, and the the devotional time was about Sabbath rest, and so I commend you to it. It's, it's, it's not only crucial, it's a commandment. It is. So that's, that's great. Brian, I went to Schaumburg, Illinois a few weeks ago. Discipleship Ministries hosted an event called the School for congregational development, and the the theme is the same as the name of the event, SCD, and that means, see, create disciple. So that was the theme. And you know, we had great worship and great keynote speakers by people from all over the connection. And it was a really joyful event. And something I loved about it was the diversity that was present in the room from all over the country and various parts of the world. So I really celebrated that. But one of the workshops I did, which was really helpful, was leaning into courageous conversation. And I think the church is going to have to do that in days and years ahead, as we know things are changing, as we're evolving. And so that was a particularly helpful event and workshop for me, courageous

**Lynn 39:40**

conversations, absolutely. Thank you. James Tommye, what are you learning and where are you learning it? So

**Tommye 39:48**

first off, I do want to thank Brian for the reminder to rest. I think that's so important in ministry, because it's we often forget it. So one thing I'm focusing on currently is the concept of inclusion ministry. Everyone learns in different ways. Everyone processes in different ways. Whether you are in the gifted category, you're on the spectrum for autism or ADHD, we have so many different personality types and the positive and negative disintegrations that come from your learning processes, but specifically how you work on including that into the church. And I'm reading as many books as I can find on it.

**Lynn 40:28**

Very good, very good. That's

**Brian 40:30**

good work. Tommye, it really is very good.

**Lynn 40:33**

Thank you. Finally finish this sentence, church is

40:41

church is relationship rooted in the love and grace of Jesus Christ and our Triune God,

**Brian 40:51**

amen, amen.

**Lynn** 40:53

Amen to that. That's

**Brian** 40:54

a good word,

**Lynn** 40:55

amen, Tommye, anything you'd like to to

**Brian** 40:59

add, church is home. Church is safe. Very

**Lynn** 41:03

nice, very nice. Brian, I

**Brian** 41:06

said, Amen to James. Ultimately, I do agree with that it is a place of grace and experiencing the love of God, and also a place where love of neighbor finds a home. And so I love that work. So thank you.

**Lynn** 41:23

So many good words. So many good words. Well, thank you James, Tommy and Brian. If you the audience would like to learn more about anything we've discussed today, including the new resources from faith and innovation, visit our table talk website at TWK, UMC dot O R G, slash Table Talk. And if you'd like to add to our conversation, we would love to hear from you, email us at table dot talk at TWK, UMC, dot, O, R, G, it has been wonderful to be together this morning and to hear so many great new ideas. Thank you all so much.

42:09

Thanks for having me. Thank you.

42:11

Thank you. You