

Frequently Asked Questions continued

determined by vote of the annual conference.” (¶415.4)

Here is what the process will look like.

STEP 1 The Special Session of the Annual Conference will vote on reducing the number of districts to eight.

STEP 2 The District Study Team’s proposal also recommends that the Special Session elect a Transition Team to assist the Bishop and Cabinet in this process. So following an affirmative vote to realign to eight districts a Transition Team will be elected by the Special Session.

STEP 3 Following the January 28 meeting, the Bishop and Cabinet will have the responsibility of drawing district lines. They will immediately begin their work while constantly consulting the elected Transition Team. This step will include listening sessions throughout the Conference and gathering information from every church. **Input from United Methodists across North Alabama will be a key part of this step.**

STEP 4 As the district lines are developed the Bishop, Cabinet and Transition Team will work with the proper groups to handle matters such as dissolving and establishing incorporations, properly transferring property, etc. As the transition continues, all 12 current districts will be discontinued and the eight new districts with new lines and new names will be created.

STEP 5 The proposal also recommends that the District Study Team remain organized to consult with the Bishop and Cabinet for the next five years so adjustments can continue to be made as the North Alabama Conference lives into its new district alignment.

If passed by the Annual Conference, when will the transition to eight districts happen? What is the timeline?

The process will begin immediately. The District Study Team’s proposal recommends that this process be completed by the 2007 regular session of the Annual Conference.

Who will be a part of the Transition Team?

Following the same process as when other Conference Teams and Committees are elected, the Conference Nominating Team will develop a slate of nominations for the Transition Team and, contingent on an affirmative vote to realign districts, will present it to the January 28 Special Session of the Annual Conference. The Annual Conference will then go through the process to elect the Transition Team. The Nominations Team includes members from every district and will meet on Friday, January 27 to develop this slate of potential team members. If you would like the Nominations Team to consider someone to be on this slate please contact Dale Cohen at 205-226-7954; 1-800 239-7950 or dcohen@northalabamaumc.org.

Why can’t we do what is necessary to grow with 12 districts instead of eight?

As the North Alabama Conference has learned during the past 30 years more structure has not created growth. In fact, since 1976 the North Alabama churches have lost more than 33,000 members. This means that currently there are less members of North Alabama United Methodist Churches paying for the same administrative structure the Conference has had since 1976. The costs of maintaining this administration has increased greatly during the last 30 years. Thus, resources that could be

used to challenge and equip the ministries of local churches are instead being used to maintain an old structure. This is bad stewardship.

Another factor is that currently in the North Alabama Conference there are not sufficient resources — such as membership, clergy leadership and financial resources — to align and create 12 strong districts. While eight districts will not be completely equal in the distribution of resources, eight districts will help ensure that there are enough resources in each district to make it strong and effective in equipping local churches for disciple-making.

What is the cost? What will these extra resources go toward?

By reducing the number of districts to eight the North Alabama Conference will be able to save at least \$500,000 a year. Through this reduction of administrative expense more money can be redirected to resource local churches through training, congregational development and other important ministries.

While saving a half million dollars each year, the eight districts will also be better resourced. This financial figure includes both providing each district with a set amount (such as \$40,000) for an Assistant to the District Superintendent who will be able to assist with administrative matters. The figure also includes providing virtual training centers in each district to bring resources closer to local churches.

How will the district offices be staffed?

Each district will have a District Superintendent, a secretary/administrative assistant and the new Administrative Assistant to the District Superintendent whose work will allow the District Superintendent to focus more on training and equipping local churches. As the staffs are developed, each district will have the flexibility to decide the Administrative Assistant that will meet that district’s needs. Some possibilities for ways a district could staff the Administrative Assistant position are through a lay person, a clergy person also serving a church part-time or a professional administrator shared with another district.

What does this mean for current ministries with leadership organized around districts ?

All current ministries organized around districts will still be organized around districts with the new configuration. The Transition Team will listen to and help resource these ministries to develop a plan so they can grow stronger with the transition to the new district alignment.

Why the January 28 Special Session of the Annual Conference?

Why not wait until the regular session in June?

The process of district realignment will take more than a year to complete. It will affect cabinet appointments and other clergy appointments. By beginning the process in January 2006, it will give the Bishop, Cabinet and Transition Team more time to properly do their task and meet the District Study Team’s request to implement the new district alignment by June of 2007.



