



**A Summation Report on the  
Great Plains United Methodist Conference  
Staff Redesign and Office Location Options**

by

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**Some revisions were made to this original report by action of the Connecting Council.**

**Those changes are meant to be reflected in this document.**

## Executive Summary

With three years of experience with its current staff and office design, the Personnel Committee, bishop and Connecting Council of Great Plains United Methodist Conference felt it was time to engage in a systematic evaluation of its staff design and office locations. The Rev. John Wimberly, a consultant specializing in congregational and judicatory ministry, was hired to conduct extensive interviews of current conference staff, district superintendents and their administrative assistants, and clergy and members of the conference. The consultant was consistently impressed by the quality of the staff of the conference and district offices.

The consultant found a lack of “executive function” in the current design. He heard repeated comments regarding the lack of accountability within the organizational system. This problem is exacerbated by the four ministry areas working in “silos” that are roughly aligned with the three locations of the conference offices. The lack of accountability is rooted in a missing person – an executive director. In United Methodist polity, this role is played by the bishop. However, the consultant asks, “Is it realistic for a bishop to also be the type of hands-on, day-to-day manager a large organization needs to thrive?” The consultant believes the answer is “No.”

An executive director will work on building a healthy, 21<sup>st</sup> century, best-practices culture where communication, entrepreneurship, and cross-fertilization of ideas for ministry and team building are prized. The executive director can work closely with the bishop and Connecting Council to ensure that their vision for the conference’s ministry becomes reality in faithful, efficient and effective ways. The executive director will form a team with the ministry area directors to problem-solve, create new paths for ministry and energize the conference staff to support congregations in their efforts to grow in vitality and reach and disciple new people in their mission fields.

The consultant believes that having specialists in the areas of new church development, Hispanic ministries and small-church development, while understandable three years ago, is no longer needed. With the focus moving from conference office-initiated ministry to district and congregational level-initiated ministry, the consultant believes the congregational excellence staff is better designed around a team concept in which staff support the districts and congregations in many ways. As a team member and team leader, the director of congregational excellence will have time to engage directly in one-on-one support of districts and congregations.

Based on consistent feedback during the interviews, the consultant thinks it wise to consider an option in which the conference’s magazine publication is ended, replaced by a focus on 21<sup>st</sup> century communication and marketing strategies.

The consultant heard virtually no support for the conference to have three offices and little for two offices. He recommends the creation of a team to decide on a single office location with a report to the 2017 annual conference. The consultant advises that one office be given strong consideration because it will allow staff team building, innovation, and cross-fertilization of ideas to begin in new and exciting ways.

## Introduction

Three years after its creation, the Great Plains United Methodist Conference (GPUMC) is engaging in an evaluation of its organizational structure. To help evaluate the conference staff and office locations, GPUMC hired a consultant, the Rev. John Wimberly. The consultant:

- Conducted phone interviews with each of the district superintendents from Feb. 3 to 9;
- Visited Nebraska and Kansas from Feb. 13 to 18, visiting each of the conference offices to conduct interviews with all the staff and have a one-hour conversation with the cabinet;
- Conducted focus groups in the evening where he heard from clergy and laity;
- Conducted five video-focus groups with clergy, laity and district administrative staffers in the central and western parts of Nebraska and Kansas;
- Worked closely with Rev. Craig Hauschild, chair of the Personnel Committee, Darrell Stock, member of the Mission Alignment Task Force, and a special planning team created as a sounding board for his questions and ideas; and
- Had several calls and one in-person meeting with the bishop, who provided invaluable guidance.

In this report, using the feedback received in interviews and focus groups, the consultant's knowledge of best practices for 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations and his long experience working in the church, the goal of the consultant is to generate recommendations and options for the Personnel Committee, bishop, Connecting Council and annual conference to consider regarding a redesigned staffing plan and office location options.

As a preface to the findings and suggestions of the consultant, it is important to affirm the quality of the people currently working for the conference as conference staff, district superintendents and administrative assistants. The consultant was extremely impressed with the skills sets and commitment conference staff bring to their ministry and work. Any findings in this report that suggest a redesign of the staff or elimination of positions are not to be interpreted as a negative finding regarding the quality of anyone's work. Rather, suggestions for redesign are intended to align more perfectly the staffing plan with the mission plan of the conference.

It is important to acknowledge that the bishop explicitly instructed the consultant not to make recommendations based solely on financial considerations. While financial savings are certainly welcome, they are not to drive the process. Mission is to drive the decision-making. The consultant has followed that instruction.

The recommendations made by the consultant are things he feels strongly need to happen for the organization to create a healthy, faithful, dedicated team culture in the future. The options are things the consultant suggests but understands there may be other ways of accomplishing the same end.

Finally, the conversations with the district superintendents, administrative assistants and district-based focus groups generated a working hypothesis for the consultant: The bishop and districts are the "face of the conference." Time and again, the consultant was told that it is at the

district level that congregations and clergy have their most frequent interaction with the conference. It is also at the district level where the diversity of the conference exists and can best be addressed. Rural, urban, suburban, various income levels, and racial-ethnic-national origin diversity are all present in the districts. Many district superintendents and focus groups complained about “templates for ministry” generated at the conference level that may work in one location but not their particular location. The consultant concluded that the best way to strengthen the conference staff’s work is to focus their efforts on the district mission field.

