

## REPORT OF THE TASK FORCE ON DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENCY

In the State of the Church address to the 2009 Annual Conference, Bishop Gwinn announced the formation of a Task Force to Study the Superintendency in the North Carolina Annual Conference. The purpose of the task force was to consider more efficient and effective ways for District Superintendents to fulfill their ministries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Specific attention was to be devoted to enabling ministries of teaching, mentoring, coaching, vision-casting, and team building among the churches and pastors of the districts.

The task force was named in late summer of 2009 and began its work in the fall. Over the past eighteen months, the task force has met on numerous occasions. The process engaged by the task force included:

- Surveying the current Cabinet to determine what hinders or facilitates their work of coaching, mentoring, team-building, vision casting, and teaching
- Theological reflection on the nature of ministry in the Wesleyan tradition, particularly the ministry of superintendency, its evolution over the history of the denomination, and an emphasis on leadership of a movement rather than institutional management
- Conversation with other Annual Conferences who have recently redesigned their work of superintendency and an examination of the different “models” of superintendency currently being implemented across the connection
- Reading and discussing together a report to the Lilly Endowment on “The District Superintendency in The United Methodist Church” authored by Dr. William Lawrence, dean of Perkins School of Theology
- A review of the responsibilities of the district superintendent as outlined in *The Book of Discipline, 2008* para. 420-424
- A comparative study of the composition of districts in the other annual conferences of the Southeastern Jurisdiction
- A review of the North Carolina Conference’s history of adding districts over the past forty five years

After a season of study and discussion, the task force agreed that the guiding principle of its recommendations would be the missional needs of the local churches of the Annual Conference and not financial implications. There will be cost savings to the Annual Conference of approximately \$380,000.00 annually in the recommendations; however the task force considers these to be a secondary, not a primary, benefit. The task force considered a number of proposals, ranging from slight and incremental change to a more radical and deep change. We acknowledge that there are significant details yet to be resolved should our recommendations be adopted. We believed our task to be the creation of a vision which others would implement.

The Task Force unanimously offers the following recommendations to the 2011 Annual Conference:

1. That the North Carolina Annual Conference affirms that the primary tasks of the district superintendents are coaching, mentoring, teaching, team-building, and vision casting and that the

superintendents must be freed for relationship building among congregations and pastors for those tasks.

2. That the number of districts be reduced from twelve to eight (*The Book of Discipline* reserves to the Bishop, in consultation with the Cabinet, the setting of the district lines subsequent to the Annual Conference setting the number – see para. 415.4).
3. That each district have a full-time administrative assistant to handle all non-appointive and non-judicial administrative matters related to the work of the district, thus freeing the superintendent for more time in the charges and with the pastors.
4. That the Bishop name a transition team to assist the various districts in matters of transfer of property and assets, and creating new district boards and agencies.
5. That it is the stated expectation of the conference that the district superintendent will be in each charge at least annually, but that it is no longer necessary for the superintendent personally to conduct each Charge Conference in the district.
6. That it is not the expectation of this Annual Conference that all superintendents must be present at all conference events and gatherings.
7. That each superintendent serve on no more than one conference board or agency and that no conference board or agency have more than one superintendent as a member.
8. That district offices be relocated out of the district parsonages where this is still the practice.

Respectfully submitted by the Bishop's Task Force on Superintendency: Carl Frazier, chair; Brenda Brown; Christine Dodson; Cashar Evans; Leonard Fairley; Ray Gooch; Randy Inness; Herbert Lowry; Linda Taylor

## **FAQs REGARDING THE TASK FORCE ON SUPERINTENDENCY REPORT**

### **Why these recommendations and why now?**

For the past several years, there has been a movement across the Methodist connection to re-think the work of the superintendency. In the history of the movement, as the needs of the church have changed, the role of the district superintendent has changed. The office of “presiding elder” as originally constituted is very different from the superintendency we have known in the last half of the twentieth century. As we move into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a growing sense that local churches need more support in their vital work of making disciples of Jesus Christ. These recommendations are presented to offer a new structure for the office of district superintendent, around which the work of coaching, teaching, mentoring, vision casting and team building can be focused.

“Why now” is simple. Any change in the structure of the districts must be approved by one Annual Conference for implementation at the next. Considering these recommendations now will allow for changes to be in place prior to the arrival of a new Bishop in the fall of 2012.

### **What are the benefits to the local church?**

The primary benefit will be a more sustained and helpful engagement by the district superintendent in helping churches to think strategically about their mission field and assisting pastors in building on strengths for ministry. The goal is to have the superintendents focused on the churches and “in the field” rather than in an office.

### **Will we really see more of the District Superintendent if she or he is not at Charge Conference? And what if we don’t feel like we “need” the D.S. around?**

The intention is for the superintendent to be present in each charge annually. The ways that may happen will be left to the creativity of the individual superintendents and congregations. Healthy, thriving communities may only “need” to see the superintendent in a gathering of celebration. Further, by reducing some of the superintendent’s administrative load and limiting their time outside the district, he or she should have more time to spend in the churches and communities. “Needing” the presence of the District Superintendent, however, is an expression of our Wesleyan core value of accountability for our stewardship of the movement’s mission.

**What about finances? Will costs (and the apportionments) go up with full-time Administrative Assistants? Or will we save money?**

Projections are that the Annual Conference will realize a savings of approximately \$380,000 a year with the reduction of districts (even allowing for full-time Administrative Assistants). Other cost benefits will be realized with fewer district parsonages to maintain and office space to rent. However, it needs to be stressed that financial benefits were a secondary concern to the Task Force. Our primary interest was missional.

**Are other Annual Conferences doing this?**

Many are, as we said above. There are various models that we looked at from around the connection - reduction of districts with strong subdistrict groupings, superintendents serving dual roles, much larger geographic areas with multiple superintendents in specific ministries serving areas together. We believed this model, with superintendents building strong teams of leaders to partner with them in their work, best serves the North Carolina Conference.

**Which districts are recommended for elimination?**

All of them. The recommendation is that new lines be drawn, essentially creating eight new districts with new names. *The Discipline* states that the Annual Conference determines the number of districts while the Bishop, in consultation with the Cabinet, "forms the districts."

**How long has the North Carolina Conference had twelve districts?**

Since 1972 when the Rockingham District was created. The Sanford and Greenville Districts were created in 1964. Prior to that, the Conference had nine districts.

**What about district boards and committees?**

District boards and committees will need to be reconstructed. A part of the recommendation includes the creation of a transition team to guide the conference in those concerns, as well as concerns about property and asset distribution.