



A New Heart...a New Name for our Life Together...

One of the identified goals that arose from the Vision Team's listening to the Conference in its various settings had to do with identifying a new name for the conference that would be more inclusive of the mission geography we serve. It is well known that our current name has not been inclusive of those churches in West Virginia and Northern Kentucky. Because names have power and they help to shape a sense of the Body, I believe it would be very helpful for us to address the process of renaming the conference toward the goal of making a recommendation for a vote at this year's annual gathering in September.

I would like to float the name **Heartland** for your consideration. This name arose more often than any other name during the conference-wide listening sessions. It is grounded in the following scriptures:

Ezekiel 11:19 – "I will give them one heart and put a new spirit within them."

Luke 10:27 - "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself."

You likely know well that there are many references to "heart" in both the Hebrew scriptures and in the New Testament (the NRSV uses heart 886 times – thank-you Bible Gateway). The text from Ezekiel is a promise of renewal to the people who have been scattered into exile. The new heart forms the people with an orientation towards God's desire for wholeness over fragmentation. The new spirit offers a renewed capacity to consent to God's desire for lives of justice, wholeness and peace within the community and beyond.

It occurs to me that as the heart is central to the life of the whole body, it can only function in fullness when each chamber is working in concert with the other chambers. I thought this an apt metaphor for our life together, as each chamber of ministry is most alive when working in concert and is being mutually strengthened by the other chambers.

I also have been contemplating the gift that the national setting is to our life in the conference. I am not saying that the national setting is the center of things or the heart of things, but rather that we have unique opportunities for collaborative engagement based on geography and presence that also has the potential to newly pulse with life.

In the ancient Near East the heart most often referred to the direction of the will and its conscious alignment with the loving desire of God. In this way, it can be said that the great commandments are really responses of the heart (and mind and soul and strength) to fully receive and live into the community-forming will of God.

So, we too, find ourselves in a season of ever-deepening engagement with that which matters most or what might be called the heart of the matter when it comes our faith. In this way we are brought back again and again to the commandments highlighted in the passage from Luke quoted above.

Though there is still work we need to do to more fully name our shared vision, I feel a strong sense that this language of the heart and its pulsing of life could be a part of that vision.

Blessings, Rev. Dave Long-Higgins