**Consultant’s Working Hypothesis: GPUMC leadership should devote more attention to increasing the impact of the conference’s ministry in the district and congregational mission fields. To do so, the conference office(s) and staff should be aligned so their primary purpose is to resource and develop work in the district and congregational mission fields.**

## Foundational Principles

### Mission, Calling and Vision

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The calling of the Great Plains United Methodist Conference is to equip and connect congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

The vision for the Great Plains – our preferred future – is captured in this phrase: Great churches. Great leaders. Great disciples. Transformed world.

### Missional Priorities

Missional priorities are our preferred response to the present reality of our conference. They will be reviewed regularly and may be adjusted as our context for ministry changes.

*Source: Great Plains Conference Plan of Organization*

Using the mission, calling and vision from the Plan of Organization for the Great Plains United Methodist Conference, the purpose of the organizational structure (governance, staff, facilities and money) is:

- To **equip and empower** congregations, clergy and lay members as they work to achieve Christ-centered excellence;
- To **connect** congregations with one another in ways that promote a shared feeling of the conference as a manifestation of the mystical Body of Christ, help congregations to **learn** from one another, and encourage congregations to work together;
- Use **21<sup>st</sup> century technology and communication** techniques to increase the ability of the conference to spread the Good News, connect one another to do the work of the church and increase **efficiency** within the organization;
- Employ excellent **management practices**, demonstrating to the conference that Great Plains is a wise steward of the precious resources they contribute;
- Learn from and employ **best practices** for 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations including:
  - Focusing on fewer rules, more policies, and more freedom as to how policies are implemented;
  - Constantly **train** staff and members; being a learning organization;
  - Becoming externally oriented;
  - Being more empowering, less control;
  - Being **transparent**/open/candid;
  - Demonstrating higher levels of risk tolerance;
  - Staying highly focused and aligned.

## Summary of Recommendations and Options

### Recommendations:

1. The Personnel Committee should draft a job description for an executive director and proceed to hire or appoint an executive director to assist and report directly to the bishop. The executive director will be the primary operations manager of the conference staff and office. The various ministry area directors will report to the bishop through the executive director and form a team with the executive director. To allow the executive director to focus on operations, she/he will not be a member of the Cabinet.
2. Create a team of five to six people to bring a final office recommendation to the annual conference in 2017. This need not be a long, drawn-out process. With the help of a skilled, commercial real estate person, a hard-working team should be able to sort through the options and make a recommendation.
3. Create a clergy well-being staff position in the clergy excellence area of ministry. Up to one-half of the clergy excellence director's time could also be devoted to creating additional opportunities for clergy and laity to grow their faith and skills. This will 1) provide additional care for pastors and 2) align the conference with organizational best practices in the 21st century where being a "learning organization" is a high priority.
4. The congregational excellence staff will function as a team, with the director as the team leader, to support district superintendents and congregations in the mission fields of new church development, racial/ethnic/national origin congregations and small-church ministry. With the addition of an executive director to the staff, it is envisioned that the director of congregational excellence will be able to devote as much as 50 percent of her/his time to directly supporting districts and congregations in these mission fields. Using this staff design, conference-level, specialist positions of New Church Development, Hispanic ministries and small-church ministries will not be needed.
5. There needs to be a complete overhaul of the way GPUMC manages information. What is the essential information needed and when? Everything else needs to be eliminated. How many hands touch any one document and how often? The more hands-on a document, the more likely there will be mistakes. A team needs to be created, including the IT staff person and treasurer, to rework the way information is processed in GPUMC. It is draining an enormous amount of energy from the mission of the church. The conference should consider adding an additional IT staff person and/or creating funds for outsourcing additional help in this area.
6. Create a team consisting of people who are knowledgeable about the way administrative work is done in the 21st century to make recommendations on the AA system moving forward.
7. Use the team working on district AA work to analyze which districts need physical offices (in commercial or church spaces) and report back to the annual conference in 2018 with a recommendation.
8. Invest in customer service both in 1) training people to use commonly used software and applications and 2) training the person handling incoming calls on proper protocols.

9. Have the person(s) performing the executive function create a plan for appropriate AA support in the conference office.
10. Move Safe Gatherings staff person to finance and administration.

**Options:**

1. End the conference magazine and reduce the communications staff by one person. Align the communications strategy with 21st Century best practices for communicating. Remain open to adding a staff person for marketing and Internet-based communications or redirect a current staff member's duties to accomplish those tasks.
2. Give management of automobiles and other such matters to an administrative assistant. Rewrite the job description to focus more directly on real estate sales and acquisition. Recruit a person with the appropriate skill set for the new responsibilities.
3. Upgrade the current part-time lay leadership position to full time.
4. Create a team to evaluate the use of the resource center and make a recommendation on its continuation and staffing.

