

Strengthening Ministry Partnerships



God's transforming grace in Jesus Christ calls us to become one dynamic church with diverse people in many settings, offering a new life of Christian discipleship to the world.

Florida Conference Vision Statement

¹⁸But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

Corinthians 12: 15 – 26, NIV

Introduction and Context

The Florida Conference vision embodies Paul's timeless message to the Corinthians: the church is one body composed of many parts, all essential for the church to collectively live in and transform the world around it.

In reflecting on the Florida Conference as one body fulfilling God's call to make disciples and transform the world, the Conference leadership has been actively seeking God's presence and guidance in establishing future direction and focus in the midst of dynamic social change and declining denominational membership. This process has been a journey of discovery and has included both internal and external reflection.

Shifting world social and financial realities have converged with a shifting reality for the Conference. While declining membership, participation and resources have been more pronounced elsewhere in the connection, it is now recognizably present in the Florida Conference. Confronting these forces while balancing theological essentials is the challenging context in which the Florida Conference must thrive.

Within this context, the Conference cabinet leadership engaged in a fifteen-month "Incubator" process—a peer-learning environment structured to clarify core processes and missional goals. Within this process leaders considered other reports and information such as a communications audit, responses to listening groups from the Bishop's capital campaign, and the Book of Discipline. They also reviewed findings and recommendations from a consultant-driven evaluation of the Connectional Ministries area. Out of this process came an understanding of the conference role in realizing the vision as threefold:

- 1. Clarify and Call:** It is the role of Conference leaders to engage the connection in conversations that clarify what missional effectiveness means in the present context. It is also the role of leaders to call members to account for them being missionally effective.
- 2. Discern and Deploy:** It is the role of Conference leaders to discern how God has gifted God's people -- both lay and clergy -- for ministry (gifts, talents, skills, passions, and personalities). Leaders also discern the leadership needs of different ministry contexts. Conference leadership will then

We are One Conference—One Body—rather than a loose confederation of independent ministries, departments and churches.

One Conference that includes local churches, districts, conference leaders and staff, general church leaders and staff and the United Methodist global connection all working to make disciples of Jesus Christ to transform the world.

One Conference that recognizes the gifts and abilities each part brings to the Body and encourages ministry and program to happen within the connection where it can be most effective.

One Conference where we honor our unique position within the body, care and love each part, suffer with those parts that are hurting and rejoice as one when any part is honored.

This is Paul's charge to us as the Church of Jesus Christ.

Rev. Beth Fegle-Miller
Director of Connectional Ministries

deploy persons in ways that maximize both the investment of God's gifts and the effectiveness of God's mission.

- 3. Relate and Resource:** It is the role of Conference leaders to cultivate open and supportive relationships with persons -- lay and clergy -- deployed in ministry throughout the connection. Conference leaders will then assist persons in finding the resources (theological perspective, training, adaptive processes, network support, and funds) enabling them to be faithful and fruitful in their ministry.

While the direction and focus of Conference work has been defined with vision and roles, resource adjustments and structure now need to be aligned to follow this future path—a path that will focus on the needs of local churches/communities while connecting with the global church—a path that has at its core a shared understanding of the Conference as one body with diverse parts connected together by our Wesleyan tradition and our common vision.

This paper will present the first steps the Conference will be taking to align resources for this work and focus. It will also give an overview of the long-term strategy to create a sensible, purpose-driven resource and staffing structure that will strengthen ministry partnerships throughout the connection.

Overall Strategy

Long-term the Conference anticipates a structure that is built on a clear understanding of the annual conference role within the connection as defined above. This structure will emphasize service that responds to both local and global needs and provides a connection between local church/community needs and programs and the work and initiatives of the global church.

The strategy that will re-align conference resources and staffing includes three general tactics:

- 1. Create opportunity and support for the development of young adult leaders, in particular, increasing the number and retention of young adult clergy.** Attracting and retaining young clergy is a key component in creating and sustaining vital centers of worship and ministry. The percent of ordained clergy in the Florida Conference under 35 years of age has dropped from nearly 9% in 1995 to a current level that is less than 6% of total clergy. The Conference will re-assign staff and resources to the Center for Clergy Excellence to create processes and programs that will result in more young clergy leadership.
- 2. Expand congregational transformation beyond crisis intervention to a proactive process that includes interventions and support for all congregations seeking excellence.** The office of Congregational Transformation

¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4: 15 - 16, NIV

Every generation must live by faith and engage in risk-taking mission, rather than distort the identity of the church as a self-satisfied, comfortable, ingrown society.

