

2026 Report of the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Connectional Table

Connectional Table serves as the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference's strategic leadership team. Led by the Bishop, Connectional Table consists of 14 people – both laity and clergy, volunteers and staff– who steward God's vision for our conference and shepherd the work of more than 300 volunteers who serve on more than 44 ministry teams. Some ministry teams focus on the training and educational opportunities for lay and clergy– such as college ministries, camping, safe sanctuary, and those who walk with people who are discerning calls to ministry. Some ministry teams focus on discovering new ways of being the church or on areas of mercy, justice, and reconciliation. Others focus on communication or the administration of the church—like finance and property and human resources.

Leading through change is not simply about managing uncertainty but about faithfully discerning God's movement in the midst of it. Rooted in our connectional tradition and guided by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are called to lean into seasons of transition not with fear, but with hope—trusting that transformation is often the very place where God does new and life-giving work and that the Spirit offers us power, love, and self-discipline. As leaders, we hold space for both grief and possibility, honoring what has been while courageously stepping toward what can be. Grounded in prayer, Scripture, and holy conferencing, we surrender and remain attentive and responsive to God's unfolding vision, believing that even in disruption, grace is at work shaping us into a more faithful and fruitful people.

The Discipleship Priorities of the TWK once again shaped the work of the Connectional Table, helping to form a budget process that projects focus on Culture of Call, Dismantling and Disrupting Racism and Discrimination, Professions of Faith, Spiritual Leadership, Mental Health and Wellbeing. The process expects casted vision, strategy and holds accountability for each ministry team to assess where their work intersects with the shared Discipleship Priorities. This year more ministry teams found collaboration to be a strength as they seek to deepen their work in the ways God is calling them to focus on the priorities.

Growing collaboration with the TWK Cabinet was evident as we worked together to create a discernment process for redistricting in the TWK. Work that could have been done in a silo was expanded as the Cabinet asked the Connectional Table to help form a team that would seek another way for creating districts in our changing conference context. A Redistricting Strategy team was birthed with members of the Cabinet, Connectional Table, and lay and clergy volunteers. Through spiritual discernment, research, collaboration and much holy conferencing, the three teams put forth a resolution and proposal for a way forward. The Connectional Table plans to support the continued work that is the Cabinet's to do after annual conference.

In the Nomination Report to this year's Annual Conference, you will notice some changes in the ministry team structure. These changes are a result of the Connectional Table listening to the discernment of ministry team leaders who have shared where God's calling and their passion are intersecting; paying attention to volunteer capacity so that we prioritize spiritual, strategic guiding by volunteer leaders rather than day to day management tasks; and connecting Ministry Teams to the area where they are naturally already collaborating. It's a listening practice that encourages the ministry to form the structure rather than the structure forming the ministry, and honors the leaders' listening, capacity, and call as well as their suggestions to change a ministry area.

Specific changes include:

- Mental Health and Well-being Guide Team and Faith and Innovation Guide Team have become focused Ministry Areas of the Connectional Table. Discover/Send Strategy Team is concluding.
- Administrative Strategy Team is now Administrative Guide Team; Communication Strategy Team is now Connection Guide Team; Connect Strategy Team is now Justice and Mercy Guide Team; Equip Strategy Team is now Leadership Development Guide Team; Developing Innovators is now called Cultivating Call, Innovation, and Transformation (CIT).
- Shifting of Ministry Teams to a natural place of collaboration – Disaster Response to Justice and Mercy; Archives/History to Connection; Safe Spaces to Admin Area; Standing Rules and Resolutions to Annual Conference Design Team; Ethnic and Local Church Concerns (ELCC) is now embedded in the work of Commission on Race and Religion (CORR); Cross-Racial Cross-Cultural Team (CRCC) is a new team

yoked to CORR within Justice and Mercy area; LGBTQ+ Inclusion Team is a new team called for by a resolution at last year's Annual Conference, and is now within the Justice and Mercy area; the Data and Research Team is a new team within the Connection Ministry Area.

- Paragraph 2517 of the 2020/2024 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 Justice and Mercy Guide Team has already completed with our covenant entities and the relationships already established, the Connectional Table recommends the Justice and Mercy Guide Team be designated as the body responsible for this important work.

Our TWK Ministry Team structure was designed to be nimble and able to adjust to this discernment as the needs and context of the local church changes. The desire of the original designers of the TWK ministry structure is coming to life!

The role of Connectional Table is to pay attention to the leading of the Holy Spirit in our midst and to follow, listen and steward the vision that God has for us. The Holy Spirit is moving, and we believe the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference is being invited to be part of that movement. So, that means we must listen for the voice of God in each other, our clergy and laity, our local churches and ministry partners, faithfully taking steps forward – one at a time. When we step together, we are offering the world another way of being. It's a way that we as United Methodists in a “still new” conference are uniquely gifted to do during this historical season in the life of the Church.

Respectfully Submitted -

The Members of the Connectional Table

Bishop David Graves, Team Leader

Melinda Young Britt

Pat Freudenthal

Mark Hagewood

Leslie Hotzfeld

Bethany Huffman

Amy Hurd

Carlisle Jones

Toi King

Courtney Lawson

Janice McCallen

Joshua Shaw

Brian Sigmon

Vona Wilson