## Appendix A

### Possible Redesign of GPUMC Staff

#### Position Subtractions from Current Design:

- New Church Development;
- Small-membership church;
- Hispanic ministries;
- Depending on decisions about office consolidation, receptionists can be reduced.

#### Position Additions from Current Design:

- Executive director;
- Clergy well-being staff person.

#### Positions Realigned

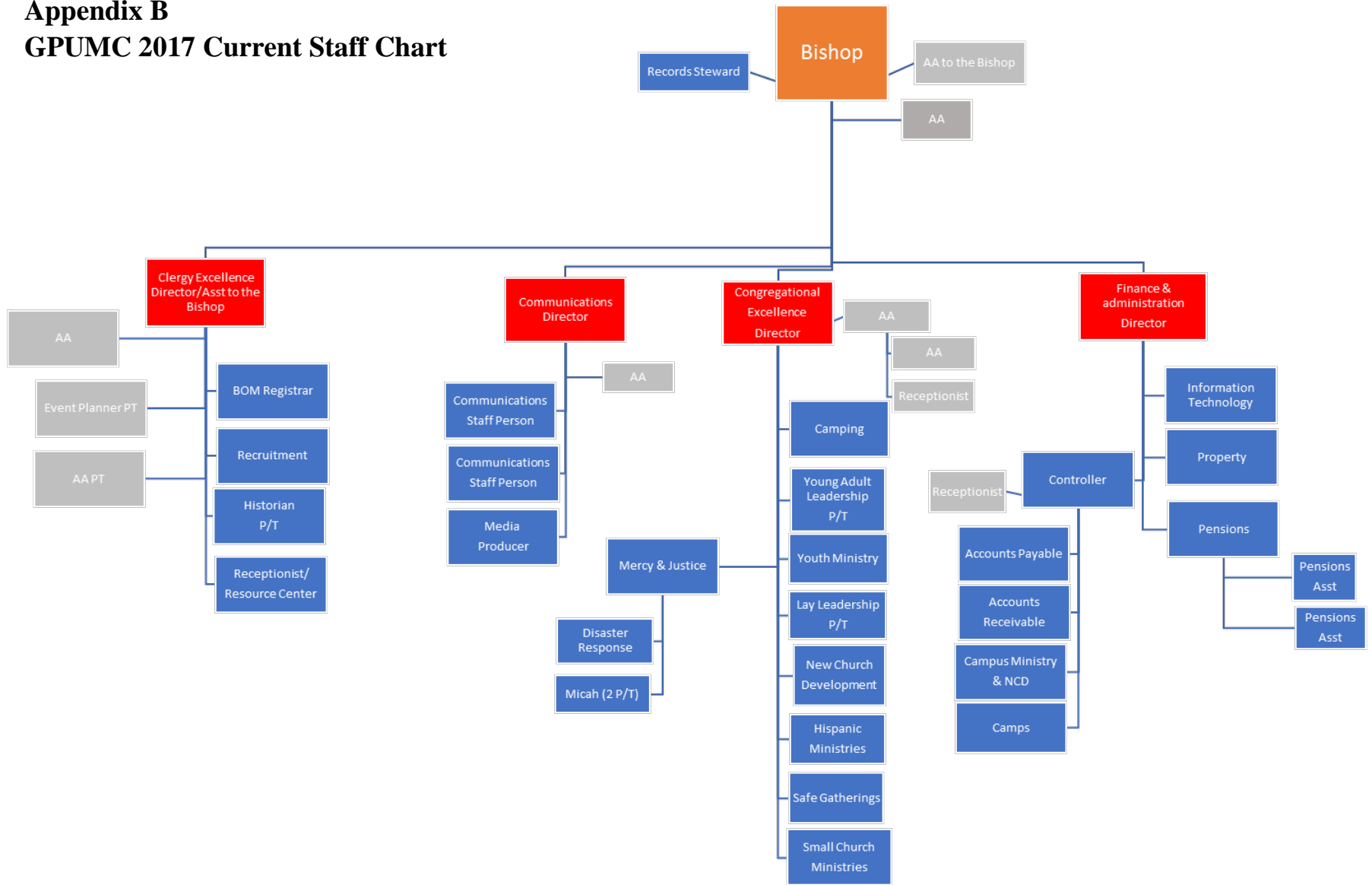
- Clergy excellence director drops assistant to the bishop functions to engage in more clergy excellence development;
- Communications staff drops work on publication and devotes more time to marketing and 21<sup>st</sup> century-friendly communication strategies;
- Property manager position changed to focus more on asset sales and acquisitions;
- Information technology increases work on simplifying the “paper-flow” within the conference.

#### Other Possible Position Changes

- The executive director will supervise, align, and hold the conference directors accountable to their goals, outcomes, and core values;
- Add a staff position to IT and/or add outsourced staff;
- Move lay leadership to full time;
- Move Safe Gatherings to finance and administration.



# Appendix B GPUMC 2017 Current Staff Chart



# Appendix C

## Great Plains United Methodist Conference

- Notes**
- Administrative assistant design is still to be determined.
  - Resource Center location still to be determined.
  - Communications position converted to marketing and social media emphasis.

