

## United Methodist Church Listening Sessions

In an effort to share information more broadly about a potential new conference, the Bishop of the Nashville area (Tennessee and Memphis Conferences) of the United Methodist Church led 18 listening sessions with clergy and laity to start conversations about opportunities and questions resulting from the creation of a united conference. These 18 sessions were held in every district during January and February 2018. Based on the content Executive Aura received from these conversations, below are the key themes gleaned.

## Key Themes

**What are the biggest needs within our conference that we might try to address when considering a new conference?**

### 1) Financial

- Budget – a stronger and more firmed-up budget
- Working through financial issues – How do we work together to build a stronger model?
- Difference in funding clergy health benefits
- Multiple comments about Tithe

### 2) Church Growth

- Clarify how this will get people into the church
- Eliminate closures of churches
- Make more disciples
- Loss of millennials in church
- Strengthen youth, children and college ministries

### 3) Diversity of Ministry

- Discover new ways for ministry – taking ministry to the people, etc.
- Need more clergy – How do we recruit more clergy, especially for rural areas?
- More Diversity and Inclusivity

### 4) Other needs:

- Financial stability along with stability of the church moving forward through transitions like The Way Forward.
- A stronger presence at General Conference
- Itinerant issues clarified

## **What obstacles do you feel would need to be discussed before a conversation could take place at Annual Conference regarding the creation of a new conference?**

### **1) Benefits**

- Pension
- Retirement
- Healthcare

### **2) Financials**

- Fear that small Churches will suffer
- Aging congregation – what does that mean for the future?
- Apportionments
- Tithe

### **3) Clergy**

- Itinerant Issues
- Impact on clergy families

### **4) Culture**

- Merging of 2 different cultures
- Resistance to change
- KY churches to KY conference or stay with TN conference
- West Tennessee join Mississippi conference or stay with TN conference

### **5) Logistical**

- Location of Conference Office
- Annual Conference location
- Unifying personnel

### **6) Funding**

- Final unified funding plan
- Education and knowledge – clear, transparent and understandable communication regarding financial situations

### **7) Transparent Communications**

- Share information as you go
- Transparent communications
- Make the “sell”

### **8) Vision**

- Vision of “combined” conference
- Identify what we gain
- Improve story for buy-in

## **What opportunities would you envision emerging from the creation of a new conference?**

### **1) Financials/Benefits**

- Bigger pool for self-funded insurance
- Combined/unified healthcare and pension
- Better financials
- Remove Redundancies
- Money saved

### **2) Growth/Working Smarter**

- Larger scale ministries
- Bigger pool of resources
- Shared Services
- More partnerships
- Sharing of ideas/ Sharing knowledge
- Mission field broader
- Adds Diversity
- Reaches younger demography
- More things can be accomplished

### **3) Clergy**

- More appointments
- More clergy

### **4) Others:**

- Strength in numbers
- Blend good points of both conferences
- Increased fellowship
- Greater presence at General Conference
- Better communications – more stories to tell

## **What questions do you have about the creation of a new conference that you would like answered that were not raised in our conversation about opportunities and obstacles?**

- Where will annual conference be held?
- How will we know if we are using our money wisely and well?
- Who will lose jobs?
- What is the cost to combine?
- Should The Way Forward be settled before merger?
- Does this help or hinder African American clergy?
- What about Bishop's role? Is it one Bishop? Will the Bishop stay on through the transition?
- Where will centralized conference office be?