

*Work of the CT—What's Next?*

**A Proposal for A Conversation  
about Identity, Vision, Connectionalism and Mission**

Many around our connection have long asked for a conversation about vision. There is a more recent hunger for conversation about regionalization as a part of that vision. Indeed, several recent statements from coalitions of delegates, individual annual conferences, jurisdictional groups, and others have expressed interest in having a conversation now about how regionalization might look and the vision that would drive it. In addition, unofficial groups are organizing to begin to visualize regionalization within local contexts. Such a group has begun in the U.S. Interest in regionalization also has been demonstrated by the positive reception of the CT's USRC legislation and the Christmas Covenant within the central conferences and beyond.

These questions about regionalization, on a more fundamental level, are questions about connectionalism and mission. They are questions about how are we to be a connectional church, engaged in mission contextually. The Connectional Table is well placed to be a connecting point to bring together various groups and others, who are committed to staying within the UMC, for a conversation about such questions and about the future United Methodist Church. Because of our work on developing legislation on the U.S. as a Regional Conference, the CT also is well placed to focus these conversations around how identity and vision might impact global regionalization, connectionalism, and mission.

The Connectional Table approaches such work grounded in its purpose and essential functions. As noted in the Book of Discipline, The Connectional Table's 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 the General Conference and in consultation with the Council of Bishops, ¶904.

We are further mandated, "To enable the flow of information and communication among annual conferences, jurisdictions, central conferences, general agencies and the Council of Bishops," *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, ¶905.2. As well, the CT is to do its work by, "...listening to the expression of needs, addressing emerging issues, and determining the most effective, cooperative, and efficient way to provide optimum stewardship of ministries, personnel, and resources," ¶905.2.

The hunger for innovative, vision-focused conversation, focused on identity, connectionalism and mission is certainly an emerging issue. The CT is being called to listen to the expressed need for such conversation now, outside of a purely legislative framework. United Methodists want to know, "What might be a vision for the future United Methodist Church? What might be the vision for global regionalization in The United Methodist Church? How are we to be a connectional church engaged in mission contextually?"

In addition, by doing this work, the CT would be supporting the enfranchisement of delegates. Indeed, many elected delegates have expressed frustration at the postponement of General Conference, which has prevented them from being seated as delegates. It might be possible, to engage this work at the jurisdictional and central conference levels as a way of getting more delegate participation in conversation and decision-making.

***In response to these emerging needs and in line with our purpose and essential functions, we propose that the Connectional Table use the next year to host conversations about identity, vision, connectionalism and mission, and about how global regionalization within The United Methodist Church, might look and how it might be shaped by vision. The need for such work is crucial at a time of uncertainty and when other groups are seeking to define the UMC. For such a time as this, the church must begin to define itself and cast a vision for its future.***

## PROPOSAL

**PROPOSED WORK:** That the Connectional Table would use the next year to host conversations about identity, vision, connectionalism and mission, and how global regionalization, within The United Methodist Church, might look and how it might be shaped by vision. The purpose would be to begin to articulate both identity and vision and to begin to coalesce around common ideas. **This work would not be focused on promoting or developing particular pieces of legislation. Nor would it involve the CT itself trying to write a “vision statement.”** The CT would be a host of conversations about identity, vision, connectionalism and mission, even as the CT continues its work on promoting passage of the regionalization legislation and its collaboration with the Christmas Covenant Central Conference Outreach Team.

**AUDIENCE:** The presumption is that this work is on behalf of United Methodists around the globe who wish to stay in The United Methodist Church. The work would engage formal and informal groups and would span ideological lines.

**WHO DOES THE WORK:** The work will be led by the Connectional Table, in line with its purpose. The CT would work in collaboration with other groups and individuals, including delegates to general and jurisdictional conferences, bishops, and groups such as Faith and Order. We would be intentional about including younger people and members of our central conferences.

### HOW TO DO THE WORK

- Note that the “how” of this work is not fully articulated in this proposal because it is important to more fully develop processes with collaborative partners.
- However, this work could be done regionally, with participants indigenous to a region. For instance, participants in the U.S. would have conversations pertinent to the U.S. context. Participants in the Philippines would have conversations pertinent to the Philippines, and so on. These conversations could happen at the jurisdictional and central conference levels, both formally and informally. However, all conversations do not have to exclusively happen in this way.
- A separate layer of conversation, beyond regional ones, would need to happen to begin to discern issues around identity, vision, mission, and connectionalism globally.
- Note that this proposal is not about the technical work of developing or promoting legislation. Nor is it about the CT writing a vision statement in isolation. This is about the adaptive work of engaging the church in shaping its future. It is vitally important that delegates and others, committed to staying within the United Methodist Church, engage this work.
- It is also of note that the intent of this proposal is to begin with a conversation about theology, ecclesiology, identity and vision, not structure.

