

# BWC Restructuring Survey Responses

## Executive Summary

### **Purpose**

To explore the opportunity for re-thinking our structure to better cultivate disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and to reignite the movement through supporting area United Methodists to reclaim their zeal. Several factors contributed to this vital examination of our current structure, such as emergent congregational, conference, and connectional needs for greater strength and vitality. Baltimore-Washington Conference (BWC) members and staff have been invited to participate in this process through the initial survey, followed by listening sessions and conversations with BWC's Connectional Table and Discipleship Council and others. The restructuring proposal is expected to be brought to the 2024 session of the Baltimore-Washington Conference in May after significant input and feedback from across the conference.

### **Process To Date**

The Restructuring Survey was sent to approximately 15,000 individuals on November 6, 2023, and 1,146 surveys were completed. This 7.6% response rate is considered a good response rate, especially considering the length of the survey. Every category of diversity was represented well, except that of those under age 24. We hope to celebrate a more meaningful sampling of this demographic group after January 15.

The Restructuring Survey quantitative report was sent to all 15,000 people on November 27, 2023, and shared in the e-connection. The open-ended questions provided the first phase of listening as we seek to discern the next faithful step for better organizing ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

This document includes qualitative information from the initial survey. The responses will be further explored during the in-person listening sessions being held across the conference and at subsequent gatherings with conference leaders. (See Appendix A for a schedule.)

A process of thematic analysis has been used so that answers guide the creation of categories and themes instead of applying preconceived labels or categories. A narrative report will be provided after the listening sessions have been completed. This is not a final report.

The participation rates in the survey closely resembled the distribution of BWC members, with the exception of those age 24 and under. Additional input is being collected for this population through January 15. More than 60% of the survey respondents are laity. Almost 80% of respondents are local church members and pastors who are not staff nor serving on a conference or district team. We value the guidance we have received from participants thus far.

## **Requirements for amplifying and building capacity for cultivating world-changing disciples:**

- Keep the main thing the main thing and minimize the rest.
- More collaboration and connection; smaller groups of churches and leaders working together as one. “A cluster of congregations in a shared mission field” was the most commonly selected answer (41%) when people were asked what they thought was the best way to make and grow world-transforming disciples.
- Explore new ways for DSs and others to support/guide/encourage local churches and honor our connectionalism to advance the mission and ministry of Jesus.
  - While smaller districts were the clear preference of respondents (77%), there was acknowledgement that we’d need to get creative about how we supported churches and met the other aspects of district superintending.
  - 85% indicated that one or more of the three guiding principles were very important to allow for meaningful conversation and mission advancement.
- Reclaim our zeal for bold, community-focused ministry – both evangelism and social justice were named as key focal points.
- A more nimble and responsive structure and more porous boundaries so local churches feel the support and permission to collaborate across district lines.
- Clear and frequent communication with feedback loops so that all understand expectations, opportunities, roles and the benefits of being a United Methodist.
- Diversity is a value. Many want the restructuring to help us live into the gifts of our diversity.
- A reasonable span of care for DSs and other staff who resource churches. Potentially separating administrative aspects of the DS role from mission strategy work.

## **In order to do the above, we must overcome these obstacles:**

- Churches, pastors, leaders and members not feeling known or valued.
- Not top-down, but all together.
- Impersonal approaches. People are longing to know and be known.
- Competitive “my ministry/church/district” culture, which obstructs collaboration.
- Laity not knowing about key elements of our identity as United Methodists, nor how to access resources.
- Exhaustion, disenfranchisement, confusion and frustration.

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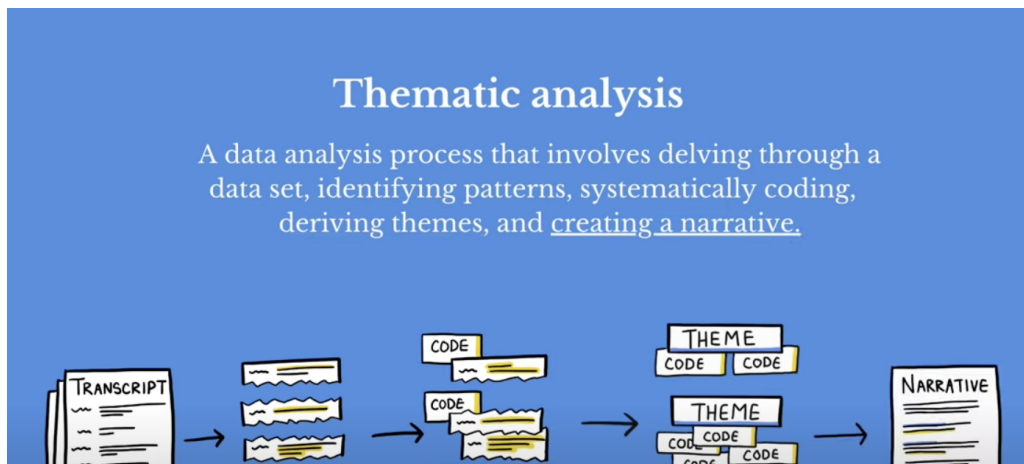
## Introduction

The restructuring survey was launched on November 6, 2023, and the qualitative part of the report was made available on November 27, 2023. The open-ended questions provided the first phase of listening as we seek to discern the next faithful step for organizing district ministry in the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The survey responses in this document are a draft to be perfected during the in-person listening sessions being held across the conference and at subsequent gatherings with conference leaders. (See Appendix A for a schedule.)

We hope to learn more about some of these responses in the listening sessions. Thanks to all who have already illuminated hopes, frustrations and ideas for strengthening our connection, witnessing, and advancing the mission and ministry of Jesus in the area known as the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

## Process

Analysis of open-ended questions was done using a thematic approach (codes were generated as answers were read versus generated before answers were read) and we sought to describe what was being said (like a reporter) rather than to interpret what was being said. This is a thematic analysis.



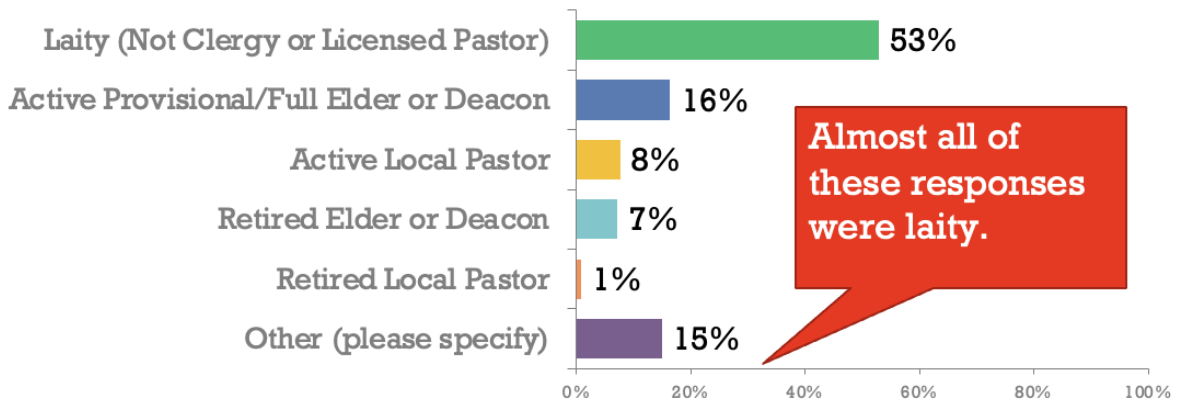
## Distribution and Participation

- Survey Period: Monday, 11/6/23 @ noon to Wednesday, 11/15/23 @ 9 a.m.
- Distribution: Approximately 15,000 individuals. This included local church members who serve on any local church committee, all clergy/pastors, conference committee members and BWC staff. Distribution did not include church members or clergy/pastors associated with churches that have already disaffiliated or were approved to disaffiliate at the 2023 Annual Conference session
- Survey Responses: 2,244
  - 271 people were disqualified
  - 827 surveys were not completed

- Final count of usable responses: 1,146 surveys which is a 7.6% response rate.
  - A response was deemed usable if all required questions were answered.
  - The response rate was determined good, especially for a survey of this length and complexity.
  - Youth groups were asked to provide time for youth to take the survey. Surveys will be open for youth until 1/15/24.

