

## Supporting the Connectional Church: Why, Why Not & Because

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*This is a first in a series of articles addressing elements of why and towards what end we are asked to support the United Methodist Church beyond the local church.*

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A common question in discussions of how we support United Methodist ministries beyond the local church is: “what does our church get back for paying our Mission Shares and Apportionment?”

This can be restated as ‘Why’? Help us understand “why” we support the Conference and levels beyond?

A university philosophy class had a one-word final exam: Why? A passing answer was “why not” but excellence was recognized when the answer was “Because.”

My answer to the “why” question regarding mission shares and apportionments is “because” but I offer you more than one word.

Our “because” is United Methodists are a connectional people. Connection is defined by the United Methodist Church as: “The principle, basic to The United Methodist Church, that all leaders and congregations are connected in a network of loyalties and commitments that support, yet supersede, local concerns.<sup>1</sup>”

Why do we support activities beyond the local church? “Because” it’s who we are. We are a network, and within this network, we show loyalties and commitments to other United Methodist churches and other expressions of Methodism in other countries. Interestingly, this principle acknowledges that it both supports local concerns, but at times, supersede those same local concerns. I will return to this in another article.

As I read that UM definition of “connection” echoes of Jesus speaking of himself as the true vine and how we are to remain in him (John 15) merges in my head with Paul reminding us we are part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12). If we remain in Christ and acknowledge we are part of the body of Christ, then the logic of connectedness through our denominational network suggests to me that our connectional understanding is grounded biblically.

Therefore, my “because” is because it is who we are: a connectional people, with a scriptural emphasis, and this principle was true in our creation story.

Duke theologian Lacey Warner writes: “The ... heritage of Wesleyan, Methodists, and Evangelical United Brethren ... emerged from a missional imperative ... This is distinctive, since other denominational

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<sup>1</sup> [Source: Sharing God's Gifts Glossary of United Methodist Terms](#). And I plan in a future piece to discuss a little about “supersede.” My take on that is that there are times the greater good is superior to the local church, but for now, let’s not dwell on this.

traditions often trace their roots to disagreements regarding confessional or doctrinal matters.”<sup>2</sup> I return to “because” it is who we are. It is a principle within the “method” that makes us “Methodists.”

I am mindful that “why not” in my philosophy illustration gets a passing grade, so “why not” must be dealt with.

“Why not” and trust, or sometimes the lack of trust, are often related. We might not explicitly say that we experience a lack of trust. However, trust is in short supply across our nation and within our church. Lacey Warner, quoted earlier, observes that trust is presumed present in our overall connection, but “when trust is low, this becomes a weakness since there are few, if any clear structures for accountability that almost maintain the connection.”<sup>3</sup> While I agree, I also think that, when trust is not present, what we don’t understand often leads us to an assumption of waste and lack of need. As I mentioned earlier, I will follow it up with other articles addressing more specifically what the local church gets back. I believe it is considerable.

Our *Book of Discipline* places great emphasis missionally on both the local church and the Conference. The local church is “the basic unit in the connectional system” while at the same time, the Conference is understood as “the fundamental body.” Our mission statement reminds us that “Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.”<sup>4</sup>

In other words, disciple-making takes place at the local church (and extension ministries), but the equipping for that action is facilitated through development and deployment of leaders by the Conference. A quote I have harvested on the connection is: “We can do more together than we can apart”, augmented by, “What resources and opportunities are opened up for us because of our giving?” This point will be the focus of my next article.

Fundamentally, the Wesleyan movement has understood sharing as a vital part of who we are. A favorite image of mine is a comparison of the Sea of Galilee with the Dead Sea. Both are nurtured by inflows of water from the River Jordan. But the Sea of Galilee releases what is received and gives back. The Dead Sea is not capable of this release, and the water that flows in, stays, to become brackish and filled with minerals. The Sea of Galilee teems with life, sustaining villages around its shores. The Dead Sea is just that: dead.

The Sea of Galilee is compelled to share, it is part of what it is. The Dead Sea is compelled to hoard, it is part of what it is. Part of who we are as Methodists, people who are part of a connection, says we are a people “connected in a network of loyalties and commitments that support, yet supersede, local concerns.” Our support is a both/and – both local and global. There are places around our world where the connection teems with life, sustaining others around its shore.

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<sup>2</sup> [UM-Insight](#) by Lacey Warner

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in a Baltimore-Washington Conference News article from May-June 2017. Link is [HERE](#).

<sup>4</sup> ¶ 120. The Mission—The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs. United Methodist *Book of Discipline*, 2016.

Now that we are thinking about “why”, I will unpack more specifically what is it the local church gets back from Mission Shares and Apportionments in an upcoming series.

**References:**

Barbara Carroll - Minnesota Annual Conference – [“What Does My Church Get Back from Apportionments”](#)

Dennis Shaw - Mountain Sky Conference – [“Defining our Mission Around Leadership Development”](#)

Erik Alsgaard - Baltimore-Washington Conference – [“Connection makes the UMC Work”](#)

Lacey Warner - UM-Insight [“Sent in Love”](#)

Laura Rainwater - [“What does my church ‘get back’ from our apportionments”](#)

North Carolina Annual Conference (and adapted from Minnesota article) - [“Faith and Money: What do churches get from paying apportionment?”](#)

The 2016 *Book of Discipline*