



Bringing Missional Adaptation and Focus to a New Quadrennium



2021 Spending Plan
Narrative Report



The Connectional Table
The United Methodist Church



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)

Bringing 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.

The Essential Functions of the Connectional Table

To provide a forum for understanding and implementing the vision, mission and ministries of the global church.

To enable the flow of information and communication among annual conferences, jurisdictions, central conferences, general agencies and the Council of Bishops.

To coordinate the program life of the church with the mandates of the gospel, the mission of the church, and the needs of the global community.

To review and evaluate the missional effectiveness of the general program- related agencies and connectional structures of the church as they collectively seek to aid annual conferences and local churches.

To recommend to the General Conference such changes and implementing legislation as may be appropriate to ensure effectiveness of the general agencies.

To provide leadership in planning and research, assisting all levels of the church to evaluate needs and plan strategies to carry out the mission of the church.

To be accountable with GCFA for the General Church Budget.

— 2016 Book of Discipline ¶ 905, paraphrase

In addition, new priorities have emerged because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased urgency around racial justice. This has impacted the needs and priorities of local churches, annual conferences, and general church bodies. Many are focused on the needs of people in their local communities suffering from illness or dealing with financial insecurity. Churches are having to learn how to host online worship. United Methodists in the U.S., in particular, are grappling with anti-Black racism and policy 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.

Despite the various challenges facing the church, the CT has continued its work while it also begins to live into the vision for the next quadrennium. The CT is emphasizing key themes—Worldwide and Contextual, Vital and Effective, Affirming and Inclusive, and Connectional—and organizing its work in these vision areas.

WORLDWIDE AND CONTEXTUAL

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 working and advisory groups.

The **Worldwide Nature** working group comprises three advisory groups: Chapter 5, General Church Council, and U.S. Contextual Ministries. These groups have worked to deepen the conversation about a vision for a worldwide connection, while considering the need for adaptive structures and systems in light of our shifting church membership.

The Chapter 5 advisory group has worked with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters and the Committee on Faith and Order throughout the quadrennium to evaluate our administrative order, in particular the work of the agencies. These groups mutually decided to continue this work into the upcoming quadrennium as they discern together how agency might be expressed in our worldwide connection.

The *General Church Council* (GCC) advisory group has used this quadrennium to begin the process of reviewing and refining the mandates of the Connectional Table, and what it means to be a body that stewards the vision for the church. The GCC's focus has been in line with the development of a global Book of Discipline. The group seeks to continue this work in the next quadrennium through continuous discussion with partners across the church, taking into account the increased urgency around racial equity and the need for the denomination to have leadership and structures that reflect its commitment to dismantling racism, colonialism, and all systems of oppression.

The *U.S. Contextual Ministries* advisory group has submitted legislation to the General Conference to be held in 2021 to create a U.S. Regional 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. Throughout 2019 and 2020, the CT has made presentations about the legislation to more than 30 groups around the worldwide connection. Wespath has been an important partner in this effort and has assisted in writing and reviewing the legislation and educating delegates about the U.S. as a Regional Conference proposal.



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. Our work in this area has been by done this last quadrennium through the **Vital Congregations Through the Four Areas of Focus (VC4AF)** working group.

This working group is composed of two advisory groups: *Agency Evaluation* and *Connectional Assessment*. The *Agency Evaluation* advisory group has led efforts to increase effectiveness and accountability throughout our connection by working with our general agencies on evaluation. One highlight of the evaluation process this quadrennium was the learning dialogues which helped the CT learn about and celebrate the work of the agencies while ensuring effective evaluation. The final report of the Agency Evaluation group is available on the CT website.

The *Connectional Assessment* advisory group successfully completed a beta phase, evaluation of annual conferences which gave annual conferences the opportunity to explore their ministries in light of the Four Areas of Focus. Annual conference leaders were able to name ministries that addressed the Four Areas of Focus and celebrate the diversity of their ministries. The CT's research also helped us learn about the assessment model we used. We learned that one assessment model and universal performance measurements can leave out contextual specifics, and that data collection is best when allowing flexibility in data collection and reporting.

The CT will also continue to facilitate the work of discerning mission and vision in order to foster collaborative strategic planning and resourcing of the agencies in line with missional priorities into the next quadrennium and beyond. During this last quadrennium, the CT worked with the agencies and the Council of Bishops (COB) through a Strategic Team to bring missional alignment to the connection. This Strategic Team included the four lead program board executives and four bishops who chair COB leadership teams related to the Four Areas of Focus. The purpose of this group was to develop strategy, and to advance, engage, inspire, align and equip the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table around the work of the Four Areas of Focus with the purpose of increasing the number of vibrant congregations. As we enter into a new quadrennium, the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table and the Association of United Methodist Foundations will collaborate on a new Missional Strategy Team that will seek to extend this work by addressing needed adaptive change and missional strategy beyond the Four Areas of Focus.