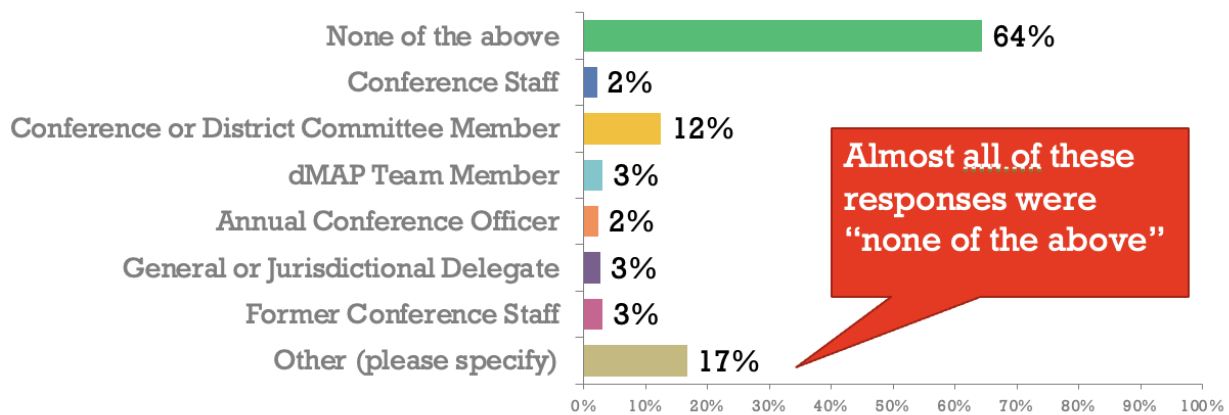
### Conference Relationship of Survey Respondents

When reading through the “other” description we learned that more than 60% of survey respondents are laity.



### Role within Annual Conference or District of Survey Respondents

About 80% of respondents are not serving as delegates or in conference or district leadership positions.



## District Membership of Survey Respondents

District	% Members	% Survey Respondents
Annapolis	14%	11%
Baltimore Metropolitan	10%	13%
Baltimore Suburban	13%	13%
Central Maryland	14%	12%
Cumberland-Hagerstown	10%	6%
Frederick	14%	11%
Greater Washington	14%	18%
Washington East	12%	10%
Don't Know		5%

## Age of Survey Respondents

Under 18	0.17%	2
19-24	0%	0
25-34	2.44%	28
35-44	7.94%	91
45-54	9.51%	109
55-64	22.51%	258
65-74	34.21%	392
75 & Up	21.03%	241
Would rather not answer	2.18%	25
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1146</b>

As of 1/8, YP totals are  
 26 - Under 18s  
 3 - 19-24s  
 31 - 25-34s

*Getting closer to this resembling the age distribution of membership. Second wave of survey closes on 1/15.*

## Self-Selected Racial/Ethnic Identity of Survey Respondents

Racial/Ethnic Identity	BWC members*	Survey Participants	Survey%	Member%
<b>American Indian or Alaskan Native</b>	64	4	<b>0.35%</b>	<b>0.05%</b>
<b>Asian / Pacific Islander</b>	1,931	19	<b>1.66%</b>	<b>1.56%</b>
<b>Black or African American</b>	29,166	316	<b>27.57%</b>	<b>23.58%</b>
<b>Hispanic/Latino</b>	658	11	<b>0.96%</b>	<b>0.53%</b>
<b>White /Caucasian</b>	91,078	707	<b>61.69%</b>	<b>73.63%</b>
<b>Multiple Ethnicity/Other*</b>	805	17	<b>1.48%</b>	<b>0.65%</b>
<b>Would rather not answer</b>		72	<b>6.28%</b>	
<b>TOTAL</b>	123,702	1146		

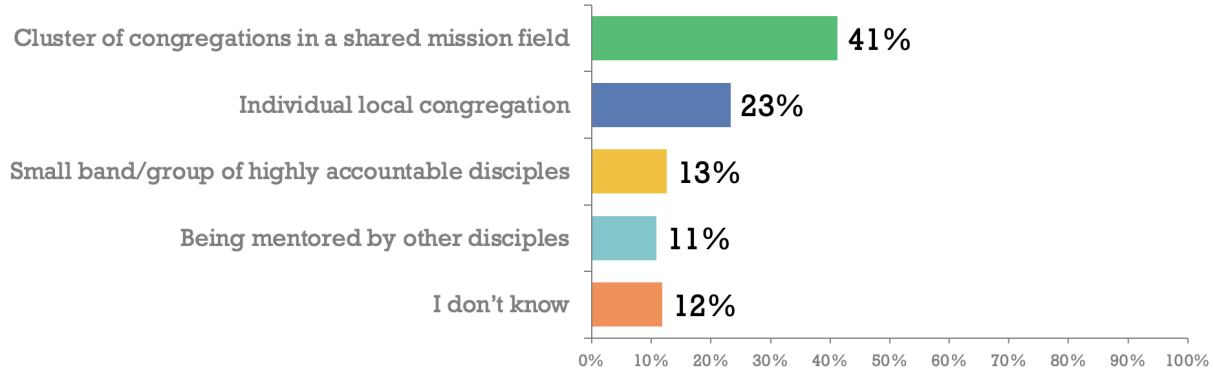
\*BWC membership data is based on 2022 statistical reports submitted by churches with disaffiliated congregations removed. "Other" is not a choice on statistical reports.

## Self-Selected Gender of Survey Respondents

<b>ANSWER CHOICES</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>	
Female	56.89%	652
Male	39.44%	452
Non-binary	0.17%	2
Would rather not answer	3.23%	37
Other (please specify)	0.26%	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1146</b>

*This represents the known gender distribution of membership.*

## Q2: Organizing for Discipleship



**Q2: What do you think is the best way to make and grow world-transforming disciples of Jesus Christ?**

“A cluster of congregations in a shared mission field was clearly the most commonly selected answer.” Those who identified as Hispanic/Latino had the same order of importance and more strongly supported (61%) that a cluster of congregations was the best way to make and grow world-transforming disciples.

