

RS-216 - 2014 Strategic Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(full plan available at
www.neumc.org/2014plan)

Background: Stepping Out In Faith

BIBLICAL GROUNDING

Joshua 3:1-5; 14-17

*'When you see the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God being carried by the Levitical priests then you shall set out from your place. Follow it, so that you may know the way you should go, **for you have not passed this way before...**'*

Matthew 14:22-33

*Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but **by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.** And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "**Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.**" Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

KEY GOALS

To create a plan that would enhance our ability to **Equip, Support and Connect local, regional, and global ministries...** as our conference mission states.

Of course, the ultimate goal is for our conference structure and ministries to be focused on **making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world**, and to help local churches – regardless of their size – to become vital faith communities¹ with life-changing ministries.

A key focus question was **"What do we need to pay attention to in the next 3-5 years in order to be more faithful to the vision of making disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?"** The primary areas that require purposeful and significant changes are:

- **Leadership recruitment**, development, and support for clergy and laity
- Intentional focus on **spiritual formation**
- Deepening **connectional relationships** for support and accountability in fulfilling our mission

Challenges

- Ambivalence about connectionalism.
- Resource allocation.
- Cultural relevance and public perception.
- Model of church.
- Variety of audiences and multiple strategies.

Opportunities

- Attitudes about change.
- Hope for this process.
- Connection.
- Stories.

¹ from the Vital Congregations Initiative (more at www.umcvitalcongregations.org)

Conference Vision Statement

**Transformed by the Holy Spirit,
united in trust,
we will boldly proclaim Christ to the world.**

Recommendation: *We suggest that the Conference Vision Statement be carried forward to the new plan.*

Conference Mission Statement

The Conference Mission Statement goes a step further, specifically stating how the Conference staff and resources will work toward the goal of making disciples.

Recommendation: *We suggest that this Mission Statement be slightly edited in the final sentence to bring it in line with the overall UMC Mission as well as to add the component of the impact of what we are doing:*

**Our mission as the New England Conference is to equip, connect, and support local,
regional and global ministries to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the
transformation of the world.**

Five Critical Values

Recommendation: *We suggest the following re-articulation and expansion of our critical values. These priorities give us particular areas of emphasis to guide our strategies and decisions:*

- 1. Spiritual Life**
- 2. Vital Faith Communities**
- 3. Diversity and Inclusivity**
- 4. Leadership Development and Accountability**
- 5. Stewardship**

Spiritual Life

GOALS

- To reawaken a culture of faithful discipleship within the New England Conference.
- To help churches develop a plan where people, no matter their age, are growing in their faith.
- To grow faithful disciples who are committed to teaching our children and youth.

STRATEGIES

- Reprioritize our metrics and focus to be on discipleship, rather than membership.
- Transform the work of the Spiritual Formation initiative into a full Board of Discipleship, to create a comprehensive plan for spiritual formation and discipling for clergy and laity. (also see *Leadership Development* section).
- Raise the expectations across the conference that every clergy and every layperson in leadership (committee chair) participate in a regular spiritual life/discipleship group.
- Develop a communications plan to support these efforts with stories about churches that have this kind of discipleship in place, and the impact on their church and ministries.
- Focus intentionally on spiritual life/discipleship in Annual Conference sessions and charge or church conferences.

Leadership Development and Accountability

GOALS

- Strong, well-trained, faithful leaders at every level of church life.

STRATEGIES

Overall

- Establish a leadership summit to develop and align resources for excellent leadership; to:
 - Analyze and determine models of clergy leadership for the future in New England.
 - Develop a plan for clergy recruitment, development, and retention, as well as for vocational transitioning as needed.
- Increase availability of training and resourcing in a variety of delivery systems (“live” resourcing days, conference library, online trainings, webinars, etc.).
 - Increase communication of the availability of these resources.
 - Provide comprehensive listing of outside training and resourcing opportunities, beyond the conference or denomination.
- Grow the number of churches being assessed and served by Congregational Development coaches, with oversight by and in communication with the District Superintendents:
 - Identify, evaluate and develop an action plan with 3-5 churches annually in each district.
 - Employ a variety of tools/resources tailored for the specific needs of each congregation.

