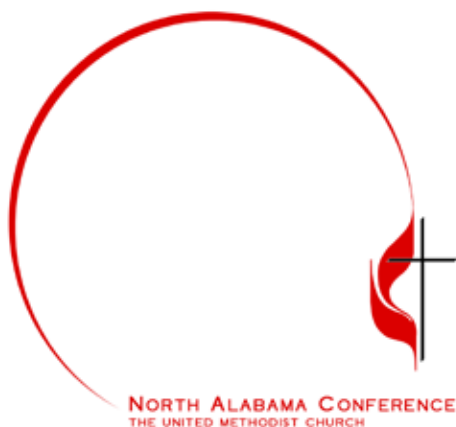


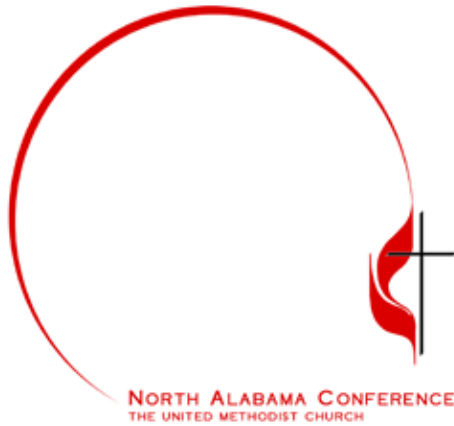
General Guidelines for Local Church Lay Leadership



Revised January 2010
Information current, January, 2010
The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008 (referenced)

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Conference Vision Statement

Every church challenged and equipped to grow more disciples of Jesus Christ by taking risks and changing lives.

Conference Priorities

- » New Congregations
- » Natural Church Development
- » Effective Leadership
- » Empowering a New Generation of Christians
- » Missions

Bishop's Message



The Laity are not just an important part of the church, the laity are the church! The laity are the whole people of God following Christ. You have been summoned to the important ministry of lay leadership. In North Alabama, we have one of the most active programs of lay leadership in the United Methodist Church. This handbook will help you to fulfill your vocation in the church and that will help your church to fulfill its mandate from Christ. Thank you for your service to our Lord and his church.

Will Willimon

Conference Lay Leader's Message



Thank you for answering God's call to serve your local church as the lay leader. Not only are you the elected leader of your congregation, but you are a chosen minister of Jesus Christ. As you prayerfully prepare to serve effectively may you have an open mind and a willing spirit to do God's will. It is important that you faithfully work with your pastor as a partner in ministry to fulfill the mission of the church. Your District Lay Leader and I are anxious to help you in any way we can. Please contact us whenever we can be of assistance to you. May God continue to bless you as you serve in Jesus' name.

Ellen Harris



Scriptural Guidelines

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love...” (Ephesians 4:1-2 NRSV)

“So, my son, throw yourself into this work for Christ. Pass on what you heard from me—the whole congregation saying Amen!—to reliable leaders who are competent to teach others.” (2 Timothy 2:1-2 The Message)

“Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV)

“But whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10: 43b-45 NRSV)

“If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you’ll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment’s notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.” (John 12:26 The Message)

“To one person the Spirit gives the ability to give wise advice; to another he gives the gift of special knowledge. The spirit gives special faith to another, and to someone else he gives the power to heal the sick. He gives one person the power to perform miracles, and to another the ability to prophesy. He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking. Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.” (1 Corinthians 12:8-10 New Living Translation)

Your Role as a Lay Leader

Lay Leader

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church (2008), Part V, Chapter 1, Section VI, ¶251: Duties of Leaders and Members—1. Out of the professing membership of each local church (¶127), there shall be elected by the charge conference a lay leader who shall function as the primary lay representative of the laity in that local church and shall have the following responsibilities:

- a) fostering awareness of the role of laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world, and finding ways within the community of faith to recognize all these ministries;
- b) meeting regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the church and the needs for ministry;
- c) membership in the charge conference and the church council, the committee on finance, the committee on lay leadership, and the committee on pastor-parish relations or staff-parish relations, where, along with the pastor, the lay leader shall serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general Church (to be better equipped to comply with this responsibility, it is recommended that a lay leader also serve as a lay member of annual conference);
- d) continuing involvement in study and training opportunities to develop a growing understanding of the Church's reason for existence and the types of ministry that will most effectively fulfill the Church's mission;
- e) assisting in advising the church council of opportunities available and the needs expressed for a more effective ministry of the church through its laity in the community;
- f) informing the laity of training opportunities provided by the annual conference. Where possible, the lay leader shall attend training opportunities in order to strengthen his or her work. The lay leader is urged to become a certified lay speaker.

In instances where more than one church is on a charge, the charge conference shall elect additional lay leaders so that there will be one lay leader in each church. Associate lay leaders may be elected to work with the lay leader in any local church.

Lay Member of Annual Conference

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church (2008), Part V, Chapter 1, Section VI ¶251.2: The lay member of the annual conference and alternates shall be elected annually or quadrennially as the annual conference directs. If the charge's lay representative to the annual conference shall cease to be a member of the charge or shall for any reason fail to serve, an alternate member in the order of election shall serve in place.

Both the lay members and the alternates shall have been professing members in good standing of The United Methodist Church for at least two years and shall have been active participants for at least four years next preceding their election (see ¶ 32), except in a newly organized church, which shall have the privilege of representation at the annual conference session. No local pastor shall be eligible as a lay member or alternate. United Methodist churches that become part of an ecumenical shared ministry shall not be deprived of their right of representation by a lay member in the annual conference. The lay member(s) of the annual conference, along with the pastor, shall serve as an interpreter of the actions of the annual conference session. These persons shall report to the local church council on actions of the annual conference as soon as possible, but not later than three months after the close of the conference.