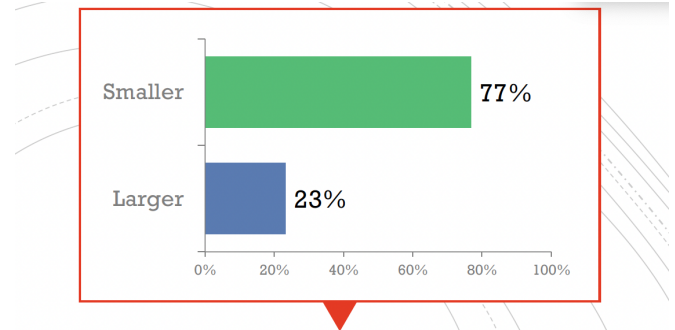


## Q3: District Size

### Smaller Districts

The data indicates that survey participants believe the connection would benefit from smaller districts. Some believe it would be easier to identify what each church has in common. This was especially valued in rural areas and from small membership churches. Respondents indicated that smaller districts would:

- Make meetings and gatherings closer and easier to attend,
- Provide more access to the District Superintendent (DS),
- Enable more individual leadership for the churches,
- Create more personalized relationships and support,
- Foster a sense of community bond,
- Allow for better understanding of the needs and strengths of each church; and,
- Provide more oversight and accountability.



Q3: Do you believe the conference would benefit from larger or smaller districts?

Additionally, smaller districts would provide DSs:

- More time to get to know the congregations,
- Make the district more manageable,
- More time for better planning, conversations, and implementation.

Expressed disadvantages of smaller districts include potential difficulty in sustaining them if there are fewer churches, limited financial resources, and the challenge of reaching out to local churches in a meaningful way for growth. Additionally, smaller districts may result in less connection and collaboration among churches and pastors across the BWC.

### Larger

According to the data, the advantages of larger districts include:

- The potential for better resources and input in a time of declining attendance.
- The ability to provide better coverage and coordination of mission; and,
- Better stewardship.

Data indicates a belief that larger districts may place District Superintendents at a disadvantage because they may be stretched further in their responsibilities unless there were other solutions included in a larger district plan.

Concerns about DS burnout, isolation of congregations due to not having personal connections with one another or the DS were shared as related to larger districts.

## Other

- 15 people named that [district] size wasn't the determining factor for restructure. Things like focus, purpose, relationships and willingness to work together towards a common goal matter more.
  - *"It's not the size that matters, as much as the frequency of connection and collaboration that is nurtured across the district. For example, larger districts (which would reduce the need for staffing) could be organized into bands (as opposed to clusters) to allow for this, without having to provide staffing for more small districts."*
  - *"I do not believe it is the size of the district. Consider how much support is made available on each District to support local congregations in the defined area. Discippler Guides, when in practice, were a tremendous asset to local pastors and their congregations."*
- Four people challenged us to let go of districts all together:
  - *"Over the years, I have not seen much benefit from the bureaucracy created by the district concept, except when problem have surfaced with pastors. This has occurred twice in 45 years at our location. Maybe the district concept should be abandoned and 2-3 senior clergy or lay members be assigned responsibility for addressing problems at the conference level. This would reduce costs as well."*
  - *"Reducing church bureaucracy should be the goal. The elimination of districts and DSs would partially achieve this end. The district is obsolete but we keep trying to redefine it purpose when it has largely lost its relevancy."*
  - *"Eliminate [current] districts. Make the regions into districts .... Focus on facilitators with proven track records for specific areas such as youth, missions, outreach and discipleship."*

## Ideas (a sampling)

- *"If districts are reimaged as [missional] hubs, then increased size allows for groupings of intentional hubs/clusters within a regional context."*
- *"Most churches and pastors don't really know their DS or what the DSs do - this seems to vary widely based on the bishop. If DS job descriptions could be communicated clearly with pastors, it would help set our expectations and enable us to communicate that to congregations."*
- *"Appoint district superintendents who have a track record of mission strategy and growing congregations, have them pastor a local church in a designated mission field, and oversee a cluster of churches in that mission field, with a focus on growing congregations and communities. Replicate this model in as many districts as needed. Appoint regional superintendents (no more than five) to work with district superintendents and the bishop on appointments."*

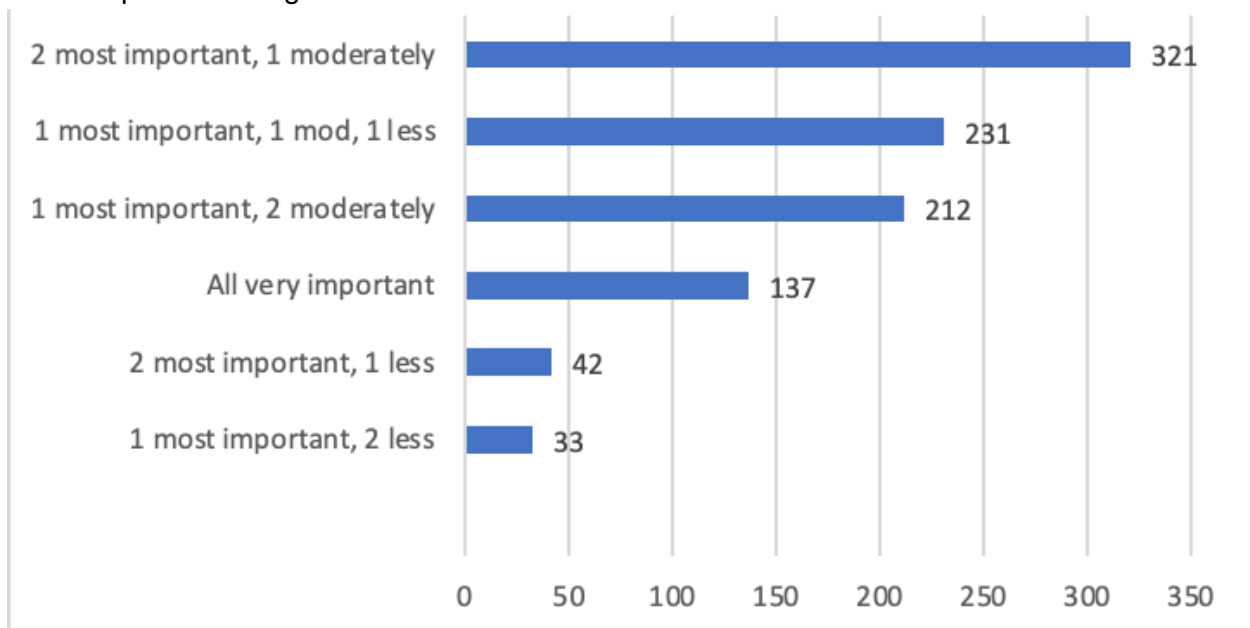
- *“Maybe smallish clusters within a larger system. Training and accountability forms from the larger system, but more personal, trustworthy relationships built in clusters. I have trouble connecting well with 100 other churches, but I can work well with 10 others. Someone to respond to the circumstances of 10 churches (tactical and spiritual) with the resources of the conference backing them up for specific challenges and training.”*
- *“Assign DS (do they have to be clergy?) with administrative skill to even clusters of districts just handle administrative stuff. Have other DS's with missional skills and calling to work with well-defined areas to bring the church to action on issues in those areas.”*
- *“Smaller means more concentrated efforts and outsized impact. OR larger districts with Connecting Elders overseeing and walking alongside each county or community within a district. Then they would report to DS.”*
- *“This should not be an either/or question. Some districts might well be larger geographically but not have populations equivalent to others. Some realignment is probably called for now, but the criterion should not primarily be geographical. Clusters are useful, but first identify the churches that are "missionally alive" and perhaps then think of how those churches might anchor a district with other (perhaps smaller) congregations in association with this anchor. In other cases, geography might be a compelling criterion.”*
- *“Smaller districts with a "lead" church that "models" growing disciples for Jesus Christ for the sake of personal faith and for sharing the faith that transforms lives and through them transforming the world. One-on-one or two-three mentoring groups are better. Members can share more openly, honestly, and openly with one another in a smaller covenant group.”*
- *“I think districts should be highly focused on evangelism and church growth in a missionally-similar area. We should have far more districts with more District Superintendents who are senior pastors at large churches. Conference can use current DS salaries to subsidize associate pastors at these churches. This would keep the DS more aware of local needs by actually serving congregations.”*
- *“Maybe a possible strategy is more creative, intentional use of the cluster model. 5-7 churches aligned around like mission to leverage resources and to develop strategic goals for impactful ministry. I personally get more out of our cluster gatherings than our district gatherings and more of our lay members get involved and look forward to joint ministry and fellowship opportunities.”*