Leadership Development for Clergy

- Strengthen our system of mentoring/apprenticeship for new local pastors, commissionees, and ordinands.
- Establish a minimum threshold of attendance at spiritual formation, resourcing, and training events.
- Require clergy to participate in a learning/covenant group.

Leadership Development for Laity

- Standardize resources and processes for District Leadership and Lay Servant Academies across the conference, while allowing for flexibility and creativity on a district-by-district basis. Utilize well-functioning Academy teams to train/resource other districts.
- Highly recommend ~~require~~ participation in at least one Lay Servant Academy or District Leadership Academy for leadership (chairs) on church boards and committees.
- Local church committees will conduct an annual review of Leadership “Guidelines” for each local church committee.
- Participation in regular Bible study or covenant group as a prerequisite for leadership (conference to recommend 3-4 resources: *Disciple, Companions in Christ, Covenant, etc...*).

Vital Faith Communities

GOALS

- Vital faith communities, liberated and equipped for the mission of making disciples.
- Understanding and commitment to our common mission.

STRATEGIES

- Understand and build awareness of the flexible definition of a vital faith community.
- Articulate a “theology of property” that can help congregations reimagine church buildings and their use.
- “Right-sizing” all congregations: Achieving appropriate balance in clergy appointment time, building size, and budget for all congregations.
 - Aligning clergy appointments to be appropriate for congregation size/budget by the 2017-2018 appointment year
 - Assisting congregations in assessing building requirements for current ministry
 - Requiring congregations to create a plan for financial viability/sustainability
- Provide support and resources for congregations to learn, affirm, and participate in our common mission and the strength of our connection. (Also see *Stewardship* section).

Superintendency

GOALS

- A model of superintendency that best allows for deeper relationships between superintendents and local churches in the districts so as to live out our mission of discipleship making.

STRATEGIES

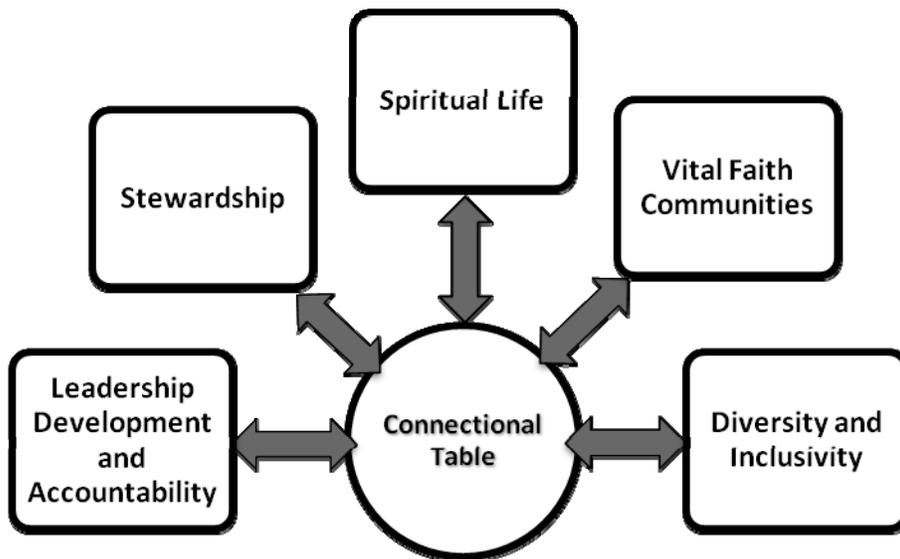
- The Annual Conference should authorize CFA to hire an outside nonprofit consultant to work with the Cabinet to develop a plan to transform the superintendency so as to focus on “strategic missional thinking” and other responsibilities as stated in the Book of Discipline in their districts for implementation in 2016.
- Key to the plan will be to examine the roles and responsibilities of superintendents.

