

A PLACE FOR YOU

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3 The position of Associate Director of Innovation, Engagement and Development was envisioned by Bishop
4 Trimble out of his deep concern for, and commitment to, caring for our United Methodist siblings impacted
5 by disaffiliation. Through Lighthouse Congregations and other initiatives, we seek to clearly and graciously
6 communicate that “there is a place” in the United Methodist Church for those who have experienced painful
7 separation from The Connection through congregational disaffiliation.

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9 The work of *A Place for You* began even before the role of Associate Director of I, E & D through the
10 Facebook group of that name. The FB group formed in response to those feeling loneliness, frustration, and
11 anxiety around denominational division and disaffiliation. To maintain a level of continuity, the title *A Place*
12 *for You* was maintained. Much work in the first year has focused around training Lighthouse Congregations.
13 *Lighthouse Congregations* are United Methodist Churches that receive training and commit to welcoming
14 and providing spiritual care and support for individuals/groups whose churches have closed or disaffiliated.
15 LTH congregations clearly communicate we have “A Place for You.” At the time of this report, there are
16 nearly 35 Lighthouse Congregations in the Indiana Conference. Nine of the ten districts have at least one
17 Lighthouse Congregation. The majority of LHCs are located in the South and Southwest Districts. To date,
18 more than 70 churches and more than 225 individuals have received training.

19
20 With the end of disaffiliations, training has focused on demonstrating care and hospitality toward those who
21 have experienced church conflict, division, hurt and abuse. While each individual circumstance is unique,
22 there are common hospitality needs among those who have been wounded by the church and, as we know
23 from extreme examples like Hillsong and Mars Hill, there will – sadly – never be an end to those who have
24 been wounded by the church. You can recognize Lighthouse Congregations from the banners which each
25 church displays to highlight their commitment to welcoming.

26
27 In late fall, 2023, a Lighthouse Congregation team comprised of lay and clergy was formed to collaborate
28 around resourcing and equipping Lighthouse Congregations in their ministry of hospitality. This team is
29 working to provide resources to improve the visibility and effectiveness of Lighthouse congregations in
30 providing “A Place for You.”

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32 During the holiday season 2023, several Lighthouse Congregations were awarded grants to offer offsite
33 worship as part of the outreach *A Place for Christmas*. In 2024, congregations completing training have the
34 opportunity to apply for a grant to further promote them in connecting with a demographic identified as a
35 missional priority by the congregation.

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37 Moving into 2024, training focused on developing connections with those in our communities through the
38 hospitality of listening and sharing stories in ways that demonstrate compassion and respect. Storytelling
39 moves beyond instruction to be relational and spiritually transformative. More than 20 individuals
40 participated in the first online Zoom training *Getting to Know You*. Additional training, online and in person,
41 continues to be offered.

42
43 *Getting to Know You: Faith Sharing and Developing Connections* is a 90-minute workshop utilizing

1 instruction, dialogue, and role play in which participants learn to:

- 2 • Initiate conversations and connections with strangers we meet in the course of our day through
3 noticing and listening; and
- 4 • Identify key events along their own spiritual journey that can be crafted into shareable stories that
5 build a bridge of connection with others.

6
7 As we move into a new conference year, we are developing new *United Methodist Story Corps*. These online
8 gatherings will provide regular practice in sharing our stories and responding to the stories of others in ways
9 that deepen connection and understanding, express compassion, and establish a relational foundation for
10 authentic faith-sharing. See the webpage <https://www.inumc.org/umc-a-place-for-you/> for more
11 information.

12
13 Groups will form throughout the year. Each group will meet weekly for four consecutive weeks to grow in
14 their ability to craft, refine, and adapt stories of their journey with Jesus to share with others in varied contexts
15 and circumstances.

16
17 Learning to listen and share our stories equips us to embody the gracious welcome of Christ. All trainings
18 are offered online and in-person at the district or congregational level. If you are considering participating
19 in any of the above workshops, all provided free of charge, consider the feedback of prior participants:

- 20 • *Tracey gives practical tools to encourage storytelling and listening to the story being told. She offers*
21 *time to practice telling and listening to one's story. Within just one hour and thirty-ish minutes, a*
22 *group of around 20+ people became more connected - by telling and listening. Take the training*
23 *session! It will be time well spent!* (Pastor Susan Shambaugh)
- 24 • *The "Lighthouse Congregations" seminar is a must-attend for clergy and church leaders seeking to*
25 *transform their churches into places of healing for those wounded by trauma and church*
26 *experiences. It offers practical, insightful guidance on creating a welcoming, listening environment*
27 *that fosters recovery and reconciliation.* (Pastor Paul Dazet)

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29 In closing, the Associate Director of Innovation, Engagement and Development connects regularly with
30 Lighthouse pastors to be responsive to their missional needs, is available at the request of any pastor for in-
31 person congregational training and resourcing and is available to superintendents for consulting with
32 congregations in their district.

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34 Consider connecting with the A Place for You Facebook group to get updates on resources and training:
35 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/aplaceforyouinumc/>

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37 Rev. Tracey Leslie
38 Associate Director of Innovation, Engagement and Development