## Q4: District Organizing Principle

	LESS IMPORTANT	MODERATELY IMPORTANT	VERY IMPORTANT	TOTAL	WEIGHTED AVERAGE
Geographic configurations	11.17% 128	42.93% 492	45.90% 526	1146	2.35
Similar ministry contexts (i.e., rural, urban, town/suburban)	12.65% 145	44.07% 505	43.28% 496	1146	2.31
Missional similarities (addressing poverty, environment, health equity, dismantling the preschool to prison pipeline, etc.)	15.71% 180	35.43% 406	48.87% 560	1146	2.33

### Q4: What organizing principle for districts best supports vitality in congregations and communities?

Process Note: Survey participants were asked to select one of three options for the three organizing principles. While the summary of these responses looks equal, when we look at those who rated at least one of the principles as very important (85% of respondents), a different picture emerges.



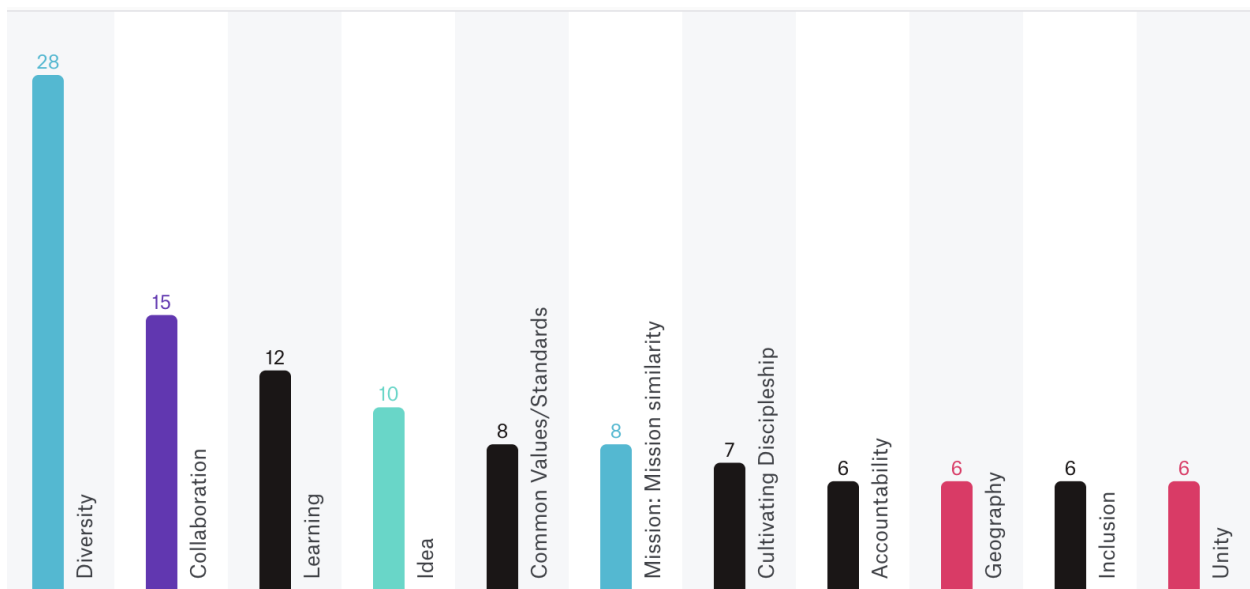
Looking at this subset of the data, stronger preferences emerge:

- 901 respondents indicate that Missional Similarities (e.g., addressing poverty, environment, health equity, etc.) is most important.

- 745 respondents indicate that Geographic Configurations are most important.
- 336 respondents indicate that Similar Ministry Contexts (e.g., rural, urban, etc.) are most important.

Note: When looking at the total responses, this was one of the few questions where there is a statistical difference in the way people answered this question based on their self-reported racial or ethnic identity. This indication is not clearly understood, and additional data is needed for deeper analysis.

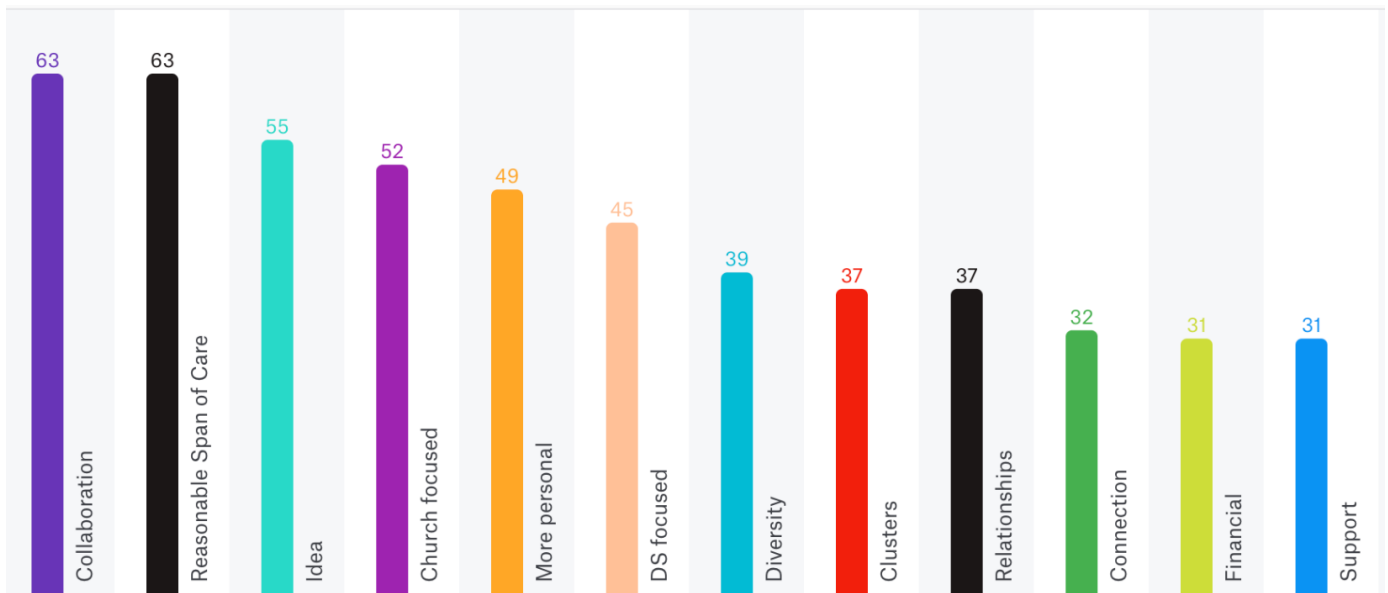
While “Other” wasn’t a choice for Question 4, there was space for people to comment on “Other” guiding principles for restructuring. Below is a snapshot of how 145 people responded. Diversity and local church collaboration were outstanding additional principles.