District Realignment

Answers to common questions raised at recent District Meetings

The mission of the local United Methodist churches in North Alabama is strong and clear ... make disciples of Jesus Christ. On January 28, 2006, the members of the North Alabama Conference will have an opportunity to vote on a proposal meant to strengthen its faithfulness to Christian disciple-making. The proposal is to reduce the number of districts within the North Alabama Conference from 12 to eight.

Why Redistricting?

Since 1976 the North Alabama Conference has lost more than 33,000 members and has made no downsizing of administration. Since the late 1960s, the Conference has formed several study teams, hired consultants and been in discussion about realigning its districts. Every study recommended reducing the number of districts. In 2004 yet another District Study Team was appointed and developed a proposal to reduce the number of districts from 12 to eight. This realignment will be more than reducing numbers, it will be an opportunity to align the resources of the North Alabama Conference to better challenge and equip its local churches for making disciples of Jesus Christ.

An opportunity to move from maintenance to disciple-making ministry

Eight districts will help more resources within the Annual Conference go toward ministry instead of administrative costs. The North Alabama Conference has had 12 districts since 1955. The current 12 districts with their current names were set in 1976. The costs of maintaining this administration has increased greatly during the last 30 years while the membership of the church has decreased. Today fewer United Methodists are paying for the same administrative structure the Conference has had since 1976. Thus, resources that could be devoted to ministry are being used to maintain an old structure. This is bad stewardship. Reducing the number of districts will allow the North Alabama Conference to better equip its churches for ministry and not simply maintain a structure.

An opportunity to move from isolated competitors to supportive connection

Every local United Methodist Church in North Alabama shares in the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Yet, at times we United Methodists do not use our strength of connectionalism to work toward this mission. We even seem to be competitors working against each other and isolating ourselves rather than working together serving the

same Lord. By realigning the districts more focus will be placed on United Methodist connectionalism. Local churches will be clustered to receive training, learn from each other, and serve the needs of their communities in the name of Jesus Christ.

The role of the District Superintendent will also be realigned to focus more on supporting the ministry of local churches. Instead of being an administrator devoted to paperwork, the District Superintendent will work with Conference staff and other consultants to train local churches for the ministries God is calling them to do. Instead

of only engaging with local churches during Charge Conference and appointment time, the District Superintendent will become a resource and mentor to equip local churches and pastors. Instead of just being an evaluating supervisor of pastors and churches, District Superintendents will also be evaluated based on the measurable outcome of local churches making disciples.

An opportunity to move from old to new

While membership has continued to decline during the last 30 years, worship attendance in North Alabama churches is almost the same as it

was in 1976. During the last 10 years the Conference has seen an increase in worship attendance. Much of this increase can be credited to the Conference starting new congregations and established congregations stepping out in faith to begin new worship services and new ministries to reach new people. Many local churches have a renewed sense of call and purpose in mission, ministry and evangelism. The members of the North Alabama Conference now have an opportunity to step out in faith and follow God into a new district alignment that will help strengthen the vision of Every church challenged and equipped to make disciples of Jesus Christ by taking risks and changing lives.

Please carefully and prayerfully read this information and consider what you hear God calling North Alabama United Methodists to do at this time.

The founder of the United Methodist movement John Wesley knew Methodists would continually need to listen for God’s call to help the church remain faithful in its ministry. In a now famous quote he said "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out." As a member of the North Alabama Annual Conference you will have an opportunity to vote on this important decision as you feel God leading you. Thank you for your service and thank you for your commitment to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19-20

A message from Bishop Willimon



Dear Friends in the North Alabama Conference:

Few events have excited me more than the District Study Team's report. We have now had some good and helpful District Meetings to discuss the report and I am pleased that many of you share my enthusiasm. I believe the recommendation for eight new districts replacing the dozen former districts is an important part of the renewal of the mission of our Conference.