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 CT unveiled its values-based process at the Pre-General Conference briefing and began educational efforts to inform delegates to General Conference about the budget legislation that resulted. The values that were key to the CT's process were missionally focused and include 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.



UMC Mission



Agency's
Core Mission



Missional
Priorities



Emerging Missional
Priorities



Transparency



Fairness & Justice



Stewardship

AFFIRMING AND INCLUSIVE

At the February 2019 Special Session of General Conference, the United Methodist Church approved the Traditional Plan, which stiffens enforcement of the current prohibitions against same sex marriage and the commissioning and ordination of gay clergy. As a result of that decision, some have experienced relief. Others have experienced disappointment and pain. At the May 2019 Connectional Table meeting, our CCMO and Chair issued The for the Sake the Church statement that acknowledged the pain and division felt across the Church, especially by our LGBTQIA+ family members.

The statement noted, "We believe that what was revealed at the Special Session were very different visions for what it means to be the church in mission. Fundamental to our impasse are not only differing hermeneutics but also differing ecclesiologies and missiologies."

To create a forum for dialogue about those differences and other matters that may define the future of our church, the CT launched *Emerging*, a web-based anthology of writings from around the connection. This [website](#) continues to be a forum for conversation about what is next for our church.

The CT continues to take advantage of opportunities for exploration, experimentation and discovery. Our board and staff continuously look for ways to join in and support conversations happening in all parts of the connection so that we might come alongside others who are discussing the future of the denomination. Inclusive in that commitment are the conversations about dismantling racism that are being led by the Council of bishops.

GOD IS DOING A 
EMERGING
 NEW THING IN METHODISM

CONNECTIONAL

The CT is committed to a vision for The United Methodist Church as a connectional body. This core value was highlighted in our State of the Church Report, entitled "*We Are the Church*" and produced in collaboration with United Methodist Communications. Playing on that well-known hymn, the report highlighted the ways in which we understand the meaning of the church, not as a building or as an organizational structure, but as a people bound together by a common witness and committed to transformative action in the world in the name of Christ. The CT promotes the vision of connectionalism in its work throughout the connection 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 to plan the Pre-General Conference briefing. CT staff and board members work closely with General Council on Finance and Administration (GCFA) to prepare the budget. Our staff and board members also have traveled across the denomination to speak to groups about legislation and other topics. Even internally, we rely on collaboration and strong partnerships to get work done. For instance, GCFA assists us with human resource and administrative functions.

2021 Spending Plan

The 2021 spending plan reflects a 4% reduction in World Service Fund income, 5% reduction in benefit trust income, and no reduction in dividends, and interest income. Despite the decrease in funds, the CT has shouldered increased responsibilities associated with General Conference 2020, the quadrennial budget, communication priorities related to regionalization, adjustments to working in the midst of a public health crisis, and the implications of the Special Session. Still, the CT is planning for a balanced budget in 2021.

In addition, we are aware of the need to maintain adequate reserves and sustain our work in future quadrennia. Toward that end, the CT has engaged the last two years in prudent spending and programming decisions and made a commitment to slowing the spending of reserves. This has resulted in underspending our budget for 2019 by \$120,000, which reduced the use of our reserves. Continuing this trend in 2020, the CT is on track to spend almost \$200,000 less than was budgeted. This means the CT will not use any of the reserves it had budgeted to use in 2020, and is on track to add more than \$70,000 to the reserves by the end of 2020. The CT Internal Finance and Evaluation Committee has been working hard to prioritize rebuilding the reserves so that the CT will be able to continue to function effectively as financial resources decline for the denomination as a whole.

Several priorities for 2020 have emerged as the CT continues its adaptive work into the future. Below are highlights and their corresponding financial implications.

CT Communications Redesign

In 2021, the CT will bring even greater focus to our disciplinary mandate, *"To enable the flow of information and communication"* [BoD ¶905.2]. We have developed and refined a communications strategy that focuses on raising awareness about the Connectional Table and encouraging dialogue about the issues impacting our worldwide connection. In 2020 and 2021 our communication priorities are:

- 1) Increase the awareness of the Connectional Table's role in articulating vision, and bringing people into conversation about what is emerging in our denomination.
- 2) Educate and share resources about the importance of regionalization to maintaining a worldwide connection that can live out the aspirations of our worldwide covenant; *"Integrally holding connectional unity and local freedom, we seek to proclaim and embody the gospel in ways responsible to our specific cultural and social context while maintaining 'a vital web of interactive relationships.'"* (¶125 BOD).
- 3) Articulate, in consultation with the Council of Bishops, vision, direction and priorities for The United Methodist Church at this time in the life of our connection. Build the infrastructure for our communications efforts by designing and launching a new website. The new CT website (umcct.org) is now online. We have created a board member portal for the website and are adding a translation function for 7 languages. We have also increased our social media footprint across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter. The fruits of this work are already apparent. The CT has increased social media usage by 300% (reach and engagement each increased). In the first four months since the website launched, there have been over 2,000 unique visitors from 21 countries. The enhanced web presence has increased our budget line item for subscriptions to \$5000 to include site hosting, domain names, newsletter service, translation software and other digital resources.

