

History of the

Mission, Aim and System Task Force

In January 1995, Jim Pollard, the Conference Council Director, requested Annual Conference Council on Ministries to begin a strategic study of the Annual Conference. The 1997 Annual Conference session instituted the Task Force on Mission Aim and System as a means to assist Annual Conference Council on Ministries in presenting a plan for conference operations that would give a sense of direction and purpose for the conference. District Superintendents were asked to identify a layperson and a clergy person from each of their districts to serve on the Task Force. Additional persons were added to the membership of the Task Force. In January 1999, a series of 10 focus groups were held across the conference in order to present the work of the Task Force to date. Approximately 150 to 200 people attended. The feedback helped the Task Force to examine values, mission statement, and vision.

By June 1999, the mission statement was further developed “To recruit, resource, refresh and release excellent spiritual leadership, lay and clergy, and to multiply the places where Jesus is proclaimed and served.” This statement was adopted by the Annual Conference session of 1999. Beginning in the fall of 1999, the Task Force worked to create a structure based on the mission statement, and the Strategic Action Plan approved by the Annual Conference in 2002. Bishop Violet Fisher enlisted the help of Dr. Nancy Foltz, to move toward in a more transformational way of thinking, and to design and implement a strategic plan. This was adopted in 2002, and was modified subsequently.

A Call to Change

As we continue to move into the 21st Century, we recognize that we are in the midst of a rapidly changing world. Our world is yearning for real life. This is a critical time.

In the midst of these changing times, God calls us and puts passion within us: to bring the life of Christ to save the world's people, to share the power of the living God, and to bring the love, grace and healing touch of Jesus Christ. We are not doing it as well as we could. We need to bring to more people the nourishment of Jesus Christ. We are slow to listen to God and do what God calls us to do. It is evident in our membership decline that we have not been faithful to God's mandate to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We have closed, restarted, and merged many churches; but Western New York Conference has not opened a new church in 10 years.

In faith and hope, we look forward to a great future. We are not giving up! We are being raised to new life!

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

“Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.” So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone.”

Ezekiel 37:4-7 New Revised Standard Version

As God's Spirit raised the bones up from the valley and breathed life into them, so God's Spirit is raising us up and breathing life into us. We are not alone. We hear God calling us to be radically open to the breath of the Spirit blowing through us.

Trusting in the love and power of God, we commit ourselves to be open: to look and listen for God's word to us through prayer, and all the spiritual disciplines. We commit ourselves to making the changes necessary to obey the command we hear from the Spirit to transform the world in the name of Jesus Christ. We believe that together with our Lord, we will participate in a miracle.

In the power and love of the Spirit, our ministry in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will reach into all our communities, even into all the world, bringing life.

“All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

2 Corinthians 4:15-18 New International Version

Purpose of an Annual Conference

[¶601 2000 Discipline]

The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples for Jesus Christ by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church: all to the glory of God.

Mission

[What we are called to do]

Our Mission for the Western New York Annual Conference is to recruit, resource, release, and refresh spiritual leaders of excellence through connectional relationships, resulting in growth and service in the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

Vision

[What we are called to be]

Our Vision for the Western New York Annual Conference is that we are a community of healthy, disciple-making, growing, serving churches following God's will in transforming the world.

Values

As we serve together, we are

- guided by scripture, prayer, discernment, tradition, and reason,
 - determined to act justly,
 - committed to seek mercy,
 - dedicated to walk humbly,
 - empowered to build on our heritage, and
 - commissioned to proclaim the Gospel boldly.
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Our Primary Issue

Our primary issue is leadership. We need a strategy for pastoral leadership.

RELATED ISSUE: CONNECTION

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Our United Methodist Connection is one of our strongest assets. Yet there are those who perceive the connection as a liability. The apportionment and appointment systems are deemed effective when they benefit congregations and individuals directly and a liability when they do not.

The connection enables us to do ministry that we could not accomplish individually. Yet the perception exists that our resources are siphoned to support a bureaucracy that appears to limit the ministry of local churches.

Goal 1: Renew our spirit as United Methodists and connect with the greater community through the Igniting Ministries Program of the General Church.

2006 - 2008: Continue using the Igniting Ministries Campaign through 2007. The Communications Committee will coordinate grant writing, training, and media buys across the Conference.

2006 – 2008 Provide funding in the budget to support the Igniting Ministries program and media outreach in our respective market areas

Goal 2: Change the apportionment and appointment systems so that resources and needs are matched.

