

**CONNECTIONAL TABLE**  
**2023 SPENDING PLAN NARRATIVE (Draft)**

**A.PURPOSE**

The Connectional Table (CT) serves a distinct role as a worldwide body 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, ¶1906)

**B . GOALS AND PRIORITIES: MISSIONAL ADAPTATION AND FOCUS**

The United Methodist Church is in the midst of unprecedented change and disruption due to a global pandemic and an increased pace of local church disaffiliations. Leaders of the Connectional Table are confident that in the midst of the change, God is doing a new thing. The Connectional Table (CT) is preparing for that new thing by helping the church become clear about its identity, vision, mission and understandings of connectionalism.

**IDENTITY, MISSION, VISION AND CONNECTIONALISM**

The CT has continued its initiative, [Imagining the Future](#), to spur conversations about the future of The United Methodist Church. These conversations were specifically designed for United Methodists who will remain in the church or who are discerning. The CT, with the help of Wespeth, UMCOM, GBHEM, United Women in Faith and GBGM missionaries, and others, brought groups together for discussions regionally in Africa, Europe, the Philippines, and the United States. These conversations were focused on our identity as United Methodists, our mission and vision, and our understandings of connectionalism. Conversations in Europe, the Philippines and the U.S. were robust. However, conversations in Africa were more limited due to difficulties with

communications and technology. In 2023, the CT will need to continue to expand these conversations in Africa to get a more complete view of the future of our church.

As part of the overall initiative, the CT also launched, in cooperation with GBHEM, UMCOM and other agencies, the “[Tuesdays at the Table](#)” theological discussions. These on-line conversations featured leading United Methodist theologians exploring our theological task, our approach to the sacraments and our approach to mission and ministry.

The Connectional Table is building on the *Tuesdays at the Table* series with a pilot program that includes a curriculum and small-group platform based on the videos. This pilot program creates an intentional space for young clergy to discern their continued place in The United Methodist Church.

#### **GLOBAL COVID VACCINE EQUITY AS A MISSIONAL PRIORITY**

The CT joined the Council of Bishops and the agencies in declaring equitable global access to COVID vaccines a missional priority. This initiative is developing as the CT’s COVID Vaccine Equity Task Force works to educate and advocate for communities suffering from the lack of vaccine access.

The group is developing a pilot program that will focus on the inequities of access to COVID-19 vaccines in Africa and Native communities in the United States. The General Board of Global Ministries is a key partner, with other agencies, in this work.

#### **C. CONTINUED PRIORITIES**

The Connectional Table is continuing with its previous priorities even as we address emerging realities. This work is aligned with four key themes: Worldwide and Contextual, Vital and Effective, Affirming and Inclusive, Connectional. They are as follows:

##### **WORLDWIDE AND CONTEXTUAL**

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

The Connectional Table has already submitted to the General Conference legislation creating a [U.S. Regional Conference](#). A U.S. Regional Conference can provide 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 makes regionalization worldwide.

Note that because of the delay of General Conference, our current promotional materials are out of date. These promotional materials will need to be reproduced, impacting our line item for General Conference promotional materials and marketing.

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

The Connectional Table 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 General Conference in 2024. The CT felt it important to address its composition first before addressing issues of role and function. Making the body that makes such decisions more diverse and representative can better address the needs of a diverse and emerging 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. The CT's work in this area centers around agency evaluation, efforts at increased collaboration, and our quadrennial budget allocations process.

### **Agency Evaluation and Connectional Collaboration**

The Connectional Table has sought 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. It has done this through the evaluation of the agencies and

through missional strategy conversations. The final *Agency Evaluation* report is available on the CT website. The CT also has continued its conversations with all of the agencies and commissions about collaboration and shared services. *This is emerging work and crucial at a time of decreased resources. The CT will need to be prepared to sufficiently resource this work into the future.*

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

In preparation for the postponed General Conference, the CT implemented a new values-based, mission-focused 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 were the mission of the denomination, the missional priorities of the connection, the sustainability of the mission of the agencies, commissions and funds, emerging missional priorities, transparency, equity, and stewardship. The Connectional Table will engage its process again as it works with GCFA to prepare budget allocations for the 2024 General Conference.

