

Tables of Transformation: Reflections on Perkins Fall 2022 Convocation

Rev. Eva Englert-Jessen

There are many things I love about the Methodist church. I love the Wesleyan understanding of grace that always invites us into a deeper relationship with God, ourselves, and all of creation. I love our commitment to mission and service. I love how connectional we are. But if I had to name a favorite thing about the Methodist Church that feels quintessentially Methodist, it is less about how we are structured or what we believe and more about how we gather: I love a Methodist church potluck. I grew up on church lady green bean casseroles and gelatinous puddings.

Something about being at the table together with food reminds us of who we are. Jesus himself often revealed who he was and what his mission was through food and the land: telling parables using gardening metaphors, feeding five thousand with simple fish and bread, and inviting himself to dinner with people whom most of us would rather avoid. Jesus set the table and offered bread and wine, even to those who would betray, deny, and forget him in his time of most dire need.

The Methodist Foundation for Arkansas recently sponsored more than a dozen lay and clergy leaders from various Methodist churches across the state for the annual Fall 2022 Convocation at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX. This year's theme was Food & Faith, which was powerful.

Among the most meaningful parts was a conversation, song, and meal hosted by an organization called Break Bread, Break Borders: Catering, which provides culinary opportunities for refugees (often from war-torn regions of the world) and cross-cultural experiences for diners and supporters. A group of incredible women exiled from Syria and Afghanistan due to war

and violence shared their stories of hardship and the journey they had to make for the safety and well-being of their children. While they told of the grief and sorrow associated with leaving their homelands, they also shared the things that could not be taken from them: their dignity and their recipes. It was a gift from God to hear their stories and eat their delicious food, which transported us to their families, traditions, and hearts.

We also heard from Dr. Norman Wirzba, a Duke Divinity professor who teaches theology, food, and ecology classes. He moved me profoundly with an important invitation- If churches are among the few remaining public spaces where we can gather across generations, and if food is

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Photos (top): Break Bread Break Borders organization; The Foundation group who attended Perkins Fall 2022 Convocation.

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A MESSAGE FROM WAYNE

Planning a Legacy

As Christians and people of faith, we believe in a life after our earthly life. We sing about it, pray about it, hear sermons about it, and read about it. *It* is the afterlife, and faithful people place their hope in it. We do a good deal of talking, thinking, and praying about it, but we don't do a good job planning for it.

Why is it so difficult to plan what we want to happen with our financial resources and tangible items? What frightens us about planning our 'celebration of life' (i.e., funeral)? Don't we want a say in what happens to our money, treasure, and health care?

The best gift you can give your family and your pastor is to let them know your desires for these topics. Write your wishes down and make sure you tell your family, friends, and pastor. In my case, in addition to the legal documents, I have written instructions on what to do with my assets, which scriptures and hymns I want at my funeral, and the after-funeral party instructions. I do not want to burden my family; besides, they might not select or do what I want!



The Methodist Foundation for Arkansas has developed a program, Planning a Legacy, to help you think through all of these issues. Planning a Legacy helps you think about your will, what happens to your children in the event of an untimely death, what medical care you want as you end your earthly life, how to remember your church in perpetuity, and

how you want your funeral to look. It doesn't matter where you are in these plans, the program can help everyone think about the next steps they need to take.

I invite you to talk with us at the Foundation to schedule this 90-minute program at your church and take your next step to plan for your heavenly arrival.

Blessings,
Wayne

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Mr. Vernon McDaniel

Mr. Ozark: Vernon McDaniel

Vernon McDaniel is a lifelong Methodist born and raised in Ozark, AR. Well, technically, he was born in Fort Smith because that was the closest hospital at the time. But not only has he lived in Ozark for most of his life, but he has also continued to give back to the community he loves.

He joined Ozark United Methodist Church at the age of nine and has been very involved over the years, holding pretty much every position the church offers. He moved away for college, and work as a college professor took him to three other states, but Vernon returned home and has been living there for the last 45 years.

During these years, he has served as the Mayor of Ozark for three four-year terms, actively writes for the local newspaper, The Spectator, volunteers at the Ozark Area Depot Museum, is on various boards and committees in the community, and is head of the local Salvation Army. Oh, and did I mention he is an avid tennis player and runner?

Another way that he has chosen to give back is by investing with The Methodist Foundation for Arkansas. When I asked Vernon why he decided to invest with the Foundation, he explained, "After receiving literature on the Foundation and doing some research, my main reasons were that the Foundation efficiently managed its funds and continuously did a great job in carrying out its mission."

Since becoming a friend and client of the Foundation in 2018, he has appreciated everyone's willingness to be open and answer his questions about his investments. He chose to open **Charitable Gift Annuities (CGAs)** for its immediate tax deduction but also for the benefit of knowing that after he passes, the Foundation will receive the remaining balance of the annuity, ensuring that his legacy of charitable giving will continue. But, in the meantime, he works with the Foundation to generously give to organizations that impact Methodists across the state of Arkansas.

Want to learn more about Charitable Gift Annuities and how the Foundation can help plan your legacy? Contact Amy Anderson at aanderson@methodistfoundationAR.org or call (479) 957-3089.



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the most common way that we interact with creation and our bodies— then churches can re-prioritize care for bodies, including non-human bodies, as a fundamental part of what it means to be the body of Christ.

Churches are very good at feeding hungry people. But what if we explored how the act of eating itself—particularly eating together as a community of God's beloved—is a crucial

part of our calling as well? What if eating together at a table grounds us in Christ's call to be part of his literal body? What if that transforms our churches, communities, and world?

In this age of challenges in our church and world, centering food and creation as primary aspects of our discipleship can yield creative harvests and encounters. What if our churches can be sites of healing and hope for all who

experience exile and hardship? What if simple acts of breaking bread and holy conversation can help us understand better who God has made us to be in this time and age? The field is vast, friends. What an opportunity we have been given.

Rev. Englert-Jessen is the Pastoral Care Director for Methodist Family Health.



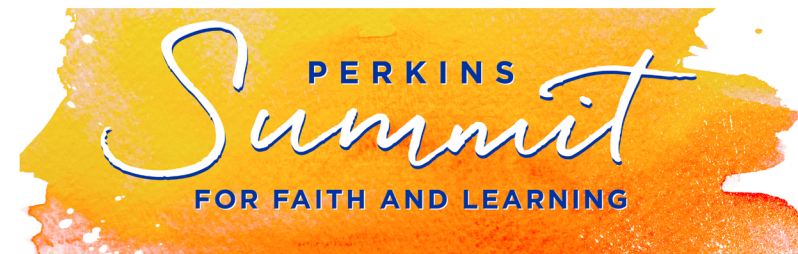
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The annual **Perkins Summit for Faith and Learning** offers a wide range of theological mini-courses for laypersons and clergy. Somewhere between seminary and Sunday School, Summit leverages the rich learning community of Perkins School of Theology to provide a unique, self-paced experience in theological education—for the church and world.

For this year's Summit, choose from a selection of academic, experiential, and spiritual direction courses on the Bible, theology, and spirituality taught by Perkins faculty, staff and special guests.

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