2006 – 2010 The Conference Council on Finance and Administration will develop and implement a comprehensive and ongoing program of stewardship and financial resource development, including current and planned giving for our church leaders and pastors.

Ongoing – Establish a pool of funds in the budget to enable missional appointments. Assign to Cabinet and the Conference Council on Finance and Administration.

Goal 3: Explore an expanded partnership with North Central New York Conference in appointments, camping, communications, foundation, general church, and Annual Conference Session.

Ongoing – Form a task force to explore expansion of partnering with North Central New York, Troy, and Wyoming Annual Conferences. The task force would consider camping, communications, United Methodist Foundation, Youth programming and Conference sessions.

2007 – Task Force to report on findings to Annual Conference with recommendations

2007 – 2010 – Continue to address the eventual boundary changes by working through the Boundaries Task Force or its future body.

Goal 4: Implement the use of technology within the WNY Conference and encourage its use at all levels: District, Conference, and Area.

2006: Establish a Technology team that will provide technical support in the areas of planning, purchasing, and the use of technology within worship, education, evangelism, communication, and connection.

2007 - 2010: Build upon the established technology while expanding the scope to include future Conference and area boundaries.

The pending expansion of Conference Boundaries will magnify all of the above statements

LEADERSHIP: PRIMARY CRITICAL ISSUE

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Leadership is a critically important issue for the Western New York Conference and will continue to be. We believe that leadership is helping God's people take the next faithful step in discipleship. The Leadership Ministry Team of the Covenant Council accepts responsibility for modeling and for providing direction for the Western New York Conference in recruiting, resourcing, refreshing, and releasing spiritual leaders of excellence. Western New York Conference leaders will:

Goal 1. Help those they lead to discern the call of God on their lives and their mission and ministry to the world.

District Superintendents:

1. Have at least one cabinet representative at district and conference youth gatherings providing presence and availability for those making inquiry in relationship to licensed and ordained ministry (07/08)
2. Keep eyes and ears open in all meetings on district to discern who may be experiencing call to ministry and mission (07/08)
3. Talk with and encourage those who experience God's call as part of candidacy inquiry process (07/08)
4. Work with the District Committee as they support and guide those who experience God's call (07/08)
5. Keep the ministry of the laity continuously before congregations, highlighted at Charge/Church Conference (07/08)

Board of Laity:

Facilitate a Spiritual Gifts Assessment Process (Equipped for Every Good Work) at the Conference Level and at the local church level as requested

Board of Ordained Ministry:

1. Candidacy program designed to help people discern their call to ordained ministry.
2. District Committee on Ordained Ministry work with candidates to discern call and works with certified candidates toward local pastor status and/or commissioned ministry
3. Conference Board of Ordained Ministry works with candidate to test call, readiness, and effectiveness

Conference Council on Youth Ministry:

1. To assist youth in growth in Christian faith, hope, love, compassion, fellowship and service and to teach and encourage Christian discipleship.
2. To encourage youth to strive to become servants of Christ, individually and as a whole - disciples who are open to, accepting of and encouraging to all people.

Goal 2. Provide instruction and otherwise equip those they lead in both spiritual practice and practical ministry skills.

District Superintendents:

1. Teach at district equipping or training days (07/08)
2. Publicize opportunities for training known to districts (07/08)
3. Work with the District Councils and Conference teams to bring excellent training events to our Conference (07/08)
4. Provide opportunities for small group pastor's gathering (07/08)
5. To sponsor SPRC training, including training in the ministry of the laity (07/08)

Board of Laity

1. Provide Local Church Lay Leader training at District training events
2. Develop a plan for implementing Certified Lay Minister (CLM) training and certification in the WNY Conference

Board of Ordained Ministry:

1. Evaluate credentials and skills of those presenting themselves for conference membership
2. Provide mentor program for probationary candidates
3. Oversee evaluation and continuing effectiveness resources for pastors
4. Sponsor continuing effectiveness programs for pastors

Conference Council on Youth Ministry:

To teach each youth how to and why we should uphold each other spiritually and support each other in prayer

Goal 3. Continue to provide activities that motivate and encourage leaders to persevere in ongoing ministry and continuing discernment.