Streamlining the Structure

GOALS

- Streamlined and efficient structure for Conference leadership, aligned with our vision and mission, and offering a web of connection.

STRATEGIES:



Recommendation for a streamlined structure of Conference committees

The **Connectional Table** is the new center of leadership for the New England Conference, and is charged with the implementation of the actions, budgets, and goals set by the Annual Conference.

- Six (6) at-large* seats
- Bishop (convener, non-voting)
- Lay Leader (vice chair)
- Dean of Cabinet
- Director of Connectional Ministries
- Treasurer
- BOOM Chair (in the case of co-chairs, the co-chairs will decide among themselves who will represent BOOM)
- President, Conference Board of Trustees

(* at large members should help ensure diversity and relate to the five critical values. They are nominated by the Lay Leader and the Bishop, ~~and approved by the Nominations Committee~~ and elected at Annual Conference session)

A streamlined committee, board and agency structure is proposed (see Appendix A) to connect to the five critical areas:

- Leadership Development and Accountability
- Stewardship
- Vital Faith Communities
- Spiritual Life
- Diversity and Inclusivity

Additional detail on the committee structure, nominations criteria, and where things fit is included in Appendix A in the full plan.

Diversity and Inclusivity

The team recognizes the paramount importance of this priority, and we believe the commitment to diversity and inclusivity is and should be infused in the other strategic areas. However, this was not part of our charter, and thus the team was not intentional in building specific goals and strategies in a distinct section of the plan.

However, we do reaffirm this as a critical value. Conference leadership is currently working on rebuilding and strengthening the Religion and Race committee. This committee will review this plan and all areas to ensure we are continuing to attend to honoring and including the full diversity of God's children in our churches and our conference. In addition, the conference leadership is encouraged to continue the work of addressing systemic issues of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and all other forms of discrimination in our conference, our churches, and our world.

Stewardship and Mission Share

GOALS

- Decrease proportion of mission shares to local church budgets.
- A healthy balance of allocation of mission shares between local, regional, and global missions, and administrative ministries.
- Increase stewardship focus and utilization of resources in local congregations.
- 100% Mission share participation by every church.
- A culture that understands the life-cycle of congregations, embracing new places for new people, growth, decline, death and resurrection.

STRATEGIES

- Assess the appropriateness of the mission share system
 - Is it in alignment with our strategy for deployment of pastors?
 - Does it support the Conference vision, mission, and critical values?
 - Is the calculation of mission shares appropriate in relation to local church budgets?
- Increase focus on stewardship in pastoral training and continuing education.
- Increase focus on communication to local churches regarding mission shares: videos, downloadable resources, "guest preacher" recommendations, etc.
- Ask each local church to use one of recommended tools and resources for stewardship, available through the Conference and the United Methodist Foundation of New England. Copies of recommended resources will be available in the Conference Library, and/or scholarships for purchasing resources.
- Work with those churches not contributing 100% of mission shares on a plan to increase mission share participation each year toward the goal of full participation.
 - Create District Finance teams (note: this model is used in Vermont). These teams will walk with churches to assess, educate, and support churches to move toward full participation in mission shares.
 - Determine future status of those churches and clergy who consistently do not contribute to mission shares.
- Develop a process that assesses viability of struggling churches and empowers congregations to close in a graceful way.

Next Steps

The presentation of the plan concludes the recommendations of the Strategic Planning Team. Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar is committed to the implementation of the strategies proposed in this plan, and will be working with the Cabinet and leadership to enact these recommendations.

Initial Next Steps

- Work with Conference Council on Finance and Administration to assess the budgetary requirements and implications of the elements of the plan.
- Nominations for the new Conference structure
- Further implementation of the plan will be ongoing.