



## In Response to The Tennessean

October 30, 2021

Dear Friends,

A few days ago, the religion writer for The Tennessean approached our team about writing a story about our new conference. We believed in the good faith of the writer to offer a story to the readers that reflected the good and faithful work of the Tennessee and Memphis Conferences. We were asked many things and offered several positive expressions of this work over the last nine years. Much of what we offered was not included in the article.

### *The Future of the UMC*

There were some questions about the future of the United Methodist Church in light of the Protocol for Separation with Grace. To be clear, the Protocol is legislation that is being proposed to be considered when the General Conference is held. You will recall that the 2020 General Conference was postponed due to Covid-19. Currently, it is scheduled for September of 2022. If it is safe to travel worldwide and if we can gather for the important work of the United Methodist Church, the Protocol Legislation will be considered along with hundreds of other petitions and resolutions that shape our Church.

We are not sure where the reporter found the information he initially included in the story. It was not from those of us who were interviewed.

The implication of the writer of The Tennessean was that the potential divide of the denomination was already approved and action was waiting to occur. Unfortunately, this new writer is unfamiliar with the United Methodist Church and inaccuracies were reported.

The reporter has since made corrections to his [online version](#) of the article that more accurately reflects the truth.

In the age of social media, several opinions are expressed about the future of our beloved Church. When General Conference meets, whether it is 2022 or after, only ideas that have been offered properly will be considered. It is premature to speculate what the outcomes of General Conference will be.

**To be clear: no denominational decisions have been made by the general Church or by our future Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference (TWK). If you have heard otherwise, the information is incorrect.**

### *Our New Conference*

The article paints a picture that reflects more about the editorial perspective of the newspaper than about the reality of how our new conference has been formed.

Likewise, this article seems to want to produce a story about a church in distress. That is not what is happening in our conference - our churches are evidence of this. In 2012, when I was assigned to the Nashville Episcopal Area, the rationale for my assignment was my history in Mississippi of being a part of two Annual Conferences that had formed a new conference. I understood that one of my responsibilities was to lead the Memphis and Tennessee Conferences to form a new Conference. This we have done with a steady pace over 9 years.

On December 4 we will hold the organizational meeting that is the next step as we officially become the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference.

**One of our commitments, which we have intentionally led over the last 9 years is to allow congregations to retain more of their tithes and offerings at the local church rather than hold apportionments at the previous rate.** The fact is that the apportionments across the two legacy conferences have been reduced by 40%. Our goal has always been to strengthen our local churches. The reduction of apportionments has been one of the strategies.

Another strategy is that our new leadership structure redefines the roles for conference-employed staff. In recent years, our conference staff has become smaller and more decentralized. **Our strategic direction and conference ministry are now in the hands of volunteer leaders with staff there to support them.**

Here is what is true: God has provided us with abundance – strong, connected churches with spiritually gifted leadership. God has equipped us with a nimble, hopeful vision for the future.

**In Christ Jesus, we have a sure and certain hope, rooted in Scripture, centered in Christ as we seek to serve in love. We have not wavered from that foundation.**

Over the last 9 years, many people – more than 500 lay and clergy members from both legacy conferences – have worked diligently to create this path to our new conference. These teams collaborated and created our new leadership and funding models for the new TWK conference. Because so many faithful disciples of Christ provided input and have been a part of the journey, we are stepping into a new era with strength.

Our new funding model that we chose together at the annual conferences is simple. Local churches will begin working toward giving a simple tithe as a connectional commitment to the ministries of the conference. Choosing to gradually reduce the commitment over the next several years reflects the new focus of keeping financial resources in the local faith community.

Finally, our strategic decision to create a new conference is rooted in our response to follow God's call so that we can share the transforming love of Jesus Christ in a deeply connected way. At no time was the vision of a new conference rooted out of financial necessity. Certainly, we are looking for efficiencies, which we have found.

### *Our Call Moving Forward*

Our call has been to follow God's leading to create a new vessel for us to share the transforming love of Jesus Christ in a deeply connected way. It is in that connection that we will find strength. In the midst of the stress of Covid 19, we have found strength together.

This has not been an easy time for any of us.

Here's what I know:

I know that God is still at work.

I know that God has work ahead for us to do.

I know that God is going to raise up something powerful out of this moment.

I invite you to join me on a journey of paying attention to God's call on our lives so that we are able to nimbly respond to that which God invites us to be and do.

May the peace of Christ be with all of you,

Bishop McAlilly