This is a snapshot of questions 3 and 4.

The language of “Span of Care” emerged from the responses. Responses that noted DSs spread too thin also went in this category as restructuring needs to provide a “reasonable span of care” for those charged with supporting 100% of our congregations becoming 100% vital. Along with Collaboration, it may be a significant objective of the restructuring process.

*“It is vitally important to pay attention to reasonable span of care for district leaders (DS, administrators, coaches) so that pastors and local congregation[s] receive meaningful interactions and connectional support.”*





b. Supporting pastors/clergy (67)

10. Describing the essential role/function, activity or desired outcome of districts

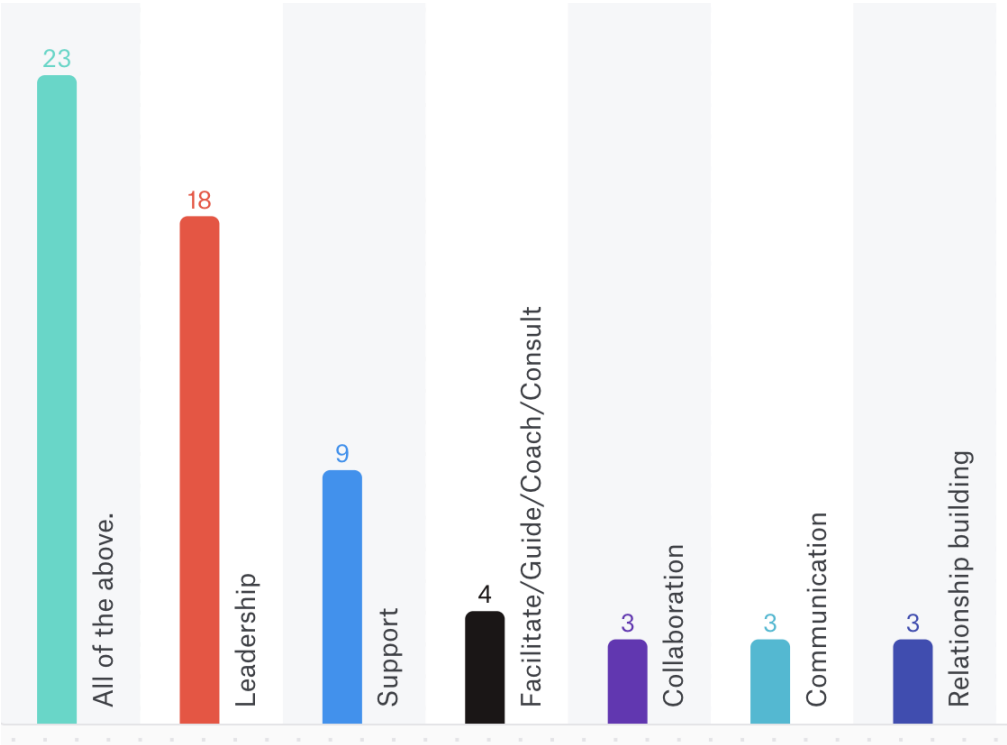
<b>Strengthen the Connection (755 answers)</b>	
126	To bridge/liaison between churches and conference/bishop
95	Pooling & sharing resources
90	Rekindle/strengthen UM connectionalism
72	To foster mutual support/sharing
64	Building relationships among nearby churches and leaders
56	Create a sense of connection and community/fellowship
55	To communicate/disseminate information
37	Shared mission/ministry
36	Serve the community together missionally
31	Enabling churches/leaders to jointly share in the mission and work of the BWC
30	Ensure all are known/valued and know/value one another
22	Facilitate learning and sharing
13	Provide opportunities for engagement
8	Addressing shared issues and concerns
8	Worship
4	Conference level resourcing of mission strategy
3	Bring together congregations and clergy with similar missional callings
3	Divide population into a meaningful group for conversation
2	To provide a larger community
<b>Missional Strategy Objectives &amp; Behaviors (505 answers)</b>	
123	To facilitate church collaboration/partnerships for ministry and mission
79	Increasing local church missional effectiveness
61	Organizing contextually and strategically
60	Advancing the mission and ministry of Jesus
39	Creating shared missional objectives
30	Working together to make a bigger UM impact in the community
24	Focus on evangelism/church planting
23	Meet community needs
18	Work together toward clear purpose/goals/objectives and strategy
12	Assess
11	Missional strategy
11	Provide leadership
10	Enabler of mission, vision and strategic ministry plans



4	Get/keep churches moving in the same direction
<b>Management (209 answers)</b>	
137	Administrative oversight/accountability
65	Provides structure for efficiency/effectiveness of connection/mission
7	To coordinate a network of churches
<b>Cultivate team culture (94 answers)</b>	
66	Create unity/cohesion/accord through common values/purpose/standards/goals
16	Foster collegiality/community/collaboration
12	Encourage/empower congregations

### Q6: Role of District Superintendent

The 114 “Other” responses were primarily “all of the above.” Additional responses included:



## Q7: How has district membership strengthened mission/ministry?

The data indicates that district membership has strengthened mission and ministry through coordinated mission and outreach activities across churches in a community, access to the spiritual guidance of a District Superintendent, facilitation of leadership development, connection in mission and ministry, and collective voices and effective collaboration.

Others (who often raised concerns in other sections of the survey also) overwhelmingly believe that district membership has not been seen as a significant contributor to strengthening mission/ministry.