Your Calling and Responsibilities

Laity are Called

All of God's people, in all places and at all times, are called to love and serve. (Ministry of the Laity) We rejoice in God's Call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Claimed by baptism and nurtured by God's redeeming love and grace, we are compelled to live under the direction of the Holy Spirit. We are called to an every-moment ministry.

Ministry of the laity includes, but is not limited to:

- Living faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in our everyday life.
- Responding to God's gifts of grace and call to serve.
- Using our gifts and resources to serve others.
- Loving our neighbors.
- Living out the Gospels in all our relationships – at home, at school, at work, at play, in our communities and in our world.

As described in the Gospels, Jesus Christ calls all persons to do a variety of things. You are called to be in lay ministry as a Lay Leader.

Your Responsibilities

You were chosen by your church at the Charge Conference to be the Lay Leader of your congregation. Your role is to make disciples of Jesus Christ and your priorities are the same as those of the North Alabama Conference.

1. Become a partner in ministry with your pastor by praying, visioning, sharing, and working together. This involves frequent communication—no less than weekly. Listen to the congregation and provide objective input to your pastor. You and your pastor are a team and teaming means sharing responsibilities. Be aware of your pastor's schedule so that the church functions smoothly when she or he is away or unavailable. Work with your pastor to actively develop, plan and implement Laity Sunday. Be willing and available to assist and share in pastoral responsibilities.



LAITY SUNDAY



According to the Book of Discipline 2008 (Paragraph 264.2) "Laity Sunday shall be observed annually, preferably on the third Sunday in October. Laity Sunday calls the Church to celebrate the ministry of all lay Christians, as their lives are empowered for ministry by the Holy Spirit. The observance of Laity Sunday shall be under the general supervision of the General Board of Discipleship. The Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders will recommend themes for an entire quadrennium to the General Board of Discipleship two years before the beginning of a new Quadrennium." Themes and worship helps for Laity Sunday can be found at gbod.org/laity.



2. Become a partner with your congregation. Communicate with them and make sure they know you are there to help them and the church. Listen to congregational concerns and issues and communicate those to the pastor, while providing information to the congregation that may alleviate their concerns. If your church has more than one service and different type services, such as traditional and contemporary, consider having an Associate Lay Leader to assure a Lay Leader is attending all services and each service is aware of their Lay Leader.

Your Calling and Responsibilities

3. Be involved in your church's stewardship program and assure the emphasis is ongoing throughout the year. Promote giving by keeping the congregation educated on all the ministries involved in your church and our connectional system. Learn about and educate your congregation on how their apportionments are used in ministry throughout the world. Help identify your congregation's gifts and graces and allow those with a passion to serve to fulfill their ministry.

APPORTIONMENTS AND CONNECTIONAL GIVING

What is connectional giving? It's as simple as people coming together, combining their money to accomplish something bigger than themselves and their local congregations. ***United Methodists support apportioned and designated funds through their connectional gifts.***

As a lay leader it is important that we not only understand the magic of being a connectional church but that we understand our role in making sure that the leadership in the church as well as the congregation are informed. As lay leaders stewardship is a very important area of our lives and responsibility. Scripture guides us best in this area: *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* — Matthew 6:19-21, NRSV

The General Conference establishes budgets for the denomination's general funds. These are divided among annual conferences, based on a specific formula. Each annual conference, using its own approved formula, divides these fund requests, along with conference administrative and benevolence fund requests, among local churches.

In addition, individuals, local churches, districts and annual conferences may make monetary gifts to the designated funds called Advance Specials, of which 100 percent goes directly to a specific project or ministry. Together, apportioned and designated funds represent our connectional giving.

By combining several smaller gifts into a larger amount, we can effect change across the world. Individual churches can minister to a small area; however, as a connectional church, we can do big things, all in the name of Jesus Christ.

Additional information is available at umcsgiving.org.

4. Educate yourself about the United Methodist Church, the connectional system, and the North Alabama Conference. It is recommended the Lay or Associate Lay Leaders be the Lay Member(s) for your church at Annual Conference. Become familiar with the training and ministries available to your church and laity through the General Church, Jurisdiction, and Annual Conference and assure your church takes advantage of them. Learn how delegates to General and Jurisdictional conferences are elected. Identify those in your congregation that have a passion to be delegates to those conferences, and help them with the nomination process.
5. Continue your Christian education and leadership skills and encourage your church laity to do the same. Become involved in Bible study, the Walk to Emmaus and Cluster Groups, Lay Speaking Ministries training, and other ministries that promote outreach and discipleship.
6. Promote the use of teams in your church to identify new ministries, areas of outreach and potential new small groups. As new ministries are implemented and small groups formed, allow teams to move on to other new areas.

