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Western District Conference Listening Process update and invitation October 2023

To WDC Congregations,

Greetings! The grace and peace of Christ be with you. We are pleased to report that twelve WDC congregations have already indicated interest in participating in the WDC Listening Process during the coming year, and we are in the process of scheduling church visits by listening teams. If your congregation has not already made plans to participate, we encourage you to do so!

The WDC Executive Board invites all congregations to be a part of this conference-wide listening experience with the purpose of empowering the vitality of WDC congregations by hearing your stories, offering ongoing relationship, and supporting your witness and mission. Our hope is to discover common themes among conference congregations and to animate hope, joy and shared vision in the months and years ahead.

Our proposal to undertake a listening conversation within congregations comes in recognition of transitions experienced across the conference in recent years, as well as transitions we can expect in the months ahead. The WDC leadership recognizes that our conference is different than it was just a few years ago and continues to change. We have experienced a pandemic. Our nation continues to wrestle with issues of justice, privilege, culture, power, environment, race, and more. A number of congregations have experienced pastoral transitions. Some congregations have left the conference while others have joined WDC. Congregations have undertaken serious discernment regarding issues of inclusion and welcome with all of the passion and conviction those issues stimulate in our pews and in our hearts.

We want to hear and understand how congregations are tending to these ongoing transitions and transformations as we listen to God's call for our churches and our conference, and how WDC and other congregations within WDC can provide resources for this.

Our listening will use an Appreciative Inquiry approach to the questions we are asking. This approach is designed to highlight and build on the hopeful and life-giving experiences of the congregation. The questions that will be asked are listed below, and can be shared with your congregation prior to hosting a listening team to facilitate a conversation together:

- Tell about a time when you've felt most alive and vibrant as a congregation, or as a participant of the congregation.
- What is foundational and reassuring about this congregation that has helped in difficult times?

- What activities or ministries are most important for your congregation now in fully carrying out God’s work?
- What do you hope for the future for your church and what resources from WDC would be helpful for that?

We invite your congregation to identify possible dates in 2023 or 2024 when a team of three people representing WDC can join your congregation in-person for conversation sessions of 2 hours total. This could be in one block of time, or divided into two 1-hour blocks. Perhaps sessions could take place during Sunday school or after a meal following worship. Maybe the best time for you would be prior to worship, or to integrate a session into a worship service. We will do our best to accommodate your circumstances, including considering a day other than Sunday if necessary.

We know that people of all ages have stories to tell about their church experience, so we hope there is good representation across ages. This isn’t only for those in positions of congregational leadership. It is for anyone who is able to participate and wants to be a part of this conversation.

The WDC listening team will record notes of the conversations and send back to your congregational leadership a summary which you may use as a resource for further discussion. When all visits of WDC churches are complete, WDC will send a final report to all congregations summarizing common themes and experiences, joys and concerns. We hope this will enable WDC to plan future activities and resourcing to match the contexts and ministries of congregations, make connections between congregations with similar ministries, interests and challenges, and nurture relationships across the conference.

We invite your congregation to consider your participation, and to respond by completing the form below, marking one or more of the options listed, and return to wdc@mennowdc.org, or WDC, PO Box 306, North Newton, KS 67117.

Name of Congregation: _____

Name and contact information for pastor and/or congregational leader:

Our congregation is ready to sign up to participate in the listening process! These are possible date(s) that could work for us to host a listening team from WDC: _____.

Our congregation would like to participate, and we have questions before scheduling a date. (List your questions below or contact the WDC office.)

We have these questions: _____

We would like WDC to contact us for further discussion before we decide to participate.

Our congregation is not interested in participating in the listening process at this time.

Comments: _____

If you have questions or seek more information, please contact WDC at wdc@mennowdc.org or 316-283-6300. Thank you for considering your role in this sacred listening conversation. We look forward to hearing from you.

Delon Martens, WDC Moderator

Heidi Regier Kreider, WDC Conference Minister & Listening Process Planning Team Member

Doug Penner and Wendy Funk Schrag, Listening Process Planning Team Members