It is this challenge that we face as the body of Christ in the Florida Conference.

Strengthening our ministry partnerships will re-invigorate our body to be in the world engaging with others in risk-taking, life-giving mission and ministry.

I am convinced that the Spirit of God will work among us in fruitful new ways as we come together seeking divine guidance in fulfilling our call as the Church.

Bishop Timothy W. Whitaker
Florida Episcopal Area

will change its name to The Center for Congregational Excellence. With this change will come an expanded focus on helping all congregations that desire to become more missionally effective. Staff will be deployed to districts to better assist local churches define needs, create plans and evaluate effectiveness. While some staff will also focus on particular ethnic ministries, all Congregational Excellence staff will be experts in process facilitation, coaching and congregational development. This expanded focus will enhance the Conference's work and partnerships with congregations across the Conference leading to more vital communities of faith.

- 3. Create a connectional ministries service and staff structure that focuses on supporting churches and ministries in meeting local needs and connecting to the wider denomination.** The office of Connectional Ministries will re-align resources to focus efforts on strengthening connections between local churches, districts, the Conference and broader denominational initiatives. Emphasis will be placed on Conference support and resourcing to the district and local connection. Some staff will continue to work on specific conference program emphases. All Connectional Ministries staff will actively partner with districts, church clusters and community ministry groups on needs, concerns and passions and make connections with denominational initiatives happening regionally and globally. Staff will be experts in program planning and community development and may at times be a subject matter expert, but more often will connect groups, where needed, with volunteer and consultant subject matter experts. This alignment of staff and resources will strengthen the connection and broaden ministry impact.

An eighteen month time line is anticipated to fully implement this strategy including the comprehensive reorganization of Connectional Ministries as described in item #3.

First Steps

Implementation of this strategy will begin on February 22, 2010. Initial steps will include:

1. Re-direct resources and a staff person from Connectional Ministries to the Center for Clergy Excellence. This shift of resources will facilitate the implementation of plans related to the tactic to increase young adult clergy attraction and retention.
2. Broaden the scope of the office of Congregational Transformation. An outward sign of this shift will be renaming this ministry to the Center for Congregational

This is a Day of New Beginnings

This is a day of new beginnings,
time to remember and move on,
time to believe what love is bringing,
laying to rest the pain that's gone.

For by the life and death of Jesus,
God's mighty Spirit, now as then,
can make for us a world of difference,
as faith and hope are born again.

Then let us, with the Spirit's daring,
step from the past and leave behind
our disappointment, guilt, and grieving,
seeking new paths, and sure to find.

Christ is alive, and goes before us
to show and share what love can do.
This is a day of new beginnings;
our God is making all things new.

Hymn #383, The United Methodist Hymnal
Words by Brian Wren

Excellence. In addition to deploying the current staff of four into assigned districts, the Center's focus will expand to include assisting congregations to empower kingdom leaders, develop authentic disciples and build effective administration.

3. Commence reorganization activities within the office of Connectional Ministries. This process will begin with a reorganization of the communications department including significant staff changes. This department will be known as Connectional Relations. It will retain communication responsibilities and will expand responsibilities in the areas of training services and intentional support services to district offices. The focus of this ministry area will be customer service both internally to Conference staff and externally to the wider Conference connection.
4. Re-organize other areas of connectional ministries once the Connectional Relations area is fully operational (six to eight months).
5. Share frequent updates with ministry partners regarding the implementation of this strategy.

Risk-Taking Mission

The Florida Conference is about the business of risk-taking mission that furthers the efforts of every local church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. This ministry of connection will not change. What will change is how the Conference engages and connects to local churches and ministries as described earlier. The goal is to strengthen the whole Conference body by resourcing and supporting its connecting parts.

The Florida Conference is committed to this strategy of strengthening ministry partnerships. It has done so through a significant discernment process. The strategy outlined above is the initial fruit of this process. It is the beginning of a new thing. The result of this new approach will take time, but ultimately the Conference connection will be strengthened so that every community of faith is fulfilling its call to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.