Your Calling and Responsibilities

7. You are a voting member of the charge conference and the church council, the committee on finance, the committee on nominations and leadership development, and the committee on pastor-parish relations or staff-parish relations. It is recommended that you or the Associate Lay Leader be present at each meeting, along with your pastor, to serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the General Church—a good reason for the Lay Leader/Associate Lay Leader to be the church's Lay Member of Annual Conference.
8. Promote effective relationships between you and your pastor. This special relationship starts with open minds and mutual respect plus an understanding that the church is God's church and only by God's grace and love can we be a part of this relationship. Congregations respond in a positive way to clergy-laity leadership when they see that both are spirit filled and working in harmony for effective ministry. This kind of partnership ministry, with the whole congregation involved, becomes important when pastoral leadership changes.
9. You, your pastor and the Pastor/Staff Parish Relations Committee have an awesome responsibility to identify and work with those laity that are called to Licensed or Ordained Ministry. One of the most important aspects of your position as Lay Leader is to help others heed God's call. You are encouraged to be aware of this responsibility and the process involved.
10. Actively support the work of the United Methodist Men, Women, Youth, Children, and other organized lay groups.
11. Serve with love, with joy, and enthusiasm; with courage to move as God directs; and with guidance from the Holy Spirit through daily prayer and meditation.

Length of service for Lay Leaders is recommended to be three years where you are elected annually. However many churches have specific and different requirements which may warrant a change to the three year rule and that may be determined by each church.

Assistance and encouragement related to the position of local church Lay Leader may come from a variety of sources; your District Lay Leader, Conference Lay Leader, the *United Methodist Book of Discipline*, your pastor and most importantly from God.

Associate Lay Leader

The Book of Discipline ¶251 provides that "Associate lay leader(s) may be elected to work with the lay leader in any local church." Election of Associate Lay Leaders is encouraged in churches with multiple worship services. Each service should have a lay leader/associate lay leader attending to help accomplish the roles and responsibilities of lay leader. Lay leaders and associate lay leaders should establish good communications, meet periodically and form a partnership with the church pastor(s). Associate lay leaders should have the same basic responsibilities as the lay leader and assure a lay leader is represented in church ministries and attendance at all meetings where the lay leaders are involved. However, if the lay leader and associate lay leader(s) are attending the same meeting there should only be one vote for lay leadership representation.

District Lay Leader's Ministry

¶659.

1. The district lay leader is the elected leader of the district laity and shall be a professing member of a local church. The district lay leader shall provide for the training of local church lay leaders for their ministries in the local churches in relation to ¶249. The district lay leader shall have responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within congregations and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the Church, and supporting and enabling lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the district and the local churches in cooperation with the district superintendent and pastors.

2. The district lay leader shall be elected as determined by the annual conference for a term of not less than four years. The method of nomination and the maximum term of office shall be determined by the annual conference.

There may be one or more associate district lay leader(s) within a district. The associate district lay leader(s) shall be elected as determined by the annual conference. The method of nomination and the maximum term of office shall be determined by the annual conference. The district lay leader and the associate district lay leader(s) may be reimbursed for their approved expenses.

3. The district lay leader will meet regularly with the district superintendent to discuss the state of the district, the Church, and the needs for ministry both locally and globally.

4. The district lay leader is a member of annual conference (see ¶32).

5. The district lay leader shall be a member of the conference board of laity or equivalent structure.

6. The district lay leader shall work with the District Superintendent to ensure that there is a district director of Lay Speaking Ministries and shall serve on the district committee on Lay Speaking Ministries.

7. The district lay leader is a member of the district conference and shall be a member of the district council on ministries or alternative structure and its executive committee. The district lay leader shall also be a member of the committee on district superintendency of the district.

8. The district lay leader may serve as a lay member of the district committee on ordained ministry (or equivalent agency) and the district board of church location and building (or equivalent agency).

9. The district lay leader shall relate to the organized lay groups in the district such as United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Youth and support their work and their activities.

10. The district lay leader may designate persons to serve as proxy in any of the above groups except the annual conference, the district conference, district council on ministries, and the district council on ministries executive committee, district committee on ordained ministry, and the district board of church location and building.

11. This legislation shall take effect immediately upon adjournment of the 2004 General Conference.

Conference Lay Leader's Ministry

¶603. Organization

9. a) The conference lay leader is the elected leader of conference laity and is an officer of the annual conference. The conference lay leader shall participate in annual conference sessions as a partner in ministry with the Bishop.

¶607 The Conference Lay Leader

1. The conference lay leader is the elected leader of conference laity and will have responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the Church and for enabling and supporting lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the annual conference, district, and local church in cooperation with the bishop, district superintendents, and pastors.
2. The conference lay leader shall relate to the organized lay groups in the conference such as United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Youth, and Scouting Ministries, encourage and support their work and activities. The conference lay leader shall also have the general responsibility in: (1) developing the advocacy role for laity in the life of the Church; (2) increasing the participation of laity in the sessions and structure of the annual conference; and (3) encouraging laypersons in the general ministry of the Church.
3. The conference lay leader shall chair the conference board of laity or equivalent structure, shall be a member of the annual conference, the conference council on ministries or equivalent structure, the executive committee, if any, of the conference council on ministries, the conference committee on nominations, the conference committee on episcopacy, and the committee planning annual conference sessions; and may be designated by virtue of office to membership on any conference agency by the annual conference.
4. The conference lay leader shall be responsible for presenting a report to the annual conference.
5. The conference lay leader may serve on the conference board of ordained ministry and will participate in the Service of Ordination at annual conference.
6. The conference lay leader shall meet with the cabinet when matters relating to the coordination, implementation, or administration of the conference program, or other matters as the cabinet may determine are on the agenda.
7. The conference lay leader will meet regularly with the bishop to discuss the state of the annual conference, the Church, and the needs for ministry both locally and globally.
8. The conference lay leader shall ensure that the annual conference has a conference director of lay speaking ministries filled in the manner determined by the annual conference and the conference lay leader shall participate in Lay Speaking Ministries.
9. The conference lay leader shall be elected for a term of not less than four years by the annual conference as the annual conference may determine. The method of nomination and term of office shall be determined by the annual conference. Associate lay leader(s), to work with the conference lay leader, may be elected by the annual conference as it may determine. The conference lay leader and associate lay leader(s) will receive reasonable reimbursement for approved dues and expenses necessary for their ministry.
10. The conference lay leader shall be a member of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders.

