

Plan approved for agency evaluation

A church leadership body approved a plan to connect the evaluation of United Methodist general agencies with the development of the denomination's budget.

The United Methodist Church has 10 general agencies that rely at least in part on local church giving to operate. Their duties vary, but all are charged with working with local churches, conferences and each other.

The Connectional Table, which acts as a sort of church council for the denomination, has the responsibility of evaluating the missional effectiveness of these agencies.

It also has the responsibility of working with the General Council on Finance and Administration, the denomination's finance agency, to draft a four-year budget that covers not only the 10 church-funded agencies but also other denomination-wide work. General Conference, the denomination's top lawmaking body that typically meets every four years, has the final say on the denominational budget.

In years past, the evaluation and budgetary work have been largely separate. The Connectional Table, meeting May 17-21 in Oslo, Norway, outlined a process for the evaluations to have some bearing on 2021-2024 agency budgets and possibly their spending plans before then.

"It won't be the only factor, or even the major factor, but it will provide some input," said the Rev. Brad Brady, co-convenor of the Connectional Table's agency evaluation advisory group. He is also senior pastor of Perry United Methodist Church in the South Georgia Conference.

"We don't have any preconceived notions of where things are going to go," Brady added. "We want to see this as our roadmap as we start our journey."

In evaluating the agencies, the Connectional Table will be looking at how the agencies collectively seek to aid conferences and local churches, fulfill their mandates in the Book of Discipline and execute other essential ministries.

Brady noted that his team already knows some of the Book of Discipline's mandates go far beyond what any agency can accomplish. For example, the Commission on the Status and Role of Women has responsibility for "the elimination of sexism in all its manifestations from the total life of The United Methodist Church."

"They'll be working on that until kingdom come," Brady said to laughter from fellow Connectional Table members. He foresees the evaluations leading agencies to submit legislation to the 2020 General Conference that would streamline their responsibilities to reflect the best use of resources.

One thing the Connectional Table will look at is how the agencies, alongside churches and conferences, help carry out the denomination's Four Areas of Focus. Those areas are: Creating new and renewed congregations, developing principled Christian leaders, improving global health and engaging in ministry with the poor.

Each agency has a board of directors that oversees its work. Starting this year, the Connectional Table will collect the evaluation materials those boards are already gathering as well as other materials requested by the evaluation team.

Next year, the Connectional Table will seek input from the denomination's 132 conferences about the partnerships they have with agencies.

Specifically, the Connectional Table's evaluations will look for evidence that agencies are fruitful in mission, making continuous improvement, building partnerships and communicating their story.

The Connectional Table next will meet with leaders from each agency to discuss what it's learning about that agency's work.

Finally, the leadership body plans to use the information it gathers in planning how the denomination allocates its resources.

"Our endgame is to lift up the collaborations among the general commissions and agencies so we can highlight what is being done across the connection," Dana Lyles, the other co-convenor of the agency evaluation advisory group, told United Methodist News Service. "You have little pockets doing great things, but it's not being captured."

An assistant principal in Greensboro, North Carolina, Lyles has long experience with evaluations.

The Rev. Kim Cape, the top executive of the United Methodist Board of Higher Education and Ministry, thanked the evaluation team for working with her and other agency leaders.

She is the convener of the General Secretaries Table, which brings together the top executives of the denomination's general agencies. Each agency's top executive serves on the Connectional Table with voice but not vote.

"I think that this is a work in progress," she said. "We're learning as we go along."

[Boxed Copy:]

Know Your Agencies

Here is a list of the 10 agencies that receive funding from church offering plates:

General Council on Finance and Administration; Discipleship Ministries; the Board of Global Ministries; the Board of Higher Education and Ministry, the Board of Church and Society; the Commission on Archives and History; the Commission on Religion and Race; the Commission on the Status and Role of Women; the Commission on United Methodist Men and United Methodist Communications (which includes United Methodist News Service).

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