### OUTCOMES:

- The church would be helped to collaboratively articulate an identity based on foundational documents and grounded in a Wesleyan ecclesiology.
- From this grounding in ecclesiology, the church would begin to grapple with and articulate a vision for The United Methodist Church globally as well as for specific regions.
- The church would begin to have conversations about how vision and mission could be lived out contextually as it prepares itself for some form of regionalization in the future.
- The church (or regions) would begin to articulate missional priorities as central to this work.

### SOURCES TO FRAME AND GROUND THE WORK

- Existing United Methodist theological statements such as,
  - Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task, United Methodist Book of Discipline, Pt. III
  - [Sent in Love: A United Methodist Ecclesiology](#) (Could ask Faith and Order to collaborate)
  - [By Water and the Spirit: A United Methodist Understanding of Baptism](#)
  - [This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion](#)

- As well, other documents, such as the [Out of Chaos, Creation](#) document produced by a group of delegates could be used to help with framing.

## QUESTIONS WE MIGHT ASK AND WHAT WE MIGHT DO

### Identity/Vision/Ecclesiology

- What is the document “*Sent in Love: A United Methodist Ecclesiology*,” or other theological documents, saying to us and how might these statements shape our vision? What is the place of polity relative to the theological/ecclesiological unity of the church? What needs to be in place theologically for us to be one denomination globally? What is our center of gravity?

#### *What We Might Do*

- *Help the denomination frame and claim an identity/ecclesiology/missiology for a global regional church by using existing theological documents and collaborative conversation to inform understandings of regionalization, grounding this work in a distinctively Wesleyan ecclesiology and missiology. We could invite Faith and Order and others to collaborate in this conversation.*

### Connectionalism and Mission

- How might we stay connected in mission even as we become more regional in governance? How might a clear vision and sense of identity help us do that? How might our connectionalism be expressed in the context of regionalization and a clear identity/ecclesiology/vision?
- How might a clear sense of identity, ecclesiology and vision shape global regionalization in The United Methodist Church?
- How might a clear sense of identity and vision shape regionalization in the United States, Africa, Europe and the Philippines? How might we begin to shape mission and ministry within regions in ways that keep us connected globally?

#### *What We Might Do*

- Encourage and engage conversation about a U.S. Regional Conference and about regionalization in the central conferences, including conversations about vision, missional strategy, etc. Convene bodies similar to an *Interim Committee on Organization* or a *U.S. Regional Committee*, or existing groups in the central conferences, or groups that are forming organically to engage these conversations. Could intentionally engage delegates to General Conference and United Methodists at the jurisdictional and central conference levels.

### Table Manners: Christian Conferencing/Dismantling Racism/Stopping Harm

#### **Christian Conferencing**

- How might we develop and use healthier forms of Christian conferencing that are in line with our ecclesiology and/or vision? How does our reliance on U.S. forms of decision-making, such as *Roberts Rules of Order*, impact our functioning as a global church? What alternative processes could we use to have constructive conversations across cultures to build consensus?

#### *What We Might Do*

- *Explore, utilize and promote ways of relating to each other with an expansive sense of the belonging of all of God’s children. This would guide “how” we do the work and would be integral to the identity/ecclesiology we claim. This work also would involve exploring and utilizing healthier forms of decision-making*

*and making use of resources on how to discuss sensitive issues and have constructive conversations.*

### **Stopping the Harm/Dismantling Racism**

- How do we engage work around dismantling racism and colonialism in a global church?
- How do we find ways that are in line with our identity, ecclesiology and vision to be in ministry with all people, including our LGBTQIA siblings?
- What does the “*Table Manners*” section of the document [Out of Chaos, Creation](#) suggest about how we might relate to one another in more equitable and expansive ways?

### ***What We Might Do***

- *Engage conversations about dismantling racism and colonialism in the worldwide church from global and regional perspectives and from the perspective of our ecclesiology and vision. Work with jurisdictions and central conferences to engage anti-racism/anti-colonialism work as part of visioning and identity. Address some of the specific suggestions of the [Out of Chaos, Creation](#) document in these areas.*
- *Engage groups like Faith and Order, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry or United Methodist seminaries in developing a theological document on human sexuality that would be in line with foundational documents such as “*In Water and the Spirit*” or “*This Holy Mystery*.” This effort would be in line with stating a clear ecclesiology and moving away from polity being the foundation of our unity. Its purpose would be to address human sexuality and would not focus solely on homosexuality. Ultimately the document could address the broad spectrum of human sexuality and could be used as a resource for spiritual formation and to address issues that are pertinent in differing regional contexts.*

*April 14, 2021*