As we prepare for the General Conference to be held in 2021, the CT will invest more resources into promotional and educational materials to help the delegates engage in informed dialogue and educate and inform people at the annual conference and local church level about regionalization in preparation for constitutional ratification. We have budgeted almost \$27,000 to create educational materials and to be able to translate those materials into multiple languages. The CT will also continue to incur costs for maintaining and growing the *Emerging* platform, and for producing the State of the Church report.

We are suggesting a conservative \$5,000 budget to cover the cost of software, \$27,000 for printing and translation costs, and \$40,000 for staff travel to support a ministry of presence and our communications efforts to better engage United Methodists on behalf of the CT and CT's work for our worldwide church.

Since its last spending plan review, the CT has transitioned from a full-time communication staff person to the use of consultants to meet our communication needs. This resulted in an increase to the consultant line item of our budget for this year (2020). The increased funds were in anticipation of General Conference and the added need for communication support. We are once again proposing a robust consultant line item of \$60,000 to support communication work.

The 2020 General Conference

The CT traditionally has responsibilities for General Conference, including helping to plan for and participate in pre-General Conference briefings. For General Conference 2020, the CT will be involved in supporting the legislative work of the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, GCFA (the quadrennial budget), as well as promoting regionalization along with its own legislative proposal to create a U.S. Regional Conference.

In addition, the CT anticipates working closely with the Commission on the General Conference and the Council of Bishops to ensure a General Conference that emphasizes the value of our connectionalism even in times of change, and moves our church forward. We have included \$65,000 in the meeting expenses line item that would go toward expenses relating to General Conference 2020/2021. This number is typical of General Conference spending for the CT. Included in the \$65,000 is the travel, hotel and meal expenses for members of the CT staff, CT executive committee, CT members

Another \$12,000 is allocated to achieve our bi-focused communications goals at the General Conference: raising awareness of the Connectional Table and advocating for our legislation. These expenditures will include: a table in the exhibit hall with an interactive display; various printed materials to educate delegates, translation and interpretive services, and other materials designed to raise awareness about initiatives important for the CT and the global church.

Rebuilding Reserves

As stated above, rebuilding the reserves is a goal for this coming quadrennium. The CT will continue to examine how it might effectively do its work while budgeting in ways that build reserves and exhibit overall good stewardship of our funds. Toward that end, the CT staff will move completely to remote work beginning in 2021. This decision has been motivated by the uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the inconsistencies in the utilization of our rented space in a large office building that has already reported numerous cases of COVID-19 on its premises. The CT continues to budget some money for space for storage, a mailing address, occasional meetings and staff retreats, as well as for reimbursement for home office space and resources.

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. Our personnel committee (Leadership Discernment and Community Life) has recommended a 1.6% cost of living increase for staff. This increase is below the national average of 3% cost of living increase, and was set at this level because of the financial uncertainty currently being experienced in the connection. Leadership Discernment and Community Life has recommended continued support for staff development and continuing education. We are recommending maintaining the modest continuing education line item at \$4,000 so that all staff members will have the resources to attend a conference, online courses, or other continuing education event in 2021.

During this year (2020) of a global pandemic and racial justice uprising the Connectional Table has sought to support staff by providing trainings related to remote work, 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.

Adaption Due To COVID-19

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed much of the work of the Connectional Table, including the temporary cessation of in-person meetings and travel for our staff and board. Consequently, the CT has reduced spending by \$100,000. As the length of the pandemic is unknown, our meeting line will be small for 2021, including only our presence at General Conference. We continue to budget funds for staff travel in 2021 with the anticipation that travel will resume at some point that year. Spending is shifting from funding travel and in-person meetings to connecting with members digitally and online via our new CT website, social media, zoom, and the Emerging website.

The sudden change to remote work, and stress of the virus have impacted our staff and their families. Our staff have had family members contract the virus, and have had to deal with stress and uncertainty in their own lives. The shutdown of schools has necessitated balancing childcare and "home schooling" with remote work. All the CT staff have taken at least a few vacation days since the pandemic began. Our team and board have responded with resilience and continue to prioritize relationship-building, effective remote work practices, and mutual support.

Diversity and Racial Justice

The Connectional Table historically has been a small team since it began in 2004. The staff, since 2004, has included seven white employees, three Asian or Pacific Islander employees, one African, one African American 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 increase in overt racism within the United States and the eruption of a national focus in the U.S. on racism, violence, and inequality have had differing impact on the CT staff. CT staff are planning to discuss the impact at an upcoming staff meeting.



The Connectional Table

The United Methodist Church