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Realignment Task Force
Historical Narrative
October 11, 2023

Executive Summary

With the retirement of a District Superintendent from the cabinet of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church (BWC), the deployment of District Superintendents was reconfigured to provide supervisory and pastoral coverage for 8 districts with 7 available District Superintendents. To better understand future coverage possibilities for the entire conference, a task force was formed to investigate and explore all relevant matters that would inform the decisions for the number of districts and coverage moving forward.

In 1993, a task force was formed to analyze the conference's situation and look for immediate, short-term and long-term solutions to the current financial realities facing the conference. One of the CFA recommendations to Annual Conference was to reduce the number of districts from 10 to 9 districts which was voted upon, approved, and made effective July 1, 1994.

In 2008, the BWC experienced another reduction in the number of districts from 9 to 8. The proposed 8 districts would be realigned into 4 Regions with a team of 5 additional support persons per region. The district reduction was voted upon and approved at the Annual Session of the BWC in May 2008 with an effective date of July 1, 2008.

Forward looking and planning, the BWC can be assured that changes in the number of districts in the past have resulted from thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the conference's financial capacity, current trends as well as strategic planning for ministry and mission. Once again, the BWC has an opportunity to evaluate how best to situate itself for "transformed lives transforming lives" with a potential plan for district realignment.

A Historical Narrative

In 1993, at a Special Clergy Executive Session on Saturday, March 23 at Epworth United Methodist Chapel in Baltimore, Maryland, Robert Paulen shared with the clergy that the Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC) ended 1992 with a 2-million-dollar shortfall.

Then again in 1993, on Saturday, June 12 at the 209th Session of the BWC of the United Methodist Church, under the episcopal leadership of Bishop Joseph Yeakel, Robert Paulen advised the conference that it was facing serious financial concerns. Recalling some historical data, Paulen noted that in 1991, the conference generated \$1,140,000.00 in new money because the apportioned budget was considerably higher. That was to say that there was a 12% increase in the budget and 10% increase in receipts. Yet in 1992, the conference's apportioned budget generated only \$220,000.00 more than its income - a 6% increase in budget and 2% increase in receipts. With what the conference believed to be an obvious trend, the conference acknowledged a gap between its budget and receipts was widening. Highly concerned, the conference realized that it could not continue this trend as the cash flow was already experiencing serious problems. Traditionally in the last quarter of the fiscal year, December would see as much as half of budget funding come in but this year only 2/3 of the traditional financial giving was realized. The conference was completely caught off guard. It was totally unanticipated.

Factors contributing to the fiscal problems were:

- Low interest rates had restricted the conference interest income,
- The recession had finally impacted the church,
- Non-payment of apportionments had reached a critical proportion,
- Reserves were depleted as they previously had been used to initiate new programming through loans, or used to support pension commitments which regularly have had shortfalls,
- Increased percentage of the budget moving to 100% payout category. The budget was no longer self-balancing,
- Our computer software needs revision or replacement to enable fully informative reporting.

As a result of the shortfall, the conference found it necessary to borrow a total of \$730,000.00 from the General Board of Pensions to satisfy all its 1992 contractual obligations.

In response to the financial concerns, Bishop Yeakel called together a task force to analyze the current situation and develop immediate, short term and long-term strategies. Bishop shared that the task force will offer the BWC Council on Finance and Administration (CFA) recommendations and then the CFA will bring a full report to the June Session for Annual Conference.

The immediate need of the conference was to correct the cash flow crisis by dramatically improving the apportionment receipts from the local churches.

One of the recommendations of the task force and CFA was to reduce the number of districts from 10 to 9 effective July 1, 1994.

On Saturday, October 16, 1993, at Mount St. Mary's College in Emmitsburg, Maryland at the Adjourned Session of the BWC, the conference voted to reduce the number of districts in the conference from 10 to 9 districts. The journal reports that Jean Young spoke on behalf of the CFA and that all of the recommendations of the CFA Report were adopted.

In the Spring of 2008, there was a new initiative being offered within the BWC to better allocate and align resources in an effort to help every local church become an Acts 2 congregation. An Acts 2 congregation was a local church that was experiencing at least 2% growth in worship attendance; receiving by profession of faith at least 1 member per every 25 worshipper each year, engaging in mission by paying 100% on its apportionments and demonstrating the presence of God's signs and wonders. To accomplish this work, the conference would be realigned from 9 to 8 districts where equalization of staff, resources and churches would help each district develop greater affinity, relationship, and ministry capacity. Also, the new initiative would save the conference approximately \$250,000 a year.

As part of the new initiative, a proposed realignment of districts would consist of 8 District Superintendents across 4 regions supported by five staff persons each: 2 administrative support staff and 3 Discippler Guides. And the effective date of the realignment would be July 1, 2008.

The new initiative received support from the BWC CFA and the Discipleship Council and was unanimously approved by the Connectional Table as it would head into annual conference for final approval in May 2008. The Acts 2 plan was not the only plan explored during this time. Other plans included a redistricting to 10 districts and as many as 20 districts. All other plans would have increased the budget and administration.

On Thursday, May 22, 2008 at the 224th Annual Session of the BWC, Bishop Schol called upon DS Terri Rae Chattin and DS C. Anthony Hunt to make a presentation in regards to the district realignment. After sharing that the realignment would offer more effective staff deployment to local congregations by District Superintendents and Regional Guides, in addition to greater ministry in the City of Baltimore, DS Chattin called upon DS Hunt who offered the Hope for the City of Baltimore presentation, a 10-point strategic plan for ministry designed to create greater collaboration ... strengthening leadership in the churches and communities and provide for new church starts.

Though a substitute motion was proposed to realign to 10 districts, it was not sustained and the motion by DS Chattin – *“Be it resolved that the Baltimore-Washington Annual Conference realign from nine districts to eight districts with two districts in each of the four existing regions effective July 1, 2008”* was approved.

Interesting note:

In December 2003, the creation of a Baltimore Central District to concentrate missionally on the spiritual needs of Baltimore City was floated. The new district would not have changed the number of districts but by configuration improved the pastoral and ministerial relationships of clergy and their congregations within the city. A concern was raised that a city district was creating a “poor district.” Another push back was ... if you are going to create a city district, then how much money will come with the programmatic thrust needed to support and undergird the effort? If not enough, then why bother. Likewise in 2008, concern was raised about the appearance of a segregated district of congregations of color in the Baltimore Region. The concern was addressed by sharing that there was no desire to create a segregated district. The city district would reflect the diversity of the city and be the most diverse district in the BWC.

Realignment of BWC Districts

1993

Annapolis
Baltimore East
Baltimore North
Baltimore Northwest
Baltimore Southwest
Cumberland-Hagerstown
Frederick
Washington Central
Washington East
Washington West

1994

Annapolis
Baltimore East
Baltimore North
Baltimore Northwest
Cumberland-Hagerstown
Frederick
Washington Columbia
Washington East
Washington West

2008

Annapolis
Baltimore Metropolitan
Baltimore Suburban
Central Maryland
Cumberland-Hagerstown
Frederick
Greater Washington
Washington East

4 Regions: Baltimore – Baltimore Metropolitan and Baltimore Suburban
 Southern – Annapolis and Washington East
 Washington – Central Maryland and Greater Washington
 Western – Cumberland-Hagerstown and Frederick