

Friends,

Perhaps you recently saw where our office of communications released information regarding conference priorities. I hope you have taken the time to read through them and consider how our local churches can also use these as inspiration. The goal in this effort is to better align the work and focus of our conference staff. It is a result of many hours of discussion between the extended cabinet, the compass leadership team—which is made up of our five directors—and myself.

As many of you know, Claire Bowen has personally helped me better focus on my work as your Bishop and has also worked with our conference staff. Over the summer she led a staff team building retreat that revealed several things to me. First, I am confident our staff is the best of the best. When I travel the connection and talk with other Bishops, it only affirms to me that we have in place highly functional people who are highly relational. It also revealed to me that the work of the staff, at times, can be silo'd and lacking in focus. Many of you who work in a local church or professional organization can identify with this scenario.

Because we are approaching a critical crossroad in the United Methodist Church, it is essential for the members of our conference staff to understand their focus and where they should spend their time. For the remainder of the quadrennium, we will focus on the following priorities with our local churches and extension ministries. The first priority is growing God's kingdom by making disciples and developing a multiplication mindset throughout the annual conference. This priority aligns with the denomination and should align with our local churches. It is all about kingdom work. If we don't keep that narrative as the main focus, we will totally miss out on the Great Commission. We will also be exploring areas of the conference that are well suited for growth and will be visioning how we can multiply what is working well, whether that is a multi site church, a new church plant, or a fresh expressions worshipping community.

The next priority is attracting and retaining exceptional talent that helps promote a culture of call for clergy and laity. Friends, most of you have not sat in an appointive cabinet room but we are approaching a critical shortage of talent. Whether it is identifying potential leaders in our youth groups or Wesley foundations or sustaining relationships with our seminary students, attracting talent has to be a key focus for us.

From speaking with many pastors and lay leaders, I am also aware that this void exists in our churches when we see the same people year after year in leadership positions, yet we haven't trained anyone to come alongside current leaders to serve in the future. Leaders are not created overnight. It is an investment of time and resources in order to see fruit.

Teaching, training, and coaching to support excellent preaching so that people encounter Jesus and live out the Great Commission is our next focus. Good preaching is essential no matter the size of the church. Studies continue to show that the number one desire of church members is to hear a good sermon each week. Having been a pastor in a local church, this is a challenge. However, with the right training and coaching, we can better equip our pastors to engage with their congregations.

The last focus states that we will be adaptive leaders through uncharted times emphasizing connectionalism and focusing on Kingdom work. I don't have to tell you that we are facing uncertain times. But I can tell you we are as equipped as any conference I know to handle whatever comes our way. By being adaptive we are studying, listening and sharing with one another to be better lead this conference.

We understand the local church has its own priorities and financial resources but we believe the conference staff can partner with you to further grow the Kingdom of God. You may find the priority document on our Website on the homepage under Quick Links. I am excited about this clear focus we now have and am confident it will empower our staff to produce outstanding work. With this new plan, diligent prayer and your support, I know that the Best is Yet to Come.