Lay Speaking Ministries

From *The Book of Discipline* Section XI. Lay Speaking Ministries

¶266. Lay Speaking

1. A lay speaker (local church or certified) is a professing member of a local church or charge who is ready and desirous to serve the Church and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church and who has received specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and care-giving ministries. An applicant must be active in the support of the local church or charge.
2. Lay speakers are to serve the local church or charge (or beyond the local church or charge) in any way in which their witness or leadership and service inspires the laity to deeper commitment to Christ and more effective discipleship, including the interpretation of the Scriptures, doctrine, organization, and ministries of the church.
3. Through continued study and training a lay speaker should prepare to undertake one or more of the following functions, giving primary attention to service within the local church or charge.
 - a) To take initiative in giving leadership, assistance, and support to the program emphases of the church.
 - b) To lead meetings for prayer, training, study, and discussion when requested by the pastor, district superintendent, or committee on lay speaking.
 - c) To conduct, or assist in conducting, services of worship, and present sermons and addresses when requested by the pastor, district superintendent, or committee on lay speaking.
 - d) To relate to appropriate committees and ministry areas in providing leadership for congregational and community life and fostering care-giving ministries.
 - e) To assist in the distribution of the elements of Holy Communion whenever celebrated upon request by the pastor of the church of which the lay speaker is a member.
4. Lay speaker training courses shall be those recommended by the General Board of Discipleship or alternates approved by the conference committee on lay speaking. Such training should enable ministries with all language and cultural groups as appropriate.
5. It is recommended that a service of commitment be held for persons recognized as local church or certified lay speakers.

¶267. Local Church Lay Speaker

1. A candidate may be recognized as a local church lay speaker by the district or conference committee on lay speaking after the candidate has:
 - a) Made application in writing to the appropriate committee and has been recommended by the pastor and the church council or the charge conference of the local church in which membership is held. The district superintendent shall be responsible for reporting the names of applicants to the appropriate committee.
 - b) Completed the basic course for lay speaking.
2. The local church lay speaker shall serve the local church in which membership is held by witness of the spoken word, vital leadership service, and care-giving ministry (See ¶266.3).
3. To maintain status, a report and reapplication with recommendations must be submitted annually and a refresher course approved by the Conference Committee on Lay Speaking Ministries must be completed once in every three years. (See ¶247.11).

Lay Speaking Ministries

¶268. Certified Lay Speaker

1. A candidate may be recognized as a certified lay speaker by the district or conference committee on Lay Speaking Ministries after the candidate has:
 - a) Made application in writing to the appropriate committee and has been recommended by the pastor and the church council or the charge conference of the local church in which he or she holds membership.
 - b) Completed both basic and one advanced training courses for lay speaking.
 - c) Had his or her qualifications reviewed and approved by the appropriate committee (See ¶258.2 f [9]).
2. The certified lay speaker shall continue to serve the local church in the witness of the spoken word, vital leadership service, and care-giving ministry (See ¶266.1). In addition, the certified lay speaker may serve in the district and conference and in local churches other than the local church in which membership is held.
3. Recognition as a certified lay speaker shall be renewed annually by the district or conference committee on Lay Speaking Ministries after the certified lay speaker has:
 - a) Requested in writing the renewal of certification.
 - b) Submitted an annual report to the charge conference and the committee on Lay Speaking Ministries, giving evidence of the satisfactory performance of lay speaking service.
 - c) Been recommended for renewal by the pastor and the church council or charge conference.
 - d) Completed at least once in every three years an advanced course for lay speakers.

¶269. Transfer of Certification by Certified Lay Speakers

A certified lay speaker who moves may transfer certification to the new district upon receipt of a letter from the previous district's committee on Lay Speaking Ministries confirming current certification and the date of completion of the most recent advanced course taken. Further renewal of certification is in accordance with ¶267.



Process for Laity Called to Ordained Ministry

Lay leaders are encouraged to help those being called into licensed or ordained ministry and be familiar with the process as delineated in *The Book of Discipline*. That process is outlined below for your information.

¶311. Candidacy for Licensed and Ordained Ministry—Persons, upon hearing and heeding the call to servant leadership through licensed or ordained ministry, shall contact the pastor of their local church, another clergy, or the district superintendent of the district in which their United Methodist ministry setting is located to inquire about the process of candidacy. Persons are encouraged to use resources recommended by the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry (GBHEM), such as *The Christian as Minister* and the *Ministry Inquiry Process*.