While you may have read the extensive list of expected outcomes and the sketch of some of our plans, I thought you might be interested to know three things that most excite me about the Committee's proposal:

1. All districts would be reformed to address some of the huge inequities that exist in the Districts that we have inherited from the past. Eight districts would enable us to **decentralize** much of the work of the Conference utilizing **District Resource Centers** in every District, designed to facilitate the work of the churches in each district. We would also utilize clergy and laity to organize churches into **clusters** that are based upon shared characteristics of the congregations.
2. We would realize **significant monetary savings** in the downsizing of our Conference administration. We have lost 20% of our members in the past three decades without a corresponding downsizing of the costs of our administration. This is poor stewardship. The savings (4 DSs, their housing and offices) could then be redirected toward resources to strengthen the ministries of local churches such as hiring **full-time administrative assistants** (who could be clergy or laity, depending upon the specific needs and goals of each district) to free the DSs for more **mentoring, coaching, and training of churches to grow** into the future. Funds also would be available for a **network of consultants** that would be provided to congregations in need.
3. Eight DSs would **work more efficiently and adaptively** than twelve. We must spend more time supporting the work of our pastors and churches and less time in routine management and administration.

In conversations with the leaders of many Conferences who have already gone through realignment, such as Bishop Larry Goodpaster in Alabama-West Florida, Bishop Timothy Whitaker in Florida and Bishop Bruce Ough in West Ohio, **all** report that new life was breathed into their Conference through realignment. While the purpose of the January Conference is simply to approve the number of districts, I promise that, once the eight districts are approved by the Called Conference, the Cabinet will work with the Transition Team to listen to you, to design the new districts in a logical way (all eight districts will be new districts with new names), and to take steps into the new future that God has for us.

Let me know (email: wwillimon@northalabamaumc.org) if you have further questions. I am pleased that the conversation has begun and that, prodded by the ever active Holy Spirit, our Conference is following Jesus into the challenge of tomorrow.

Happy New Year,

Will Willimon

Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions were raised at the District Meetings concerning the Special Session of the Annual Conference.

What will the Annual Conference be voting on at the Special Session on January 28, 2006?

You will be voting on a proposal from the District Study Team authorized by the 2004 session of the North Alabama Annual Conference. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* gives the Annual Conference the authority to determine the number of districts within its bounds. (The Bishop is given authority to draw the district lines.) The recommendation is to reduce the number of districts within the bounds of the North Alabama Annual Conference to eight districts. The complete proposal was included in your registration mailing. You can also find a copy on the North Alabama Conference website (www.northalabamaumc.org).

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Local Churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.

¶120, The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church

How will redistricting help local churches make disciples?

Reducing the number of districts will help realign the resources of the North Alabama Conference to go toward ministry instead of administrative overhead. By realigning to eight districts the Conference has an opportunity to make each district stronger and serve as a better resource for the ministries of local churches. Realigning districts will also allow the role of the District Superintendent to be realigned to focus more on equipping and resourcing local churches.

Why eight districts? Why not nine, six or ten?

Eight districts will make it possible to more equally distribute resources — such as membership, clergy leadership and financial resources — among the districts. While the eight districts will not be completely equal, this number ensures enough resources are in each district to help it be strong and effective in equipping churches for disciple-making. Also, reducing the

number from 12 to eight will cause every district to be changed. Gil Rendle of the Alban Institute, a consultant working with the Cabinet, recently said an organization needs to change itself by at least 20% in order to get real change. By reducing the number of districts by one-third, it will help bring the intended change to the North Alabama Conference.

What has been the process to arrive at this proposal of eight districts?

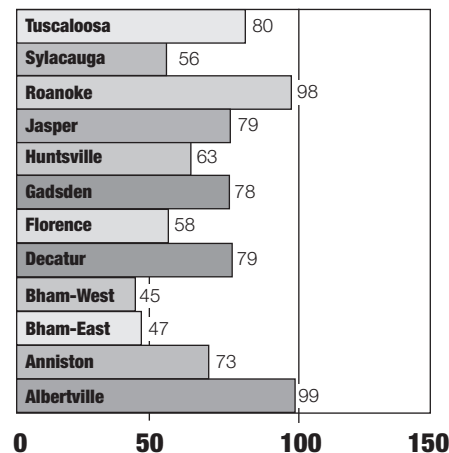
In 2004 the Cabinet brought a resolution to the Annual Conference to “request Bishop Robert E. Fannin to appoint a committee to study the District structure of the Conference and to instruct said committee to make a report of its findings to the 2005 session of the Annual Conference.” The Committee was appointed and began to work with Bishop William Willimon and the Cabinet. In 2005, Chairperson Rev. Barbara Harper reported that much of the committee's work had focused on the

role of the District Superintendent — a topic the Cabinet had also been studying. Her report included a promise to continue the team's work and to prepare a proposal to the Annual Conference reducing the number of districts. Throughout the period of the District Study Team's work, they talked to other Annual Conferences who have gone through the redistricting process; they talked to the current Cabinet, former District Superintendents and other conference leaders; and they looked at research including studies, consultant reports, and discussions the North Alabama Conference has had concerning its district structure since the late 1960s. This fall the team developed the current proposal to present to the Annual Conference.

