

Baltimore-Washington Conference Restructuring Task Force 2023-2024
Report on the Book of Discipline guidance and implications related to district alignment
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Executive Summary

When it comes to structuring an annual conference, there is both historical precedence and disciplinary prescription. And, there is wide latitude in the organization of an annual conference, particularly in relation to “districts,” allowing for interpretation and creativity in designing a missional strategy for maximum impact.

This report seeks to represent the guidance of the Book of Discipline (hereafter “BOD”) for our work. It is comprehensive, but not necessarily complete in all references to districts in the BOD (see appendix). I sought to determine the requirements of leadership and district structures *mandated* by the BOD and did not include those areas where there is discretion of the DS/Cabinet/District or Conference.

Key takeaways from the research:

1. Required representation on some district committees mandates a district be diverse. Districts that are homogenous in membership would have difficulty meeting the inclusion standards of most district boards/agencies, as well as be challenged to send inclusive representatives to the annual conference and conference leadership teams.
2. Required supervision and mentoring of candidates and licensed clergy mandates an adequate supply of full clergy members within a district (this will also enable the DS to designate presiding elders at charge/church conferences)
3. Many of the functions of a DS and/or District committee assume one DS per district. If we were to create assignments across districts (for example: DSs assigned to specific functions in all districts, as opposed to all functions in one district), we may need to find ways around the BOD language, which could be challenged by Judicial Council

The task force should be able to identify first the missional needs of the annual conference and take freedom in thinking outside the box, while referencing this report when we seek to do something that may be different than the status quo.

Report on Disciplinary References Related to District Alignment

There is actually no specific definition of a *district* in the Book of Discipline (hereafter BOD). By deduction, it seems that a district is made up of charges and clergy appointed/assigned to those charges (similar to the makeup of an annual conference). The annual conference establishes the *number* of districts and the bishop, in consultation with the district superintendents, “*forms*” the districts. While districts have nearly always been designated by geographic boundaries, the BOD does not define a district in this way.

The BOD does not limit the number of district superintendents, but it does require every conference to have at least one DS. The duties of the DS are first to the conference and cabinet, and then they are assigned by the bishop to service in districts.

Each district is prescribed mandatory leadership structures, including roles and responsibilities for the DS and Lay Leader. There is a lengthy list of required duties and assignments for the DS and Lay Leader in district and conference leadership. In addition to those required duties, other boards/committees and structures are recommended by the BOD that would also require participation of the DS and/or Lay Leader, or their designees.

By virtue of the relationships necessary to become the chief missional strategist, the BOD seems to assume that a DS is caring for one district for a period of time. The tasks required of DS and Lay Leader might prescribe a reasonable geographic range for familiarity and stewardship of time and resources.

The DS is the chief missional strategist for the district; they recruit, train, deploy, and supervise laity, candidates for ministry, provisional, licensed and ordained clergy. They are responsible to identify and oversee new church development as well as cooperative parishes. They have oversight of property and legal transactions, fill vacancies, and are the pastor of record in charges without appointed clergy. As a cabinet member, they consult with SPRCs and clergy to provide wisdom and discernment in the appointment process.

There are three areas that I did not consider relevant to the BWC, but could be researched in more depth should we move into a new direction that would require a closer review: the designation of mission districts, the district conference, and district property. I am unaware of the BWC currently operating any of these options.

Finally, I have not researched any additional requirements in the policies/procedures of the BWC. We might review those in future work, and/or consider the recommendations of this team to supersede current policies/structures.

Key findings

What is a district? A predetermined composition of charges, and the lay and clergy members of those charges

Who sets the # of districts? The annual conference; there is to be at least one district, with at least one DS per conference

Who determines the makeup of the districts? The resident bishop, in consultation with the cabinet

What is the function of the district? The district fulfills various responsibilities of the annual conference for equipping churches for mission and ministry as well as recruiting, training and overseeing lay and clergy leadership; the BOD requires 5 district committees and recommends several more

Who serves as district leadership? The bishop appoints the DSs to districts; there is no restriction on how many DSs serve a district, but each district should be supervised by at least one DS; there is also to be an elected district Lay Leader per the annual conference process; each committee also has required and suggested membership outlined in the BOD

What are the responsibilities of the DS? The duties of the DS are first to the conference and cabinet, and then they are assigned by the bishop to service in districts. The DS is chief missional strategist; they recruit, train, deploy, and supervise laity, candidates for ministry, and clergy. They are responsible to identify areas for new church development and cooperative parishes. They have oversight of property and legal transactions, fill vacancies, and are the pastor of record in charges without appointed clergy. As a cabinet member, they consult with SPRCs and clergy to provide wisdom and discernment in the appointment process. They are mandated members of 5 district committees and represent the cabinet on conference committees as assigned by the resident bishop.

