

## Connectional Ministries Report

Connectional Ministries continues to steward the vision of the Annual Conference, as well as serve as a central hub for collaboration, resourcing, and leadership development across the South Carolina Conference. Through partnerships with conference agencies, local churches, and community organizations, this work supports the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

When we diligently seek to be the hands and feet of Jesus Christ in the world, we can find ourselves on holy ground. This was the theme of our Connectional Ministries meeting this year: Common Ground or Holy Ground?

When we find common ground, we settle for things that we can endure together. We tolerate. We compromise. When we take off our shoes, become vulnerable, and stand on holy ground, we experience compassion. We feel our brother's or sister's pain. Instead of tolerating, we love unconditionally.

Perhaps this is where God is leading us – Holy Ground: A Sacred Space – where we do what we do out of a deep abiding love for God and for neighbor.

Our work remains grounded in Our Four Priorities, which represent the foundational practices of healthy and vital congregations. At the same time, we seek to align our resources – staffing, training, and funding – to the Missional Priorities identified through the work of the Jeremiah Teams.

This ensures that we more effectively reach new people; nurture children, youth, and young adults into a life of discipleship; and develop leaders who will keep the church growing and thriving for generations to come.

During the Special Called Session of the Annual Conference on October 18, 2025, the conference approved the reduction of districts to 10 from 12, effective July 1, 2026. As a result, Connectional Ministries will update its rosters to ensure engagement of laity and clergy across the newly configured districts.

We also will be working to more actively engage our council, committees, boards, and agencies in the work of ministry as we seek to resource local churches based upon their contextual needs, which vary church-by-church and district-by-district.

The conference also voted to merge the Office of Connectional Ministries and the Office of Congregational Development to create the Office of Congregational Excellence. This new office will continue the core work of Connectional Ministries while strengthening our capacity for congregational vitality, innovation, and new ministry development – intentionally maximizing resources and reducing administrative costs through strategic alignment and shared leadership.

By reducing administrative overhead and aligning our work more effectively, we are able to steward our resources in a way that prioritizes direct investment in ministry, leadership development, and congregational vitality.

Connectional Ministries continues to strengthen the ministry of the South Carolina Conference through strategic partnerships and external funding that expand the church's ability to serve communities and support congregations.

Over the past two years, the conference has secured more than \$2.6 million in grant funding to support initiatives in children's ministry, rural church vitality, and disaster recovery.

These grants include a \$1,110,305 Lilly Endowment grant for the Nurturing Children Through Worship and Prayer Initiative, which will support 60 congregations in a five-year intergenerational ministry learning cohort.

The conference has also received a \$375,000 grant through the North Carolina Rural Center, funded by the Lilly Endowment, to support rural congregations through coaching cohorts focused on community engagement and asset-based community development.

In addition, significant funding has been secured to assist communities recovering from Hurricane Helene, including \$798,392 from the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), \$206,799 from the American Red Cross, and \$150,000 from The Duke Endowment to support long-term recovery and rebuilding efforts. An additional \$5,000 UMCOR grant has supported leadership development through disaster response training at the Southeastern Jurisdiction Disaster Academy.

These grants represent more than financial support – they reflect the growing capacity of the South Carolina Conference to partner with organizations that share our commitment to strengthening communities and nurturing disciples of Jesus Christ.

Through these initiatives, congregations are being equipped with training, resources, and collaborative learning opportunities that help them engage their communities more effectively, nurture children and families in faith, and respond compassionately to those recovering from disaster.

Our vision is to help local churches employ this strategy as well. Through our partnership with the South Carolina Office of Resilience, we have held three grant writing seminars during which local churches and organizations have come to learn how to write strong proposals to help meet the needs that have been identified in their congregations and communities.

More than 130 people have attended these trainings and have left with valuable information and new connections that will help them to find new and innovative ways to fund their ministry and to reach new people for the Kingdom.

Through the work of the Four Ministry Areas of Connectional Ministries and the boards, committees, agencies, and teams through which they accomplish their work, we can indeed find ourselves standing on holy ground.

The question is, will we hold this sacred space as holy and respond faithfully to love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously?

Will we open ourselves up and risk being and doing something different?

Join us! Take off your shoes!

Respectfully Submitted,

Millie Nelson Smith, Director  
Pamela Goodwine-Glover, Convener  
Mason Cantey, Co-Convener  
Megan Gray, Convener, Advocacy Ministry Area  
Kim Bryant, Convener, Discipleship Ministry Area  
Betty Void and Michael Jennings, Conveners, Lay Leadership Ministry Area  
Martin Quick, Convener, Outreach Ministry Area  
Doris Bright, Secretary  
Steve Patterson, Anderson District Superintendent (Cabinet Representative)