

## **CONNECTIONAL TABLE**

### **2022 SPENDING PLAN NARRATIVE**

#### **PURPOSE**

The Connectional Table (CT) serves a distinct role within the church: as a body of laity and clergy from across our worldwide connection whose purpose, "... is for the discernment and articulation of the vision for the church and the stewardship of the mission, ministries, and resources of The United Methodist Church as determined by the actions of General Conference and in consultation with the Council of Bishops." (United Methodist Book of Discipline, ¶906)

#### **MISSIONAL ADAPTATION AND FOCUS**

As The United Methodist Church anticipates unprecedented change, the Connectional Table (CT) is preparing for the new things God is doing. It may be that unity and mission within our connection will be expressed in different ways in the future, and we realize that such changes will take time. In addition, new priorities have emerged because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased urgency around racial justice, especially in the United States.

Indeed, the past two years have seen the church pivot to respond to a worldwide pandemic that has infected hundreds of millions and killed millions around the globe. In response, our local churches developed on-line worship services, put in place infection control methods, and found ways to reach the vulnerable communities around them. Many churches have continued with virtual formats or hybrid services (some virtual and some in-person) and discovered that they are reaching more people.

As well, agencies, annual conferences, local churches and others continue to reach out in local communities around the globe to try to ease the suffering caused by the pandemic and associated economic disruptions. The church also continues to grapple with anti-Black racism and police brutality. The CT continues to support the ministries providing a global response to such issues, including, the Council of Bishop's denomination-wide "Dismantling Racism" initiative.

#### **POSTPONED 2020 GENERAL CONFERENCE**

A key impact of the pandemic on the CT's work has been multiple postponements of General Conference. This has left the church in limbo, unable to make crucial decisions, especially in light of a

possible split. And, even as effective vaccines have been developed, a full recovery from the pandemic has been stymied by the emergence of more infectious variants, unequal distribution of vaccines globally, and vaccine hesitancy, especially in the United States. The CT continues to prepare for General Conference however, the rhythm of the legislative work has changed.

## **DISCERNING AND ARTICULATING VISION AND IDENTITY**

With uncertainties brought about by the postponement of General Conference, and with the possibility of a split on the horizon, the Connectional Table is using the time to help the church become more clear about its identity, vision and mission and its understanding of connectionalism. In April of 2021, the CT launched an initiative, in collaboration with the agencies and others, to spur conversations in and around the connection regarding the future of The United Methodist Church. These conversations are targeted at United Methodists who will remain in the church or who are discerning.

The CT is working to bring groups together for such discussions regionally. *Regional Coordinating Groups* have convened in Europe, the Philippines, and the United States to shape these conversations in those areas. The process for conducting such conversations in Africa is still taking shape.

It is our hope that such conversations will support the enfranchisement of delegates and the engagement of United Methodists globally. As part of this initiative, the CT also will launch a program called “*Tuesdays at the Table.*” These are weekly theological discussions, featuring leading United Methodist scholars. To engage United Methodists around questions of identity at a time of great change, these scholars will explore our theological task, our approach to the sacraments, and our unique approach to mission and ministry.

Because of the growing collaboration with the agencies that are a part of CT, the weekly “*Tuesday’s at the Table*” events and the visioning process are receiving significant in-kind support from United Methodist Communications, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministries, the General Commission on Archives and History, Wespeth, and others.

## **DIVERSITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE**

The Connectional Table historically has been a small team since it began in 2004. The staff, since 2004, has included eight white employees, three Asian or Pacific Islander employees, one

African, two African Americans and one Native American employee. During the CT's history, one staff member has been male, and all the rest women. The CT has employed elders, deacons and lay people who live in various jurisdictions across the United States. The CT strives to reflect the values of diversity and inclusion in its hiring.

