ITEM 2026-50: IDENTIFYING AND CELEBRATING ENCOURAGERS IN CHRIST

Whereas, the Holy Scriptures emphasize the importance of encouragement and mutual support among the people of God, as exemplified by Deborah, who strengthened and accompanied Barak in faith and courage for the sake of Israel (Judges 4–5), and by Barnabas, who was called the "Son of Encouragement" (Acts 4:36–37; Acts 9:26–27); and

Whereas, members of the Horizon Texas Conference (HTC) regularly witness acts of encouragement and support in their local congregations, ministries, and daily lives; and

Whereas, sharing stories of encouragement is itself an act of care and healing, as bearing witness to God's grace through one another's lives restores hope, strengthens resilience, and tends to the wounds that isolation and discouragement can bring; and

Whereas, June 11, 2026, is the feast day of Barnabas in the Catholic Church, providing an opportunity to honor encouragers in our lives in a unified and intentional way with our ecumenical siblings; and

Whereas, collecting stories of encouragement and thanksgiving allows HTC to celebrate the work of the Spirit among its members and encourages a culture of mutual support; and

Whereas, structured report forms enable the Annual Conference to capture these interactions and discern the impact of encouragement across the HTC; it is therefore

Resolved, That the Horizon Texas Conference invites all members to prayerfully identify someone in their lives who has served as an encourager and to intentionally reach out to them by phone, email, text, or other means on or by **June 11, 2026**, so that these acts of gratitude may become part of the conference's living testimony: telling the story of faith, mutual care, and healing within the body of Christ; and

Resolved, That in each contact, HTC members would:

- Communicate that the person they are contacting has: been an encourager in their life;
- Offer thanksgiving for this person's presence and ministry;
- Cite at least one specific instance in which the person lifted their spirits or provided encouragement; and

Resolved, That following this contact, members of the Horizon Texas Conference may complete and submit an Encourager **Form** as a narrative account of how encouragement has served as a means of care and healing across the Horizon Texas Conference, telling our collective story of the Spirit's work among us, which includes:

- Name of the HTC member submitting the report;
- Name of the person identified as an "Encourager";
- A description of how this person is a Encourager;
- Personal reflection on the experience of expressing appreciation;
- Any additional comments.

Resolved, that the operations department of the HTC will create and distribute an Encourager Report to all conference delegates on or by **June 11, 2026**, with a submission deadline of **June 30, 2026**, to allow the Annual Conference to collect, review, and analyze the results; and

Resolved, That the HTC Care and Healing Team will provide a report to the Annual Conference in 2027 that communicates the participation and analysis of the returned Encourager Forms, which may include the number of reports received, the proportion of delegates participating, the number and types of encouragers identified, common forms of encouragement described, emerging themes from narrative reflections, and representative stories that illustrate how encouragement has served as a ministry of care, resilience, and healing across the Horizon Texas Conference; and

Resolved, That the Horizon Texas Conference encourages congregations, ministry teams, and members to share and tell our story of encouragement, recognizing that sharing these experiences is itself a ministry of care and healing, thereby fostering a culture of mutual support, gratitude, and discipleship in alignment with the mission of the United Methodist Church and the priorities of the Horizon Texas Conference.

Submitted by Rev. Jason Valendy

Supporting Information

What Biblical text(s) informed you in the development of this petition?

- Judges 4–5 - Deborah encouraging Barak
- Ruth 1-4 - Ruth's encouraging Naomi in her decisions
- Acts 4:36–37 – Introduction of Barnabas as a generous supporter.
- Acts 9:26–27 – Barnabas' encouragement of Paul to join the apostles.
- Acts 18:24-28 - Pricilla does not tear down Apollos but pulls him aside to help him grow
- Hebrews 10:24–25 – The call to encourage one another and spur love and good works.
- Thessalonians 5:11 – "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

How does this petition help further the mission of our Annual Conference to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? How does it align with the HTC vision and the five strategic priorities?

- Maximize care and healing: encouraging and recognizing encouragers fosters spiritual growth, discipleship, and relational vitality within congregations.
- Multiply followers of Jesus: followers of Jesus Christ are bringers of Good News and being an encourager of the Good News.
- Tell our story: Giving people a purpose and reason to not just tell stories, but to hear the stories of others.

Provide pertinent references set forth in the 2020/2024 Book of Discipline *or the* 2020/2024 Book of Resolutions *that relate to this petition.*

- ¶ 126 The Heart of Christian Ministry - Affirms that Christian ministry is rooted in Christ's "outreaching love" and expressed through a common life of gratitude, devotion, witness, service, and discipleship. This provides a foundational theological basis for recognizing encouragement as a vital expression of Christian ministry.

- ¶ 129 Ministry as Gift and Task - Describes ministry as both a gift of grace and a task of unsparing service, reinforcing that practices such as encouragement are not optional but integral to the church's life together.

How does this item differ from the stated stances set forth in the 2020/2024 Book of Discipline *or the* 2020/2024 Book of Resolutions*?*

- None

If applied, what action would be required of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference?

- Distribution of the Encourager Appreciation Report (EAR) Form to all Annual Conference delegates, as well as to the chairs of the Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members, the Orders of Deacons and Elders, and the Board of Laity, on or by June 11, 2026.
- Collection of submitted forms by June 30, 2026.
- Generate a report to the Annual Conference in 2027 that communicates the participation and analysis of the returned EARs.
- Encouragement of ongoing practice of identifying and uplifting encouragers within HTC congregations and ministries.