1. Those beginning candidacy for licensed or ordained ministry:
 - a) shall be a professing member in good standing of The United Methodist Church or a baptized participant of a recognized United Methodist campus ministry or other United Methodist ministry setting for a minimum of one (1) year;
 - b) shall write to the district superintendent requesting admission to the candidacy process and the assignment of a candidacy mentor. Include a statement of call. Request registration through the district superintendent with GBHEM;
 - c) after registration by the district superintendent with GBHEM, mentor and candidate will study the resources adopted by the conference Board of Ordained Ministry;
 - d) shall write their statement of call and responses to Wesley's historic questions in ¶310. The candidate will consult with the pastor or equivalent in ministry setting specified by the district committee on ordained ministry to request a meeting of the pastor parish relations committee or equivalent body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry to consider the statement of call and responses to Wesley's historic questions;
 - e) After approval of the candidate by pastor parish relations committee or equivalent body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry, shall meet with a charge conference or body specified by the district committee on ordained ministry called to recommend the candidate to the district committee on ordained ministry. Approval of the candidate must be by two thirds written ballot, and the candidate shall have been graduated from an accredited high school or received a certificate of equivalency.
2. Candidates approved by the charge conference and seeking to become certified for licensed or ordained ministry shall:
 - a) request to meet with the district committee on ordained ministry. In preparation for meeting with the district committee on ordained ministry, consult with the mentor to provide the following written information, in addition to the material written for ¶311.1.d.: (i) the most formative experience of their Christian life; (ii) God's call to licensed or ordained ministry and role of the church in their call; (iii) their beliefs as a Christian; (iv) their gifts for ministry; (v) their present understanding of their call to ministry as elder, deacon, or licensed ministry; and (vi) their support system;
 - b) complete and release required psychological reports, criminal background and credit checks. They shall submit, on a form provided by the conference Board of Ordained Ministry:
 - (1) a notarized statement detailing any convictions for felony or misdemeanor or written accusations of sexual misconduct or child abuse; or
 - (2) a notarized statement certifying that this candidate has neither been accused in writing nor convicted of a felony, misdemeanor, any incident of sexual misconduct, or child abuse.

Process for Laity Called to Ordained Ministry

The district committee on ordained ministry through the Board of Ordained Ministry shall seek ways to consider cultural and ethnic/racial realities in meeting these requirements.

- c) provide other information as the district committee may require for determining gifts, evidence of God's grace, fruit, and demonstration of the call to licensed or ordained ministry; and
 - d) agree for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world and the most effective witness of the gospel, and in consideration of their influence as clergy, to make a complete dedication of themselves to the highest ideals of the Christian life as set forth in ¶¶102-104; 160-166. To this end they shall agree to exercise responsible self-control by personal habits conducive to bodily health, mental and emotional maturity, fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness, social responsibility, and growth in grace and the knowledge and love of God. Where possible, the local church is encouraged to assist candidates with the expenses of candidacy.
 - e) Upon vote of certification, shall be encouraged by the district committee on ordained ministry to attend a United Methodist seminary.
3. In special circumstances, the district committee on ordained ministry may authorize other United Methodist ministry settings to serve in the role of the local church for the purpose of recommending candidacy and specify the persons or bodies that will serve in the roles of pastor, pastor parish relations committee and charge conference.



About The United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church, which means our churches are connected by a system to guide our work and govern our policies. This system also allows us to pool our resources so that we may work together more effectively and be in ministry throughout the world.

How we are connected:

Local Church

All members of The United Methodist Church are connected with a local congregation. United Methodists believe the local church is the most significant arena through which we are able to make disciples (devoted followers) of Jesus Christ. Sometimes several local churches are linked together and share a pastor. This is known as a pastoral charge. Each local church can have its own personality and style, but our local congregations have this common purpose: to make disciples through worship, educational experiences for people of all ages, fellowship activities, and opportunities to serve and put faith into action.

There are 764 local churches in the North Alabama Conference.

The North Alabama Conference has eight districts, each with 55-140 churches.

Districts

A district is made up of a group of churches in a geographical location. An ordained clergy elder known as the District Superintendent supervises each district. Churches in a district often meet together for training events and ministry opportunities and may combine resources for special projects.

Annual Conferences

The Annual Conference is the basic organizational body in The United Methodist Church. An Annual Conference includes all United Methodist churches (and thus all districts) in a geographically defined area.

A Bishop presides over an Annual Conference. Bishops actually oversee an Episcopal Area, which may be made up of part, whole, or multiple Annual Conference areas.

Pastors are itinerate within an Annual Conference area, which means they move from church to church during their ministry career. The Bishop and the District Superintendents, known as the Cabinet, determine which church or ministry a pastor will serve, making sure each church has a pastor. The Bishop officially appoints a pastor to a church and appointments are renewed or changed each year.

The Annual Conference connects local churches together. Churches contribute financial resources—a portion of their local church budget known as apportionments or connectional giving—which enables the Annual Conference to support ministry projects within its boundaries and throughout the world, to provide training sessions to help its churches be more effective, to start new churches and ministries, to provide special events for children, youth and adults, and to administrate the business of this connection of churches.

The geographical area of the North Alabama Conference includes the area from the middle of Alabama north to the Tennessee state line.

The North Alabama Annual Conference session is traditionally held the first week in June.

Once a year clergy and lay representatives from each pastoral charge meet for an Annual Conference meeting. During this event, they worship together, share Bible study, hear stories of ministry and determine the programs and direction of ministry for the Annual Conference for the next year. They also make business decisions necessary to support the ministry of the Annual Conference and its churches.

About the United Methodist Church

Jurisdictions

Jurisdictions are large regional divisions of The United Methodist Church within the United States and are composed of Annual Conferences within their boundaries. The five jurisdictions are North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern and Western.

Representatives from each Annual Conference meet together for a Jurisdictional Conference once every four years. During this session, the delegates vote on business matters regarding the ministry within that Jurisdictional area. They also have the role to elect Bishops for the church.

A Bishop is an ordained clergy person who is elected by the Jurisdictional Conference to oversee an Episcopal area. A Bishop is elected for life, and is itinerate in the Jurisdiction in which he or she was elected. Bishops are appointed to oversee an Episcopal (geographical) Area in four-year terms. Special permission from the Jurisdictional Conference is required for a Bishop to serve an area longer than eight years. Mandatory retirement for bishops is age 70. A Bishop is no longer appointed to preside over an Episcopal Area after he or she turns 70, but continues to serve the Church on the world level as a part of the Council of Bishops.