### **AFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE**

The CT continues to find ways to create forums for dialogue about matters that may define the future of our church. The CT has done this work through [Emerging](#), a web-based anthology that serves as a forum for conversation about what is next for our church.

### **CONNECTIONAL**

#### **(The State of the Church)**

Our connectionalism is highlighted in our annual State of the Church Report, which was developed and produced in collaboration with UMCOM. The report is entitled "[Who do you say I am?](#)" and mirrors the [BeUMC](#) campaign which also highlights our identity and celebrates our connection. This State of the Church Report was produced as an on-line resource rather than

printed booklets. It is our hope that the change in format will lead to better engagement and reduced costs.

#### **D. THE CT'S INTERNAL WORK**

**Meetings:** In 2021, the CT continued its work through virtual board meetings and in-person meetings for smaller groups such as our Budget Allocations Team. The CT is pleased to announce that it will hold its first in-person board meeting since the pandemic in February of 2023. Funding of \$110,000 had already been set aside for this meeting. However, moving to more in-person board meetings as a regular occurrence will impact our budget. *We need to expect that meeting line item to return to pre-pandemic levels plus more considering inflation.* Though we have on-line tools available for smaller group meetings, it is important that we begin meeting in-person as a full board once a year. This will allow us to better engage the relationships that are necessary for complex work and decision-making.

**Communications:** The has worked with UMCOM to improve our communications. CT's website shows a global audience from 39 different countries. The CT also sends two newsletters out each month. The open rate for each of the newsletters has stayed above 60 percent. The CT is reaching more people through our growing social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube. For instance, CT's Facebook engagement in a 90-day period in 2022 increased 48%. As well, the CT's presence on the [Resource UMC](#) platform has increased our reach. These communications vehicles are crucial at a time when we are trying to build community in a worldwide church and with diminishing resources. Note that the CT will continue to explore greater collaboration with UMCOM.

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

- The CT let go of the lease on the Chicago office space as of December 31, 2020, saving \$30,600 in annual costs. 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.

- All 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.
- The CT has 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. Our personnel committee (Leadership Discernment and Community Life) has recommended a 4% cost of living increase for staff in line with recommendations from the Committee on Personnel Policies and Practices (CPPP.) 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.
- **Staff Diversity:** The Connectional Table historically has been a small team. Since the CT's inception, the staff has included eight white employees, three Asian or Pacific Islander employees, one African, two African Americans and one Native American employee. The CT has employed elders, deacons and lay people who live in various jurisdictions across the United States.

**Partnerships:** Our partnerships with the agencies and commissions, the Council of Bishops, the Commission on the General Conference, the Standing Committee, annual and central conferences, and others throughout the connection are central to our work. We have worked on collaborative projects with all of our agencies, hosted conversations with the agencies about greater collaboration, worked closely with the COB on missional strategy and with the GCFA staff and board on budget-related matters. We also have worked with grass-roots caucus groups and delegates to the General Conference. Our collaborative work across the worldwide connection has raised the profile of the CT and awareness of its work.

**Challenges and Changes in 2023:**

- The on-boarding of a new board chair and possible transition of staff, including additional costs for recruiting and on-boarding. Possible changes to staffing costs.
- Continued inflation that will outpace a cost-of-living increase. Continued disruptions in the stock market, impacting returns on invested funds.
- The resumption of an annual in-person CT full board meeting. An increase in staff travel due to the resumption of in-person meetings across the connection.
- The need to produce new materials for General Conference 2024. The additional costs of promoting CT legislation in anticipation of General Conference.
- Note that the CT is under-resourced in terms of staffing or consultants to facilitate needed conversations about agency collaboration and shared services, or to monitor the progress of those conversations or assess their efficacy.
- The CT still anticipates ending 2023 with sufficient reserves per its policy. However, 2024/2025 will involve the onboarding of an entirely new board. Costs associated with that (especially in the face of continued fluctuations in the stock market) are likely to further diminish reserves.

Submitted by: Kennetha J. Bigham-Tsai, Chief Connectional Ministries Officer  
and Frances Jett Roberts, Operations Manager