- *Bright spots:*
  - *“I was completely strengthened, along with the congregation I serve, when part of a Discipler group. I cannot think of a single time showing up at a regular district has done anything to strengthen our congregation.” (Of course, there were others who did not find these to be helpful.)*
  - *Working in clusters has helped address larger issues in the community, from food insecurity to housing concerns. Harford County’s pastors worked together to address school lunch debt and the associated impact. This could not be done well as a solo church.*
  - *As part of a district, you are able to actually see and discuss practices of neighboring churches that are successful. Often, you are encouraged or challenged to implement some new or different approach which brings about more positive results/outcomes in your church.*
  - *“The mission and ministry of the church has been strengthened by smaller clusters of churches. The district had no effect.”*
  - *“District-wide training of laity.”*
  - *“Districts are helpful for resourcing congregations, holding clergy and congregations accountable, and encouraging connectionalism.”*

## Q8: How could district membership reignite the UMC?

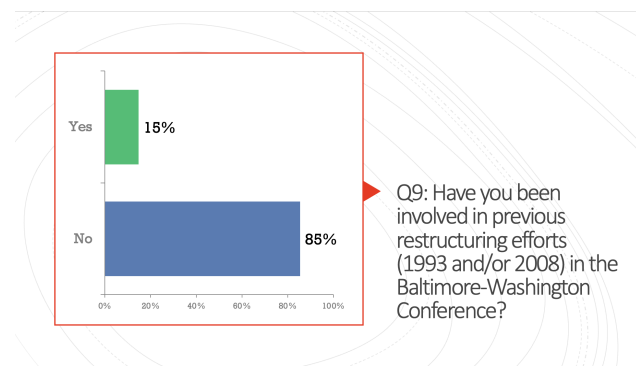
Most of the 1,048 responses mirrored responses provided in previous sections – including the cry for more collaboration, communication and connection. While restructuring itself can't reignite a movement, others didn't see the reignition of the Methodist movement as dependent on the district. Some offered a fresh (yet ancient) perspective on what district membership could do to ignite a movement.

- **Keep the main thing the main thing and minimize the rest.** *“If the focus was more on discipleship and less on reports and administrative requirements, I think the congregations could be reignited. When volunteers assume the administrative duties, we have no energy left for discipleship.”*
- **Reclaim the power of the connection.**
  - *“Mimic bands, classes, and societies with appointed leaders at each level. local church, cluster/co-op parish, and district, each level empowered with administrative authority and built in connection for growth.”*
  - *“One thing I think that could reignite the Methodist movement is taking a closed church or other Methodist property to do a creative and collective district ministry (e.g. establishing a restaurant, coffee house, Christian entertainment venue, gym, recreational program, etc.)”*
  - *The revitalization of the Methodist movement lies in leveraging the district's pillars of accountability, fostering mutual support, and encouraging the exchange of resources and experiences. By cultivating a culture of shared responsibility and collaborative learning, the district can serve as a catalyst for renewed passion and commitment within the Methodist community.*
  - *Connectionalism! There is much to be gained by churches working together, especially when many of us are very small. I love the model of several churches together with multiple pastors; often it feels like the mission of the church is to pay the pastor.*
  - *Revivals that are district sponsored, even bringing back the camp meeting as a form of revival. Accountability groups, sponsored Emmaus walks.*
- **Pray for Renewal.**
  - *Praying for renewal. Build compassion for the hurts and fears around our communities. Churches having fellowship together for worship service.*
  - *If those who are within a district were truly connected and seeking to work in harmony with the leading of the Holy Spirit, praying together for our communities, our counties, our state(s), our Conference and the world we are seeking to reach for Christ, makes all the difference in the world. If we are not truly connected and seeking to work together, following the Holy Spirit, then we have no real hope of being reignited.*
- **Empower Laity...**
  - *...to missionally engage their communities. Our greatest strength is in our laity's ability to reach people in their immediate neighborhoods who are far from God.*
  - *... for ministry. Training clergy and laity to work together toward ambitious goals that impact people's day-to-day lives. Then holding both accountable for action, while sharing information (such as grant writing, or government relationships). Creative*

*resource sharing and willingness to work together as opposed to worried about "my church first."*

- **Critical Mass.**
  - *Combining congregations within district to unify/advertise/market UMC's mission throughout district,*
  - *Being in a district which is actively involved with other churches would strengthen our mission.*
- **Cultivate a Heart-Strangely-Warmed Culture.**
  - *Create a culture of trust, a culture of prayer, a culture of evangelistic fervor, a culture of compassion, a culture of love. Has to be done personally.*
  - *The idea of bringing together a number of churches and forming a district, I believe, was from the beginning a noble one. In his priestly prayer in John 17, Lord Jesus prayed for oneness. This oneness is the aspect that can reignite the Methodist Movement in a world full of divisions politically, socially, and culturally.*

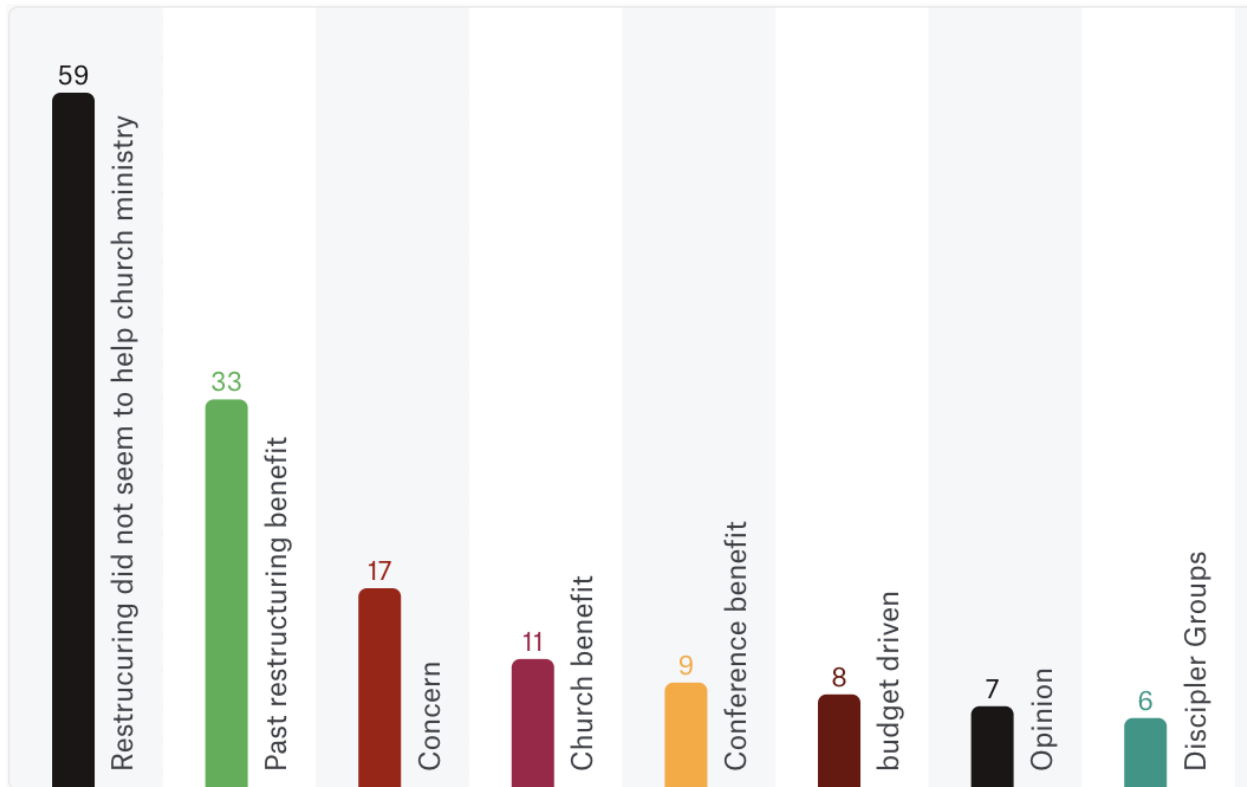
## Q9-12: Learning from Prior Restructuring Efforts



Those who answered yes to Question 9, were invited to answer three more questions. The 159 people who answered this set of questions had very similar answers across the question sets so after seeking to provide an answer summary to the questions in a broad way, results are shared in categories across the questions. Interestingly, some people seemed to be describing restructuring at their local church instead of annual

conference restructuring of the annual conference. Additionally, there were programmatic elements associated with the 2008 restructuring that were actually rolled out prior to the restructuring.

