

The United Methodist Church
Northeastern Jurisdiction
We make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world

Episcopal Area Supervision Assessment

February 2015

The primary mission of an episcopal area is leading, organizing and aligning leadership and resources to grow vital congregations and make disciples for the transformation of the world. To identify episcopal area alignment, four conference issues are evaluated in this report:

1. **Assessing the size and complexity of conferences and episcopal areas** – Generally the criteria for looking at episcopal boundaries has been the number of churches, number of clergy and the number of square miles. These criteria primarily focus on the bishop's ability to itinerate to the churches. Complexity of an area has been added and defined by diversity, size of budget, staff supervision, and urbanization.
2. **Assessing the capacity of conferences and episcopal areas to effectively carry out the mission** – Rejuvenating resources for the mission is key to the health of the mission and sustainability of a conference/episcopal area. Assessing how an episcopal area enhances or diminishes capacity for the mission and rejuvenation of the episcopal area are important factors for assessing episcopal area boundaries.
3. **Assessing present and future trends of mission fruitfulness** – What can reasonably be understood about the future based on present fruitfulness and trends? Assessing the vitality of congregations, worship attendance and other trends provide insights for identifying episcopal boundaries.
4. **State Boundaries** – Preferably an episcopal area will be contained in the same state for cultural, legal, and identification needs.

Ideally, the best episcopal areas will 1) minimize the size of the geography, 2) minimize the impact of complexity and 3) maximize the capacity for mission and fruitfulness. Diminishing the challenges and maximizing the opportunities provides the greatest opportunity to rejuvenate mission resources and fruitfulness.

Measures

1. Size and Complexity
 - Numbers of churches and pastors – The number of congregations and active clergy serving churches impacts general superintending.
 - Geographic area – The number of square miles in an episcopal area impacts the ability of the bishop to travel throughout the area.
 - Budget - The size of budget and the number of staff add to the complexity of a bishop's supervision.
 - Diversity - Urbanization, ethnic diversity and theological diversity adds to the complexity of a bishop's supervision.
 - Culture - A church-favorable culture or a *de-churching* culture enhances possibility or adds to the challenges and complexities of a bishop's supervision.
 - Clergy – Elders and local pastors have different development needs.
2. Capacity for Mission

- Financial and staff resources – funds available to resource congregations and mission.
- Apportionments per church – resources available to resource congregations.
- Program funds and apportionments – additional resources available for congregations.
- Conference staff per church – conference staff to support congregations.
- Church per square mile – an appropriate reach of a conference through its congregations.
- Average worship attendance per church – attendance high enough to support the ministry. Higher average worship attendance may indicate the congregation has financial resources for ministry and mission. Lower average worship attendance likely means more funds are going to building and clergy salary.
- Church -favorable culture – a church-favorable culture or a de-churching one. A church-favorable culture in society enhances capacity to make disciples and grow congregations. A de-churching culture makes it harder to attract worshipers and creates challenges for the mission.

3. Fruitfulness

- Percentage of highly vital congregations – The percentage of highly vital congregations demonstrates the ability of congregations to achieve fruitfulness in several areas and may demonstrate rejuvenation and how a conference is resourcing for vitality.
- Growth in the key markers of healthy and vital congregations – conferences whose churches as a whole demonstrate fruitfulness in worship, small groups, making new disciples and giving. Conferences whose congregations are growing in these areas demonstrate potential to be regenerative.

Comparison Charts

The three charts below are based on data from statistics and information submitted by conference treasurers in 2013. Three areas are more subjective – theological diversity, urbanization and churched culture and are based on input from individuals and census data. There is also a summary of each of the three charts – 1) conference size and complexity, 2) capacity for carrying out the mission, and 3) fruitfulness.

The colors indicate the following

- Comparatively High
- Midrange
- Comparatively Low

These are comparison measures with other conferences within the jurisdiction. Within the denomination, our conferences would fall within a wider range. For instance, some of our conferences that fall in the comparatively higher range may be lower denominationally and conferences that fall in the comparatively low range may be midrange within the U.S. This is a measure and comparison among NEJ conferences.

Conference Size and Complexity										
	BW	EPA	GNJ	NE	NY	PDE	SQH	UNY	WPA	WV
Square miles	6,596	6,801	9,308	59,435	8,616	2,491	19,054	39,811	18,888	23,929
Number of churches	645	440	576	630	470	435	922	916	847	1,129
Number of Clergy serving churches	442	383	407	353	311	234	487	536	497	488
Local Pastors serving churches	119	124	138	140	45	80	201	236	162	209
Number of Superintendents	8	6	9	9	6	4	7	12	10	9
Number of Staff	57	26	62	37	29	21	37	54	44	31
Apportionment collected	\$13..9M	\$5.6M	\$9.6M	\$5.9M	\$7.7M	\$4.7M	\$11.1M	\$8.2M	\$8.0M	\$5.9M
Ethnic diversity	22%	11%	20%	6%	32%	12%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Theological Diversity										
Urbanization										
Overall Size and Complexity										

