



## Well-Being Practices for Meetings and Gatherings

In the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church, we believe God desires for our ministry leaders to flourish in mind, body, and spirit. We encourage all ministry teams across our conference to shape their gatherings, whether retreats or routine meetings, as spaces of grace and wholeness. We know that God did not create us to be machines driven only by tasks, but beloved children called into the beloved community. In Christ, we are invited to care for one another, to honor the gifts we each bring, and to nurture the rhythm of ministry that reflects God's abundant life.

"I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." -John 10: 10b

- **Start gatherings with a time of centering** that invites individual and collective vulnerability. This might include praying and creating space for people to share openly and honestly. This helps us move from a generic gathering space to a time of belonging and intimacy together as followers of Christ. It would be helpful to model what this vulnerability might look like.

Questions you might consider: What brings you joy or delight? Name one thing you are especially grateful for today? Where are you sensing the movement of the Holy Spirit? How is it with your soul? What is one word that describes what you are currently experiencing or feeling?

- Utilize **silence, meditation, or mindful breathing** as a grounding exercise at the beginning and middle of your meetings. Examples include: take five deep "belly breaths" together, engage in 3-4-5 breathing (inhale for 3 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 5 seconds).
- When holding a meeting for more than an hour, **schedule time for breaks**. When hosting a break, encourage participants to engage in physical movement of at least five minutes. Consider using your break time for a movement and stretch break. If a meeting is expected to last several hours, plan to take a longer break – at least 15 minutes—so that people can also take care of other needs. This would encourage true presence during the meeting. When people know they will have an opportunity to handle email at scheduled break times, they are less likely to multitask during the meeting.
- Create a shared **covenant** together. A covenant is a process of agreeing how a team will engage with one another in order to honor God's invitation and the gifts God has given to each member. The process of developing a covenant is even more important than the document that is created. It is an experience for a team to learn that without the grace of God, adaptive leadership is not possible. Be open to the ways God will help you adapt the covenant to meet your team's needs. [Learn more about creating a covenant here.](#)
- **Get outside.** Meeting one-on-one with someone or in a small group? Consider meeting at a park and walking together.



- **Integrate play** into your gatherings with opportunities to have fun with each other and share joy. This could look like icebreakers at the beginning or middle of your meeting.
- **Take breaks for reflection.** During the meeting, pause to allow participants to reflect on the topic and formulate their thoughts before sharing. In retreats and longer meetings, create white-space – time without any assignments.
- **When gathering in-person**, be thoughtful about how the space promotes well-being. Things to consider include having water and cups available, putting sensory toys and coloring pencils at each seat, making sure space is well-lit, ensuring nutritious meals and snacks.
- **When meeting virtually**, consider sitting outside or position yourself in front of a window so that you can look outside while you're participating in the call. Every 20 minutes, focus on something 20 feet away. Allow for "camera off" time and make that an acceptable practice during meetings.
- Use the Loving, Learning, and Leading model to **structure your meetings**. Begin your meetings with a time of "loving." This could look like someone offering a brief devotion or time of centering. It could also include a time to invite attendees to discuss and reflect upon your shared covenant together. Next, spend some time "learning" together. This is a time to intentionally set aside for group development. Is there a report to receive, or a new idea to consider together? Finally, spend time "leading" together. What action steps does your team need to take to move forward in your work?
- Beyond structured meeting time, look for opportunities to create **shared experiences** together as a team or committee. This could look like sharing a meal, going on a pilgrimage, engaging in mission and service, etc. Shared experiences give opportunity for members to build a deeper level of trust with one another, creating authentic relationships.
- **Be aware of any sense of restlessness** or impatience. We live in a society that places high value on productivity and efficiency. We expect things to be done at the hour mark. How might we reset expectations and remind one another that the Spirit does not work on our schedule? We must allow ourselves time and create shared experiences that give value to our time. Slow down the pace.
- **End the meeting with gratitude.** Invite participants to express gratitude for the shared time and the contributions of their colleagues.
- Take time to invite a **meeting evaluation** at the end of your gathering. Ask questions like: What did you like about this meeting? What changes would you like to see for next time? Are there adjustments we could make that would help you be fully present?