## Did the prior restructure efforts help church ministry?



Some of the benefits named were:

- It reminded the conference of connectionalism. A shift from identity of self as a member of an organization to an identity of self as a disciple of Jesus Christ was heightened. (Many more people said the opposite).
- Sometimes it helped to focus the entire conference on a common theme and vision. It enlivened the process of ministry for a while. Refocused us on the mission and vision vs operating in silos.
- Acceptance of more diversity in some districts.
- Attempts to make the administrative duties of the DS more manageable and administrative effectiveness more effective.
- Discipler Groups developed broader relationships, equipped, and built a sense of connection and community. While six people named them as a benefit, two named them as a hindrance.
- The old Guide/DS model produced a shared leadership model that provided increased communication, fewer silos, more mentoring, and more collegiately.
- Clusters of churches was quite effective for some.
- Ensuring that all churches had a computer.
- There was some effort to reduce the benevolence factor by reducing conference staff, which was appreciated.

What were the unintended consequences of the previous restructuring efforts?

- Church seems more institutionally connected than communally connected.
- It failed to build the strength of passion for ministry.
- 2004 enlarged our geographical boundaries, which made it difficult to build relationships.
- 2008's streamlined structure resulted in laity losing their voice,
- Left people feeling disenfranchised.
- Not everything benefited everyone.
- Made a larger, more prosperous congregation.
- Lost something when country and urban were no longer combined.

The unintended consequences of the previous restructuring efforts include: confusion around the identity and functioning of committees, isolation of urban areas, heightened mistrust of local churches, limited positive outcomes despite significant resources used, further mistrust among different groups within the conference, pain and disillusionment among clergy and congregations, loss of certain projects such as disability ministries, lack of resolve in new church initiatives, increased emphasis on administrative order over evangelistic ministry, increased segregation and separation, appointment of clergy outside of the United Methodist tradition and geographic area of the conference, lack of knowledge about the UMC among congregants, and little emphasis on what is required of a disciple. Additionally, there was a lack of racial-ethnic diversity in some districts.

Q12: Did the prior restructure hinder local church or BWC ministry?

Yes and no because – in general – people aren't clear about what lasting impact it had and whether or not the amount of time and energy was worth it. People reported the following hindrance types:

1. Less connection; less knowing and being known,
2. Layers of loss that change entails with the emotions that accompany grief,
3. Diminishing confidence, understanding and investment in the whole.

## Q10-12 Additional Thoughts

Q10. Did the prior restructure efforts help church ministry?

1. *Smaller groups of churches would work better within the confines of a larger network.*
2. *Reduced the cost of the administration. The conference should not be top heavy or top down, but led by the local churches.*

Q12. Did the prior restructure hinder local church or BWC ministry?

1. *Think restructuring to this point has failed to achieve a "Come Follow Me" attitude. We need to find the means through restructuring to enable our older members and engage younger members to continue Jesus' mission.*
2. *In current restructuring, we have lost members and revenue for the church to meet Conference monthly apportionments; conference should consider restructuring the apportionments in the next fiscal year, if not it will be difficult for the churches to survive.*
3. *Less districts has meant less connection with the DS/AC. I do believe that in terms of conference leadership, there has been a dependency on clergy to fill many of the roles that aren't staffed any longer. Again, clergy are burning out at high levels so we might need to consider how much more we are asking them to do beyond the local church. I believe that most of us are willing to engage beyond the local church but shouldn't be doing the work of another part-time or even full-time job without remuneration.*
4. *No true clear-cut direction. Remember the saying, "You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make them drink." Perhaps we should lead them to the water and drink with them together.*
5. *Cannot really say for certain. What I do know is that it is important that congregations have a proper understanding of what it means to be the conference. In many of the congregations that I have served in, I had to re-educate who we are as Methodists and that we are connected for a purpose, and we are not to be lone-ranger congregations doing our own thing.*
6. *Following at least one of those restructurings there was too great an emphasis on physical numbers rather than changed hearts and lives. They can both measure effectiveness but finding the appropriate balance is necessary.*
7. *The Baltimore-Suburban District is too long. Culturally, people in Harford County have very little in common with those in Carroll County. The time it takes to drive from one end of the district to the other is nearly two hours. This prevents sharing of ministry, resources, fellowship, etc.*
8. *By placing most persons of color into one or two districts (whether intentional or not) we limit the impact that cross-cultural sharing and ministry provides. If we were to re-district, but also create "partner" churches in other areas of the annual conference whereby culturally different congregations (race, ethnicity, socio-economically, geographically, educationally, primary employment, rural/urban/suburban, etc.) can share with one another resources, ministry, worship, etc. it might help to combat some of the divisiveness present in any boundary situation.*

### **Q11: Prior restructure - Unintended Consequences?**

1. *Past restructures focused on a top-down approach to ministry that many came to resist. How can passion and vision happen more locally and invite the conference on the journey. God is already at work in communities and that's where churches are*
2. *Feelings were hurt and some left the church. More education about the restructuring process would have been helpful if shared with all of the congregations involved.*
3. *Anger within the churches - perhaps because issues were not openly addressed to the people by their pastor or whoever in person. A sense that a church's thought does not matter, even in this modern age of communication. Polls are nice. Questionnaires or nice. But sitting down eye-to-eye and laying it on the table with no politics of any kind involved makes a difference.*

### **Q10-12 Concerns**

#### **Q10. Did the prior restructure efforts - Help church ministry?**

1. *The previous restructuring was a top-down approach. The system basically collected data then told us what we asked for. Hopefully this will be different.*
2. *The language used harmed relationships.*
3. *Made a larger, more prosperous congregation.*
4. *It depends on the quality of the district leadership.*
5. *Prior restructuring did not help the ministry of the conference or local church. The DS's were spread too thinly over a larger geographic area.*
6. *Some of what we did served the larger and more affluent churches better than it did the small membership congregations. Not everything benefited everyone.*
7. *I don't know that it has. We have decreased the number of districts and taken DS's further away from local churches and clergy because they don't have time to connect with us. As far as conference positions, the changes haven't really reached the local church in any meaningful ways, but I believe that realignment of conference ministry positions made things more streamlined.*
8. *Con: diverts attention from basic work before the Church.*
9. *Lowering the number of districts (increasing the district size) has actually hurt congregations -- distance does not lead to knowing/working with others.*
10. *Added to bureaucracy.*
11. *Reducing the number of districts did not help. The district superintendents had so many churches and issues to work with that they got lost into really knowing the heart and soul of the local congregations and the affinity groups that they needed to be working together with. Smaller groups of churches would work better within the confines of a larger network.*
12. *Did not help. It made things worse.*
13. *Too much emphasis of conference demands and charging churches too much money to allow them to stand on their own.*