Where is the plan? What will the new district lines look like?

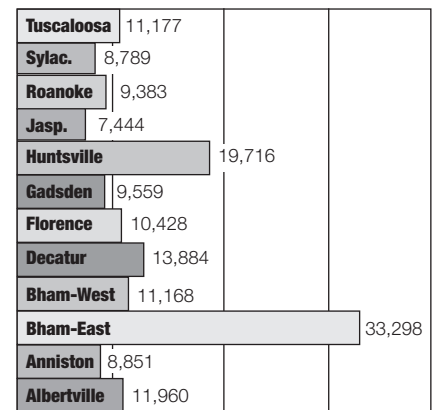
There is no map of new district lines yet. The vote at the Special Session of the Annual Conference in January is just one step in the process. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* outlines that it is the Bishop's responsibility “to form districts after consultation with the district superintendents and after the number of the same has been

Number of Churches reported in 2004 by District



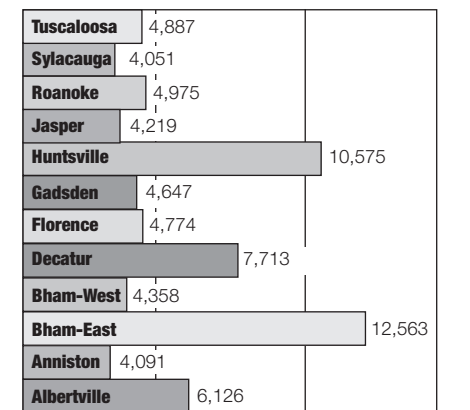
Church Membership

LN09 Table S97
p. 530, 2005 North Alabama Conference Journal



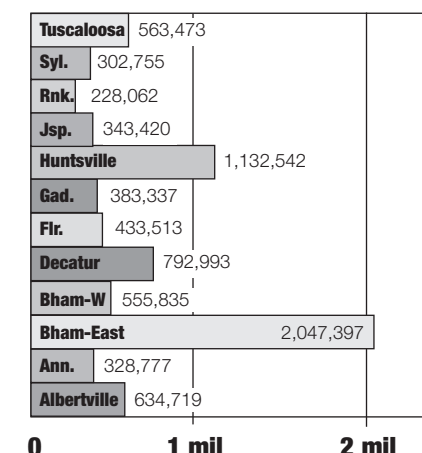
Average Worship Attendance

LN10 Table S97
p. 530, 2005 North Alabama Conference Journal



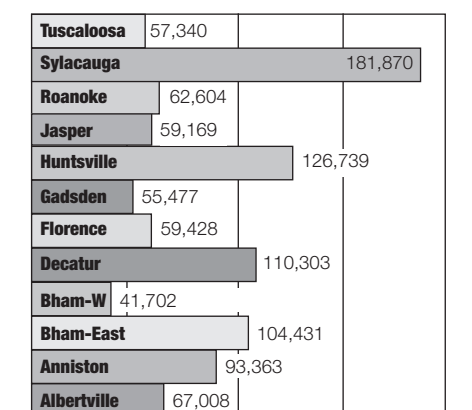
2004 Total Local Church Program Expenses (\$)

LN70 Table S100
p. 533, 2005 North Alabama Conference Journal



2004 District Administration Apportioned Amounts (\$)

LN55A Table S99
p. 532, 2005 North Alabama Conference Journal



District Administrative Costs

(excludes District Superintendent salaries)
Figures from 1977 and 2005 North Alabama Conference Journals

	1976	2004
Members	189,309	155,657
District Administrative Costs Apportioned	\$85,115	\$1,019,435
Cost per Member	\$0.45	\$6.55

Numbers from
Col. 9 p. 91-A and Col. 50a p. 93-A
1977 Journal
and
LN 09 p.530 and LN55A p. 532, 2005 Journal