## **CONTINUING THE WORK AROUND FOUR KEY THEMES**

The Connectional Table continues with its previous priorities even in light of new realities. These priorities are aligned with four key themes: Worldwide and Contextual, Vital and Effective, Affirming and Inclusive, and Connectional. They are as follows:

### **WORLDWIDE AND CONTEXTUAL**

#### ***U.S. as a Regional Conference and the Christmas Covenant***

The Connectional Table continues to be inspired by the task of ¶ 125 of the Book of Discipline, to be “bound together in a connectional covenant” and to hold together “connectional unity and local freedom” (*United Methodist Book of Discipline 2016*). This has been accomplished in many ways through the work of our Worldwide Nature working and advisory groups. A key component of this work is the U.S. as a Regional Conference legislation, which has already been submitted to the General Conference.

Creating a U.S. Regional Conference provides an organizational structure for the U.S. to have parity with existing central conferences for working on the adaptable portions of The Book of Discipline. Equally important, a regional conference will offer the U.S. the opportunity to develop missional strategies for the church in the U.S. context. We continue to promote this legislation even as we support and collaborate with the Christmas Covenant Outreach Team. The Christmas Covenant is legislation that institutes regionalization worldwide.

#### ***CT Make-Up Task Force***

The Connectional Table also has convened a task force to look at the makeup of the CT to ensure that it better represents our worldwide church. This task force is preparing legislation to offer at the postponed General Conference in response to legislation in the ADCA that addresses the CT's makeup. Whereas this legislation does not address the CT's function, the board felt it important to address makeup, as a new board will one day address the role and functioning of the

CT. Making the body that makes such decisions more diverse and more globally representative positions the CT to better address role and function in ways that best fit the needs of a diverse church.

## **VITAL AND EFFECTIVE**

Equally central to our work is the growth of a vital and effective United Methodist connection that centers its energy in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Our vitality is enhanced when we affirm and include all of God's people and more fully live into a Wesleyan vision of a connectionalism that embraces all.

Going forward, the Connectional Table will continue to address how The United Methodist Church can best function as a vital and effective worldwide connection working to strengthen its ministry partnerships and its global witness. The CT has done this work through the evaluation of the agencies and through missional strategy conversations. The final report of the Agency Evaluation group is available on the CT website. The missional strategy work has happened in collaboration with United Methodist Foundations and the Council of Bishops. Another key area of this work is the development of the quadrennial budget in collaboration with the General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA).

### ***A Values Based Budget***

Focusing on its efforts to bring vitality and effectiveness to the connection, the CT implemented a new mission-focused, values-based process to allocate the denomination's budget. This process was designed to create a budget that could better focus our work missionally as a global church, help us maintain our core mission, and thrive. The values that were key to the CT's process included the mission of the denomination to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the mission of the agencies and funds, key missional priorities as well as emerging missional priorities. The CT also stressed the values of stewardship, transparency, and equity.

## **AFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE**

The CT continues its work to create a forum for dialogue about matters that may define the future of our church. The CT continues this work through *Emerging*, a web-based anthology that serves as a forum for conversation about what is next for our church. We have moved to a video

format rather than primarily print articles and have featured video interviews with bishops Cynthia Harvey, Thomas Bickerton, Christian Alsted, and Gregory Palmer, Rev. Adam Hamilton, Harriett Olson, General Secretary of United Methodist Women, Rudy Rasmus, and pastors and laity from around our global connection.

## **CONNECTIONAL**

The CT remains committed to a vision for The United Methodist Church as a connectional body. This core value is highlighted in our *State of the Church* reports, the most recent of which is entitled [\*“Blessed is the Church”\*](#) and was produced in collaboration with United Methodist Communications. This report marks a transition to on-line reports rather than printed booklets. It is our hope that the change in format will lead to better engagement with the reports and reduced costs.

### ***Improved Collaboration***

One way that we promote a vision for connectionalism is by working to build collaborative relationships with the agencies, the Council of Bishops, and others across the global church. For instance, the CT has partnered with the general agencies to assist in training new District Superintendents and Directors of Connectional Ministries. The CT has collaborated with UMCOM, GBHEM, GCAH, Wespath, and other agencies on the *Vision, Identity, Mission and Connectionalism* project. This collaboration has resulted in resource support for this project which has saved the CT any outlay of funds. As noted above, CT staff and board members also work closely with GCFA to prepare the budget and with the Council of Bishops on a variety of initiatives.