What are some BOD requirements that inform our discernment?

1. **Required representation on some committees mandates a district to be diverse.** Districts that are homogenous in membership would have difficulty meeting the inclusion standards of most district boards/agencies, as well as be challenged to send inclusive representatives to the annual conference and conference leadership teams. The UMC always recommends inclusion on leadership teams, typically 1/3 clergy, 1/3 laymen, 1/3 laywomen. In several cases, there are more specific requirements. For example, the District Committee on Ordained Ministry requires a minimum of 6 clergy, which shall include elders & deacons/women/ethnic/under 35/associate member. This committee alone requires that a district have 6 full members with representation of gender, ethnicity, and age. A district that has a limited # of elders will stretch those elders thin across the different groups that require their representation, and term limits will mean

that there need be a reservoir of leaders with the credentials and gifts necessary for the assignment.

2. Required supervision and mentoring of candidates and licensed clergy mandates an adequate supply of full clergy members within a district (this will also enable the DS to designate presiding elders at charge/church conferences). The BOD requires that mentors be clergy in full connection (or full-time licensed local pastors who have completed the Course of Study).

3. Many of the functions of a DS and/or District committee assume one DS per district . Superintendents are responsible for all candidates and clergy in their assigned district. The makeup of a district includes the clergy and lay members, who must relate to their assigned DS. Clergy who are not appointed to a local church (retirees, clergy on leave of absence, serving in extension ministry/ABLC) are, by virtue of their membership in a charge conference, assigned to the DS of record for that district; similarly, CLMs and ministry candidates relate to the district in which their local church is a member, and therefore report to the DS of that district; one could reasonably conclude that it would be difficult for conference superintendents to divide areas of responsibility across district boundaries. Other challenges include the requirement for a DS to work with district committees in areas of supervision, property, and development of new churches, mission churches, and cooperative churches within the district. If we were to create assignments across districts (for example: DSs assigned to specific functions in all districts, as opposed to all functions in one district), we may need to find ways around the BOD language, which could be challenged by Judicial Council.

Appendix

BOD references to DISTRICTS

Districts: general

Par 415 Presidential Duties

415.4 it is the Bishop's responsibility to "form the districts AFTER consultation with the district superintendents AND AFTER the number of the same has been determined by vote of the annual conference."

(Judicial Council decision 422 affirms the annual conference sets the # of districts)

District Committees required by BOD (There are several other optional ones)

DCOM (Par 666)

- Amenable to BOOM
- Shall supervise all matters dealing with candidacy for the ordained ministry and with the license for local pastor
- Works with DS to select mentors to be trained by BOOM (note Par 349.1 Candidacy and Clergy mentors must be clergy in full connection or associate members or LLPs who have completed COS)

Membership:

- 3 laity (members of local churches)
- BOOM representative
- DS
- at least 6 clergy and SHALL include: elders & deacons/women/ethnic/under 35/associate member

District Committee on Superintendency (Par 669)

Membership: 11 members, inclusive, at least 3 clergy and 7 lay

UMW/UWiF (Par 670)

UMM (Par 671)

District Board of Church Location and Building (Par 2519)

Membership: DS/6-9 members min (recommended 1/3 clergy)

May be more than one board in large geographic area

415.4 Mission District “Any district may be designated a mission district...” When approved, operates the same as any district with all rights and powers

Criteria (requires one of these):

1. Membership and resources limited and unlikely to result in regular status for extended period of time
2. A strategic demographic, cultural, or language opportunity for serving a limited population is present
3. It is expected that long-term sustaining funding from outside sources will be necessary for it to exist
4. The district is geographically located in a remote location from the other districts of the AC