William H. Willimon was elected a Bishop at the Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference in 2004. He has served the North Alabama Conference since September 1, 2004.

General Conference

The General Conference is the highest legislative body in the denomination. Representatives for every Annual and Central Conference (Regional Conferences outside the United States) meet in April or May every four years. Bishops preside at these sessions but do not have the privilege of voice or vote in its deliberations.

The last General Conference meeting was in Fort Worth, Texas, in 2008. The next is scheduled for April 2012 in Tampa, Florida.

The clergy and lay delegates debate and vote as one body. The primary responsibility of the General Conference is to enact legislation for the denomination.

The organization, beliefs and official policies of The United Methodist Church are contained in *The Book of Discipline*. At its quadrennial meeting, the General Conference reviews

The Book of Discipline and has the authority to rewrite any portion of it following proper procedures.

Checks and balances are built into all aspects of church life. The organization of the denomination resembles that of the U.S. government. The General Conference is the top legislative body; a nine-member Judicial Council is the supreme court, and reviews situations in the church to make sure they are in adherence with *The Book of Discipline*; and the Council of Bishops is similar to the executive branch.

At every level of the church, from the local church to the General Church, there are teams, committees and councils focusing on particular areas of ministry. These teams guide the efforts of a particular ministry effort and determine the specifics of how ministry is carried out.

Connectivity allows us to serve the world.

United Methodists join the founder of the Methodist movement John Wesley in affirming the divine call to do good works that show God's love wherever we can. We are mutually connected - organized - so that our individual efforts blend with the work of others to be more powerful than any one person or any one congregation can do alone. Our budgets support our good works and express our covenant to connectional service and multiply God's love in tangible ways.

United Methodists comprise the second largest Protestant denomination in the United States.

Statistics are accurate as of January 2010.

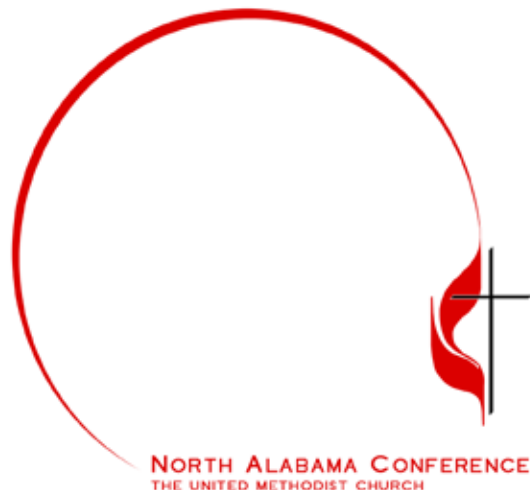
About the North Alabama Conference

The North Alabama Conference is a connection of the approximately 764 United Methodist Churches within the geographical area from the middle of Alabama north to the Tennessee state line. In the North Alabama Conference, the annual meeting is held in June. It is required that some business be conducted, but the focus of the Conference is shifting to a more uplifting and worshiping celebration.

All clergy are members of the Annual Conference and each charge is allowed to elect one lay member for each clergyperson they have. ***It is recommended that the church lay leader also be the lay member of Annual Conference.***

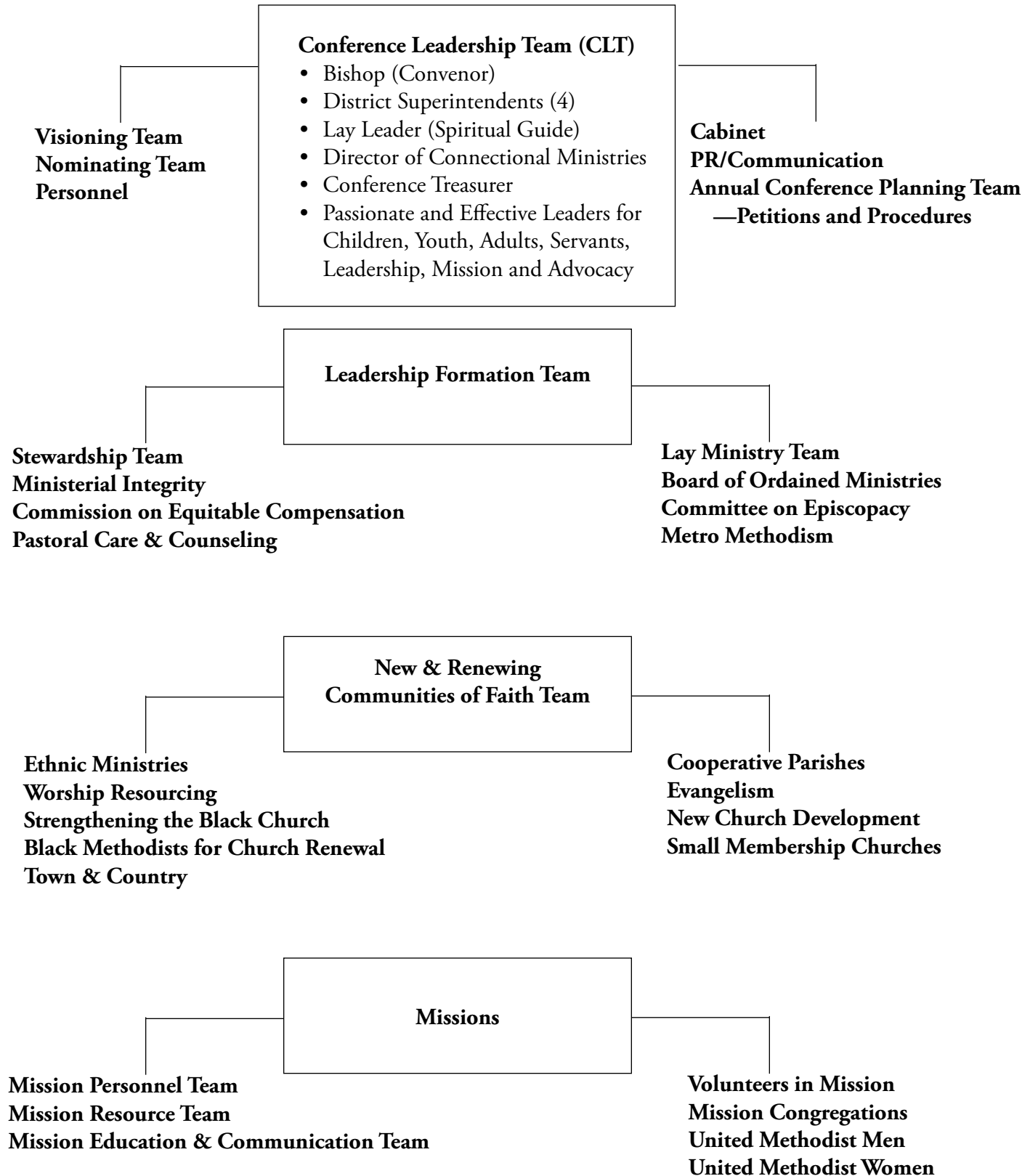
All United Methodists are invited to attend Annual Conference, but only the members of the Annual Conference are allowed to vote during the business sessions.

