

Connectional Table holds organizational meeting

The Connectional Table

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JACKSONVILLE, Fla.: The 2017-2020 Connectional Table gathered in Jacksonville, Florida this weekend for their organizational meeting.

The 62-member board is comprised of members elected from jurisdictions, central conferences and caucus groups, the general secretaries and their board presidents (most of whom are members of the Council of Bishops), as well as representatives from the Commission on General Conference and the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters. They are tasked with the stewardship of the vision and the resources for mission and ministry in consultation with the Council of Bishops and as directed by General Conference.

The board began their work together by centering themselves in worship and theological reflection. "Worship and theological reflection will guide our conversation as leaders from all corners of the connection come together to discern and articulate the vision of a highly vital worldwide United Methodist Church," explained Bishop Christian Alsted, chair of the Connectional Table and bishop of the Nordic-Baltic episcopal area. Local campus ministry and church leaders led the body in worship throughout the weekend.

Dr. Charles Wood, retired professor of Christian Doctrine from Perkins School of Theology, offered a time of teaching and theological reflection. Dr. Wood gave two lectures on the content of the Committee on Faith and Order's document *Wonder, Love, and Praise*, which is currently in translation for study by the whole church. His lecture focused the board on the saving love of God for all people, the transformational love of God, and the ability of God's love to create community.

The work of the Connectional Table will continue to focus on increasing vital congregations and bearing fruit in four Areas of Focus. The structure of the Connectional Table's working groups will reflect these priorities. A working group on the Worldwide Nature of the Church will be supported by advisory groups addressing the composition of a more global General Church Council, the referral of Plan UMC Revised, the development of Chapter 5 of a General Book of Discipline in partnership with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, and the question of where the United States can best address legislative and policy issues in its own context. Three additional advisory groups focused on missional trends, the development of a connectional assessment tool, and agency evaluation, will support a separate working group on vital congregations through the four Areas of Focus.

While there is a great deal of technical and adaptive work before the Connectional Table this quadrennium, Rev. Dr. Amy Valdez Barker, Chief Connectional Ministries officer of the CT,

reminded the new configuration of this board, “You were chosen as members of the Connectional Table ‘for such a time as this.’ My prayer is for us to find our way through the leading and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to run the race faithfully, lead the church faithfully and illustrate the good gift of being authentically united as people of the Body of Christ.”

“I was impressed by the faith, passion, experience and depth of knowledge and wisdom the participants brought to the table,” Alsted said following the meeting. “Our conversation was rich and multifaceted, the desire to serve the church in the best possible ways was clearly evident, and I have high hopes and expectations for what the Connectional Table by the grace of God will be able to contribute, as we all live through this very challenging quadrennium in the life of the denomination.”

The next in-person meeting of the full Connectional Table will be held in Oslo, Norway in May 2017. Meetings of the working groups and advisory groups, as well as an additional meeting of the full Connectional Table will be conducted online in the interim.

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