## **THE 2022 SPENDING PLAN**

We are using the same apportionments base as the 2017 to 2020 quadrennium due to the postponement of General Conference. We did not receive any funds from the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). The CT also set as a goal in 2020 to improve our reserves position. With the associated reduction in spending due to the pandemic, in particular travel, meeting expenses, and office expenses, we have added more than \$169,000 to reserves in 2021. We

anticipate continuing to add to our reserves in 2022, in the amount of approximately \$30,000, given that we will not hold a full CT board meeting that year.

*Some of the changes that we have instituted to respond to new realities are as follows:*

- **CT BOARD MEETINGS**--We anticipate that the CT will not have a full in-person board meeting in 2022 due to the uncertainty of an emerging variant of COVID 19, complications related to international travel, and the need to secure venues far in advance. The CT will continue its work through virtual board meetings for the full board and most working groups, as well as through in-person meetings for smaller groups such as our Executive Committee. As such, we have budgeted \$58,000 for the meeting line item and placed \$110,000 in temporarily restricted reserves to cover an in-person CT meeting when circumstances related to the pandemic improve.
- **GENERAL CONFERENCE**--Our budgeting for General Conference remains largely the same, except for some promotional materials that will have to be re-produced because they are now out of date. Also, because of further uncertainties about General Conference occurring in 2022, the CT has placed the budgeted amount of \$122,928 for this event into temporarily restricted reserves.
- **ADMINISTRATION**--We let go of the lease on the Chicago office space as of December 31, 2020, saving \$30,600 in annual costs. All staff are now virtual. We maintain an address in Chicago, storage space, and a phone number with a Chicago area code through the use of companies that provide such technology and services. Staff have transitioned to virtual work environments, and we have put into place appropriate personnel policies and procedures governing remote work, staff training and team building.
- **STAFF RETENTION**--At a time of great disruption and uncertainty in the church, the CT is able to do its work with a very small and effective staff. The CT leadership has placed a high value on retaining and developing staff so that the work can continue in the most effective way possible. The CT is providing trainings related to remote work, staff retreats, stipends for use of home office and infrastructure (phone and internet), and allowing for flexible work schedules and time off as needed to care for self and family. Our personnel committee (Leadership Discernment and Community Life) has recommended a

4% cost of living increase for staff in line with recommendations from GCFA's Committee on Personnel Policies and Practices (CPPP). We also are prepared to move to salaried employees being paid in arrears which will require a 3.8 % adjustment to outlay. This is being done at the recommendation of GCFA as a way of significantly reducing their administrative payroll costs. Leadership Discernment and Community Life also has recommended continued support for staff development and continuing education and will examine readjusting staff salaries to be more in line with agencies of similar size. This will impact the bottom line but still allow us to add to the reserves. Our staff team continues to respond with resilience and prioritize relationship-building, effective remote work practices, and mutual support.

## **REBUILDING RESERVES**

Rebuilding the reserves has been a goal for this quadrennium. Because of changes due to the pandemic, our timeline for rebuilding our reserves has been accelerated. We anticipate ending 2021 with reserves of \$725,600 and 2022 with reserves of \$755,600. This has been accomplished through the ongoing institution of cost-savings measures, ending our building lease, through a reduction in staff travel due to the pandemic, and through the postponement of General Conference and in-person CT meetings. Per our Reserves Policy and our auditor's suggestion, the Board voted at our September 1, 2021 meeting to place six months of income, or \$274,000 into board designated reserves.

### **History of Reserve Use**

2017—\$7702

2018- \$119,744

2019—\$31,367

2020—(\$159,016)—*parentheses indicated addition to reserves*

2021-(\$169,534)

2022—(~\$30,017)