One of the Lay Leader's responsibilities is to serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the Annual Conference and the General Church to the congregation. Annual Conference is a beneficial and spiritually rewarding experience.

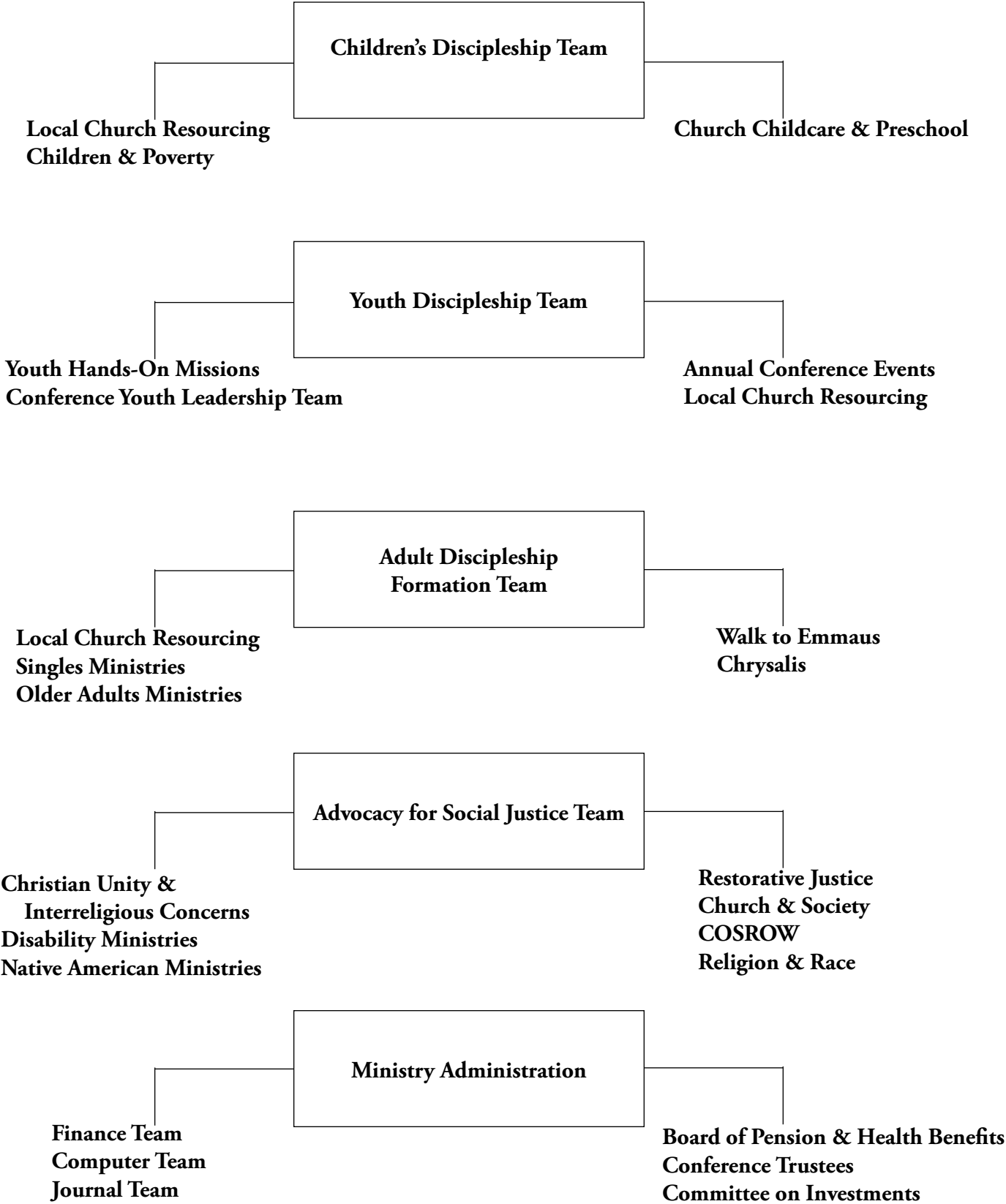


North Alabama Conference Organizational Structure

Information on how organizational teams are selected and how they function can be found in the 2009 Journal of the North Alabama Conference in the Call to Mission and Ministry Section.