14. *We eliminated a district to lower expense. We did not see a lowering of apportionments. The restructuring was not helpful. It just gave the DS another excuse for not being engaged in the local church.*
15. *I know it's necessary financially, but it has broken down the connection between local churches and the Annual Conference. We need to redouble our efforts with the local church.*
16. *Change is difficult and I feel like the 2008 restructuring was just told to us without any ownership on the part of the local church. We were just told the new way.*
17. *My conference committee on evangelism was eliminated in the 2008 restructure. This in no way helped anyone. It is much too late to do anything about that.*

#### **Q12. Did the Prior Restructure Hinder local church or BWC ministry?**

18. *Yes, it has at times when there wasn't enough information early on about the changes and implementation. We are a conference who struggles with trusting the higher church leadership. Lack of information, encouragement, training, prayer and clear communication.*
19. *Lots of lip service to empowering the local church, but vision continues to be top down (paternalistic) and resources continue to be gathered at the AC level with little truly assisting the local church (and grant writing requires many man hours with little accountability and empowered coaching.)*
20. *An emphasis on forced clusters of churches -- which fed into the idea that the conference was trying to close smaller churches -- and in some cases, hastened the demise of those churches -- was not a holistic way to help smaller congregations.*
21. *With exception of Bishop May's evangelistic efforts, prior restructuring has been a threat to the churches, focused primarily on money. Little effort made to fully diagnose the problem that would require restructuring. (No one answers the question "Why is the need to restructure?" while putting out a constant stream of "new things" to do.)*

#### **Q11: Prior restructure - Unintended Consequences?**

22. *Yes, by putting all of Baltimore City into one district, with very little outside the City in the Baltimore-Metro District, it created a nearly all-Black district reminiscent of the Central Jurisdiction. It's also the poorest district/least likely to pay apportionments. As a result, there have been comments that "Black people don't pay apportionments," without understanding the myriad reasons for why Baltimore City churches struggle to pay apportionments (white flight leaving small congregations to manage historic, old properties too big for the current congregation and no resources to do so; socio-economic issues; job suppression, etc.).*
23. *We see less of the bishop, DS and conference staff. Think of "bobby on the beat," just being present in worship, checking in on Council meetings.*
24. *Unintended consequences of prior restructuring include: 1.) confusion around identity and functioning of committees, such as the District Committee on Ministry when redistricting was part of the restructuring; 2.) isolation of urban areas in ways which, to*

*some extent, then highlighted the concerns rather than the strengths of these same areas; 3.) heightened mistrust of local churches and sense of being manipulated by the conference; 4.) much work and use of considerable financial resources with limited positive outcomes; 5.) further mistrust among groups within the conference, including, but not limited, to women and persons of color.*

- 25. Unfortunately, it has hardened the attitude of some churches against involvement by the Conference.*
- 26. The restructuring of the districts caused the church that I led to be divided from churches along the Route 1 corridor that were in ministry with each other to become divided into two districts, and we lost that cooperative ministries and mission.*
- 27. The Discipler groups were awful for morale — clergy were treated as newbie imbeciles that needed remedial training — they tried to force collegiality in awkward ways.*
- 28. The greater picture of the Annual Conference became diluted when they just shuffled things around without local input. We used to teach confirmands about the hierarchy. Now we gloss over a lot of it because it will probably just change again.*
- 29. The complainers who lost their positions destroyed it with the next episcopal change and we lost all of the positives that came from it.*
- 30. Shuffling of districts upsetting pipeline of lay leaders for district ministries.*
- 31. Isolation of urban ministry away from suburban partnerships*
- 32. I recognize it is necessary to include multiple counties (and states) within some districts, previous restructuring did not anticipate the impact of future demographic changes.*
- 33. Further alienated small country and rural churches.*
- 34. Closing of churches, people leaving the denomination, greater emphasis on administrative order than evangelistic ministry, increased segregation and separation, increased appointment of clergy outside of the United Methodist tradition and outside of the geographic area of the conference, lack of knowledge about the UMC by congregants, little emphasis on what is required of a disciple.*
- 35. Alienation and anger towards the Conference for implying that local churches have been ""doing church"" wrong.*

# Final Question: Anything Else?

About 532 people answered the final question. We appreciate the additional feedback on process, sharing your pain points, letting us know we – and the process – were covered in prayer, affirming this as needed, encouraging us to keep intentionally communicating, emphasizing previous comments they and sharing more opinions and ideas/recommendations.



## Appendix A: Invitation to Listening Sessions and Prayer for BWC Restructuring

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. Romans 12: 1; 9-12*

As the Restructuring Task Force continues its work within the Baltimore-Washington Conference, you are invited to attend one of the Listening Sessions that will be held over the next several weeks. This is the second phase of a collaborative process that was introduced in September. The first phase was a conference-wide survey, which more than 1,140 of you completed. Now, we turn to Listening Sessions, which will enable you to be in direct conversation with members of the Task Force. By attending one of six at-large sessions, you will have the opportunity to help discern how the Conference positions itself for greater vitality and effectiveness. Your input, ideas and creativity are important to this work. Please make every effort to attend a session. The Task Force will also meet with specific ministry teams such as the Board of Ordained Ministry, Discipleship Council, Youth and Young Adults, and the Connectional Table. [See a video from Bishop Easterling on restructuring.](#)

As we prepare for those meetings, we also have a request. Since 2016, we have focused on a unifying concept: We Are One.

Those three words, which served as our foundational theme for holy conferencing, were the basis of a conference-wide Bible study and became a common refrain in our ministry, still form the basis of our skilled servant work. There is power in moving together and being of one accord. Therefore, as we continue the deep listening, dialogue and discernment necessary to prepare a recommendation on restructuring for our 2024 annual conference, we want to incorporate a call for prayer into the process. As our founder John Wesley taught, "Prayer is the grand means of drawing near to God." While it is important that we hear from and listen to one another in this work, it is also critically important that we hear from God through the Holy Spirit. Further, we believe that praying together as a conference will enhance our ability to really listen to one another. See Bishop Easterling's [New Year's Message on Forging A New Path](#). Therefore, please incorporate this process into your daily prayers, and we ask that we join at 12:01 pm every Wednesday for common prayer. We thank you for your participation.

The Task Force looks forward to seeing and hearing from you.

May the God of all hope and love be with us as we strive to serve the present age.

The listening sessions are as follows:

**January 18 - Two At Large Sessions**

BWC Mission Center  
10711 East Market Place,  
Fulton, MD  
1 – 3 p.m. and 7 – 9 p.m.

**January 27 - Under 35 Youth and Young Adult Session**

Emmanuel United Methodist Church  
10755 Scaggsville Rd.,  
Laurel, MD  
1 – 3 p.m.

**January 30 - At Large Session**

Towson United Methodist Church  
509 Hampton Lane,  
Towson, MD  
7 – 9 p.m.

**January 31 - At Large Session**

Epworth United Methodist Church  
9008 Rosemont Drive,  
Gaithersburg, MD  
7 – 9 p.m.

**February 6 - At Large Session**

Otterbein United Methodist Church  
108 E. Franklin St.,  
Hagerstown, MD  
7 – 9 p.m.

**February 7 - At Large Session**

St. Matthew's United Methodist Church  
14900 Annapolis Rd.,  
Bowie, MD  
7 – 9 p.m.