



**DAVID W. GRAVES, RESIDENT BISHOP**

June 6, 2025

Dear Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference Family,

I am overwhelmed with the graciousness of God among us this week at the 4<sup>th</sup> TWK Annual Conference in Collierville, TN. You arrived prepared, anticipating what the Lord might do with us, and we indeed experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit!

Focusing on Christ as the whole body of the church is always the right thing. Praise and worship were phenomenal. Our prayer times were encounters with the Spirit that words fail to describe. While I was not present in every place, it was clear to me that the equipping and learning opportunities were deepening our collective dive into the discipleship priorities. Fellowship times fostered the relationships we have with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank you all!

I want to share a few things that have touched my heart. There will be more as I reflect on our time. Just for this moment, please allow me to share.

We had an incredible youth and young adult presence at this Annual Conference. Your presence among us is an encouragement for the way Jesus is inviting more people to follow Him. You just weren't "present" – you were fully engaged, and in many cases, leading! Having spent several years in youth ministry, I know the sacrifices made by many adults to nurture the next generation on their faith journey. Thank you for doing it! Keep doing it! It matters to the whole body of the church. It is the culture of the call that God has invited us to take up together. Our young people are leaning into the Spirit!

Our preachers shared the word of God with humility, power, and truth. Your prophetic voices called us to a deeper relationship and life with Christ. We will never be the same! And friends, during our closing worship, when the lights went out in Collierville, you immediately responded by bringing in the light! Your voices resounding with praise as you sang, Amazing Grace, and your confident trust in God with that moment will stay with me forever. I am at a loss for words to describe what we experienced. I hope we all take that moment into our lives when dark moments come – trust the light of Christ to be with you.

Most Annual Conferences have a host church. Their teams make sacrifices no one can see; they work tirelessly on behalf of all of us. This year, we had three churches that collaborated and provided hosting: Collierville, Germantown, and Peace Tree UMC. Seeing that collaboration and strength within the connection is wonderful. Your hospitality is a beautiful expression of Christ's love within you, and we received abundantly; thank you!

Finally, let me say that your joy in celebrating each other as people were received into the covenant family of clergy called to ministry left me speechless. Seeing you applaud each other for saying “yes!” to God was genuine and encouraging. Sports figures receive applause for making touchdowns. Musicians often receive applause for great concerts and special gifts. You applauded each other and praised God for doing something among us that is more than we could ask or imagine! We have heard the call, and we are answering. Thanks be to God!

After I hold the Kentucky Annual Conference next week, I will take some time to rest. The space to reflect and enjoy time with my family will help me. God gives us insight and renewal when we step away. You can be assured that in reflection and rest, I will keep you in prayer and return with anticipation of our time ahead. Thank you all for making my first Annual Conference with you a shared experience with the Holy Spirit that will bless my life forever. Nancy and I are so grateful to be serving with you.

Grace and Peace,



*David W. Graves*

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