North Alabama Conference Organizational Structure



Frequently Asked Questions

What should my relationship with the pastor be?

As indicated in Your Calling and Responsibilities, you should "...become a partner in ministry with your pastor by praying, visioning, sharing and working together." Section 8 also addresses the relationship between you and your pastor.

How much should my pastor expect of me?

The material in Your Calling and Responsibilities addresses this question generally. Specific responsibilities of the local church lay leader should be arrived at through prayerful and open communication between the pastor and yourself.

Do I need to have lay speaker training? Basic? Advanced?

In the Discipline, ¶251.1.f states: "The lay leader is urged to become a certified lay speaker." Sections 4 and 5 of Your Calling and Responsibilities address the importance of encouraging others and continuing your own Christian educational growth.

Will I have an office? Will I be supplied with a laptop, cell phone or other communication devices?

The answers to these questions depend on facilities and resources available through your local church. Discuss this openly with your pastor.

Along with the pastor, I am involved on many committees in an ex-officio role. What exactly does this mean duty-wise?

It means you, or the Associate Lay Leader, are expected to attend the meetings of all committees of which you are a member by virtue of your position as local church lay leader. Section 7, Your Calling and Responsibilities, states that through your attendance at these meetings you are to serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of these committees to the congregation. Generally, ex officio members of a committee/group have a voice, but not a vote. Check with your local church for the specific implementation of the ex officio role.

Am I involved with other churches and/or their lay leaders?

Outreach ministries are critical to winning souls for Jesus Christ. There is no better way to reach out than to interact with other local church laity leaders. The means by which your congregation offers "a cup of cold water" to those who are hurting and needy is important information to be shared and to be learned from others.

Do we ever meet with our conference or district lay leaders?

Please feel free to communicate with them. Contact information about them appears elsewhere in these Guidelines. They are always available for personal meetings, consultation and guidance. They are very approachable people, so just give them a call or email.

What about my attendance at Conferences (local, North Alabama, Southeastern Jurisdictional, General)?

As indicated in Your Calling and Responsibilities, the local church lay leader should "...become familiar with the training and ministries available to your church and laity through the General Church, Jurisdiction, and Annual Conference and assure your church takes advantage of them."

What about goals—are they provided to us by the conference, district or church pastor?

The material in the section Your Calling and Responsibilities provides general guidelines for your work as local church laity leader. The setting of specific goals for your local congregational work should be developed by you and then agreed to jointly by you and your pastor. The setting of goals is critical for moving forward for Jesus. When setting goals, be sure they indicate specific actions, time frame for completion of actions plus means to evaluate the goals.

Suggested Resources

The Wesley Study Bible

The 2008 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church—www.cokesbury.com

The United Methodist Book of Worship

Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation, Lay Leader/Lay Member—www.cokesbury.com

The North Alabama Conference Journal—Available in hardcopy, CD and online at www.northalabamaumc.org/journal. Orders can be placed online or by calling the Conference Resource Library.

WEB SITES:

North Alabama Conference web site: www.northalabamaumc.org

United Methodist Church web site: www.umc.org

Apportionment Giving: www.umcsgiving.org

Laity Sunday: www.gbod.org/laity

MAGAZINES AND E-NEWSLETTERS:

The Interpreter Magazine—Order through your church from United Methodist Communications or online at www.interpretermagazine.org

New World Outlook Magazine—the mission magazine of the UMC. www.gbgm-umc.org/nwo

The Upper Room Daily Devotional Guide— www.upperroom.org/DEVOTIONAL

E-newsletters from the North Alabama Conference—Sign up for the eVoice and other ministry specific newsletters at www.northalabamaumc.org/site/stayconnected

BOOKS:

Natural Church Development by Christian A. Schwartz and Christopher Schalk

Now Discover Your Strengths by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton

The Ministry of Christian Education and Formation: A Practical Guide, Discipleship Resources

Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide by Reggie Joiner

Children's Ministry in the 21st Century by Craig Julita, Jim Wideman, Pat Verbal, Group Publishing

Making Your Children's Ministry the Best Hour of Every Week by Sue Miller and David Staal

Energizing Children's Ministry in the Smaller Church by Rich Chromey

Building a Children's Ministry: A Practical Guide by Tina Houser

When You Pray: Daily Practices for Prayerful Living by Reuben P. Job

Three Simple Rules: A Wesleyan Way of Living by Reuben P. Job

UPPER ROOM PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE THROUGH COKESBURY:

“What Every Leader Needs to Know About...”

Leading in a Congregation

Leading in Prayer

Leading Meetings

Leading with Purpose

United Methodist Connections

From Discipleship Resources

Conference Staff

For current information please refer to the North Alabama Conference web site: www.northalabamaumc.org

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Conference Contact for Lay Speaking Ministries

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District Lay Leader

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Email _____

District Director of Lay Speaking Ministries

Name _____
Address _____
Phone _____
Email _____

District Superintendent

Name _____
District Office Address

Phone _____
Email _____

Other District Contacts

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Address _____
Phone _____
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Other Contacts

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