District Superintendents:

1. Continue with or establish monthly small group pastor's meetings (07/08)
2. One-on-one yearly supervisory interviews, which address the issues, stated (07/08)

Board of Laity

Plan and facilitate a Lay-Clergy Partnership event aimed at strengthening relationships and joint ministry

Board of Ordained Ministry:

1. Conference Relations functions to work with pastors who sense a change in call and/or a change in personal Circumstances
2. Reviews and makes recommendations to the Clergy Session regarding pastors who are referred to it by the Cabinet because of alleged ineffectiveness
3. Orders of Elders, Deacons and Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate Members work to encourage and to hold one another to mutual accountability.

Conference Council on Youth Ministry:

1. To encourage and support youth participation in District, Conference, Jurisdictional, and worldwide youth Ministry with related activities by personally inviting every church in the WNY Conference.
2. To create more effective Youth and Adult Leaders through participation and leadership in NEJ Convo and CYM Steering, Division of young People's Ministries, Connection! WNY YouthNet, UM Seminar, Youth 2007, MOP and WNY UMYF Leadership Training in August and January.

Goal 4. Work with leaders to evaluate the fruits of ministry and make changes when necessary.

District Superintendents:

Annual one-on-one supervisory meetings as well as annual meeting with SPR or PPR committees using the CORE Competencies tool or similar instrument (07/08)

Board of Laity

Implement a survey of Local Church Lay Leaders in 2007 and use the results to set Board of Laity Goals for the 2007-2008 Conference year.

Board of Ordained Ministry:

- 1-3 same as in #3
4. Sponsor continuing effectiveness programs for pastors

Conference Council on Youth Ministry:

1. To foster inter-District and inter-Conference communication and participation
2. Consistently encourage diversity in WNY Conference Youth Ministries

Goal 5. Create and sustain structures, institutions, and relationships, which promote the first four components.

District Superintendents:

Work with the Board of Ordained Ministry regarding "continuing effectiveness" and towards exit procedure if necessary (07/08)

Board of Laity

Convene Board of Laity Meetings 4-6 times a year

Board of Ordained Ministry:

1. Develops policies and structured for working with clergy in their conference relationship and effectiveness
2. Provide times of refreshing and resourcing
3. Develop and encourage and meet with small groups of clergy and laity

RELATED ISSUE: UNITY IN DIVERSITY

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:

As we are united by our faith in Jesus Christ, we at the same time value diversity as the people called United Methodist in Western New York. Our diversity is experienced in at least six subcultures. These six subcultures are theological, racial, gender, church type, geographic and economic.

In order to truly value our diversity we need to identify and name the issues that divide us; move beyond stereotypes by affirming each person within the annual conference as a unique child of God, blessed with varying gifts and talents; truly get to know and form positive relationships with those who are unlike ourselves, seek healing for the ways in which stereotyping has wounded us; and understand and appreciate, not negate, another's experience.

We have begun with Diversity Training as a starting point. Not all people of The United Methodist Church are fully included in all aspects of our church. Diversity Training will be followed by other opportunities to address the other "ism"s in the appropriate fashion and time.

Goal 1: Our Annual Conference will develop an intensive 3-day racial diversity training experience for lay and clergy, and require that all persons under appointment in the conference will have completed this training by 2009 so that we will have a proactive diversity policy in our appointment making, staffing and nominating processes.

2006– Identify and train a group of persons from Western New York Conference who will develop and implement racial diversity training.

2007 – The racial diversity-training group will begin training of all lay people of churches, District, and Conference support staff, and all persons under appointment.

2007 - 2009– All people in Conference leadership will be trained by the racial diversity-training group.

2007 – Will begin exploring the “ism” of human sexuality and will submit a proposal to Annual Conference at its June session.

RELATED ISSUE: EVANGELISM

STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE:

God calls us and puts passion within us to spread the Good News and to make disciples. Therefore, the resources of the Annual Conference as well as other connectional resources, including facilities, budget, programming, and staff will be utilized to:

- Train and encourage clergy and laity to proclaim the Gospel boldly in order to reach the unchurched.
- Strategize how best to use Annual Conference resources to open new churches and to revitalize existing churches.
- Implement strategies to open new churches and revitalize existing churches.

Goal 1: Identify and designate churches to which the resources of the conference will be provided in order to create congregations effective at making disciples and building God’s Kingdom.

Goal 2: Establish a policy and procedure for new church starts.

Goal 3: Identify and train those persons and congregations interested in beginning new congregations reflective of the diversity of Western New York.

Goal 4: To be determined with the Conference Board of Higher Education

Goal 5: To be determined with the Conference Board of Church & Society