District Superintendents

In each annual conference there shall be ONE OR MORE district superintendents (Par 53)

Extension of the bishop’s office; appointed by bishop, in consultation with Cabinet and DCOS (Par 417)

Bishop to consider UMC inclusiveness standards in appointing DSs (Par 417)

Term limits DS (Par 418)

Up to six years is “normal”/may be extended up to 8 (in consultation with Cabinet and DCOS)

No more than 8 years in 11 consecutive years; no more than 14 yrs total

Role of DS (Par 419)

- Extension of episcopal office
- Oversee all clergy within the district (including extension and ABLC) and the churches, related to spiritual and pastoral, personnel, administration, and program
- The DS is the acting administrator for any open charge

As part of Cabinet (Par 424)

- a conference-wide responsibility
- DSs are first members of the cabinet and then assigned by the bishop to a district
- The cabinet holds the DS accountable for their work, both at the conference and district
- Cabinet works in partnership with BOOM/DCOM

Duties: (Par 419)

1. Chief Missional Strategist
2. Appointment Making (with Bishop/Cabinet) and assignments Par426/428
3. DCOM: examine and support candidates and oversee LLPs (Par 310.1b DS assigns candidacy and clergy mentors)
4. Work with local church leaders
5. Spiritual leadership
6. Support/care/counsel clergy
7. Supervision and accountability for clergy
8. Maintain records of all clergy/church property
9. Strategic deployment/realignment of charges
10. Interpret questions of church law and discipline (2718.1); subject to review of bishop
11. Cooperate with BOOM when changes in conference relationship of clergy
12. Serve at the pleasure of the bishop in all other duties as assigned

Other duties as found throughout the BOD

- Oversee lay supply Par 205.4
- Cooperative ministry: annually recommend churches, become familiar with training, provide leadership and training opportunities Par 206
- Adjudicate lay complaints Par 228
- Administer covenants in shared ecumenical ministries Par 209
- Oversee church viability studies Par 213
- Transfer members of closed churches Par 229
- Fix time of Charge Conference/Preside or designate elder/ call special CC Par 246
- Approve pastoral compensation annually/anytime changes Par247
- Interpret Connectional Giving Par 247
- Authorize a satellite congregation Par 247
- Authorize a Charge Conference as a Church Conference Par 248
- Authorize SPRC to meet without pastor Par 258
- New church organization duties Par 259
- Assign CLMs and write recommendations Par 268
- Evaluate Provisional Members, provide supervision and assign mentors Par 326
- Evaluate clergy annually and review 8-yr review plans Par 349
- Approve status changes Par 350s
- Prepare church/pastor profiles annually Par 427

Representation on district committees (required; several other committees may be formed, with DS as member or chair)

- District Committee on Ordained Ministry
- District Committee on Superintendency
- UMW/UWIF (ex officio)

- UMM (ex officio)
- Board of Church Building and Location
- Board of Stewards (if there are district apportionments, this board is formed with DS as chair)

Representation on conference committees required (1 DS per)

- CCFA (ex officio without vote) Par 612
- Equitable Compensation Commission Par 625
- BOOM (NOT on CRC) Par 635

District Lay Leaders

District Lay Leader Par 660

Elected leader of the district laity; shall be professing member

Term limits: no less than 4 yrs; nominated/elected per AC rules

Duties required by BOD:

- Provide for training of local church lay leaders
- Foster awareness of the role of laity...
- Meet regularly with DS to discuss state of the district, Church, needs for ministry
- Ensure (with DS) there is a district director of Lay Servant Ministries
- Participate in adjudication of lay complaint (Par 228.2b(8))

Memberships: these are mandated; may designate a proxy except those with *

- *Annual Conference
- Conference Board of Laity
- District Committee Lay Servant Ministries
- *District Conference (if there is one)
- *District Council on Ministries (or equivalent)
- District Committee on Superintendency
- *District Board of Church Location and Building
- (relate to) UMW, UMM, UMY
- (other groups are optional, those above are mandated by BOD, but DLL may designate a proxy except those with *)

Other

Par 2518-2524 District Property guidelines