BW = Baltimore Washington
EPA = Eastern Pennsylvania
GNJ= Greater New Jersey
NE = New England
NY = New York

PDE= Peninsula Delaware
SQH= Susquehanna
UNY= Upper New York
WPA = Western Pennsylvania
WV = West Virginia

Conference Mission Fruitfulness										
	BW	EPA	GNJ	NE	NY	PD	SQH	UNY	WPA	WV
% of highly vital congregations	39%	26%	34%	25%	25%	26%	28%	20%	24%	22%
# of worshipers to make 1 profession of faith	16	18	18	19	17	22	23	23	24	32
% of worshipers in small groups	56%	53%	58%	43%	44%	45%	49%	39%	45%	47%
% of congregation spending on mission	16%	10%	14%	13%	12%	15%	14%	13%	14%	12%
% of congregations growing	35%	31%	39%	27%	31%	33%	30%	32%	32%	32%
10 year trend for worship attendance	(11%)	(19%)	(14%)	(16%)	(11%)	(13%)	(18%)	(24%)	(17%)	(14%)
Overall Fruitfulness										

Summary										
	BW	EPA	GNJ	NE	NY	PDE	SQH	UNY	WPA	WV
Size and Complexity										
Capacity										
Fruitfulness										

Conference Worship Attendance Size										
	BW	EPA	GNJ	NE	NY	PD	SQH	UNY	WPA	WV
2005	70,269	51,351	53,823	36,922	36,575	36,210	75,561	60,665	67,250	50,004
2009	66,863	45,624	49,482	34,267	36,080	33,567	68,785	54,639	61,494	47,141
2013	63,274	40,940	46,100	30,175	32,296	30,147	62,369	47,547	56,067	41,819
% Change	(11%)	(19%)	(14%)	(16%)	(11%)	(13%)	(18%)	(24%)	(17%)	(14%)

Observations

In the Northeastern Jurisdiction, the fastest *de-churching* culture is in the Northeastern part of the jurisdiction – Upper New York (UNY), New England (NE) and New York (NY). This coupled with the significant rural area in UNY and NE creates challenges for turnaround, sustainability and growth. New England is the most challenged conference within the jurisdiction in large part because of the rural area (1 church for every 94 square miles, small church size (average of 50 worshipers per church), and diminishing capacity. Creative and thoughtful strategy that includes church planting and evangelistic outreach is essential throughout the jurisdiction and particularly in the northeastern part of the jurisdiction.

The southwest part of the jurisdiction is the most churchied culture within the jurisdiction – West Virginia (WV), Western Pennsylvania (WPA), and Susquehanna (SQH). In spite of this, all three show challenges in the area of fruitfulness, particularly WV. Here again, in spite of a more favorable church culture, rural area and small average worship attendance create significant challenges for growth, mission and rejuvenation.

The greatest urbanization and/or diversity is within five conferences – Baltimore-Washington (BW), Eastern Pennsylvania (EPA), Greater New Jersey (GNJ), Peninsula Delaware (PD), and New York (NY). The greatest strength is in BW and GNJ. These two conferences are urban, diverse, have larger average worship attendance per church, have greater financial strength, have fewer square miles and have larger staffs. These traits provide opportunity for greater witness, mission, presence in the area and congregational resourcing.

While all of the NEJ conferences have been declining in worship attendance, four conferences have sharper declines. Three are more rural – UNY, SQH and WPA, and one is more urban, EPA.

While conference size tended to drive episcopal areas in the past, the emerging issues are complexity, capacity and fruitfulness. Conferences are becoming more diverse and more complex and require a balance between relational style leadership and strategic style leadership. No longer can a bishop be one or the other and lead a conference to health; both are required. Depending only on one style will mean the further detrition of capacity and fruitfulness.

Of the five smallest conferences by worship attendance, West Virginia and New England show challenges in several key indicators due largely to the rural nature of the conferences, de-churched culture (NE) and significantly less capacity. Three of the conferences, EPA, NY and PDE are experiencing challenges in several indicators while conferences near them are showing more fruitfulness. One reason may be because they are smaller conferences with less or declining capacity. Within these three conferences, there is potential for growth and turnaround and immediate steps should be taken to strengthen these conferences.

Recommendations

1. NEJ develops common and collaborative initiatives that includes jurisdiction-wide and cross conference boundaries strategies to:
 - a. Grow rural conferences
 - b. Grow evangelism strategies to connect with the non and nominally religious
 - c. Increase joint strategic thinking and learning within the bishops and grow the strategic skills of bishops
 - d. Reach a growing immigrant population

- e. Strengthen urban ministry
- f. Grow and strengthen smaller congregations
- g. Identify core competencies and characteristics for turnaround clergy leaders and collaborate to develop and implement leadership recruitment and development strategies
- h. Develop and strengthen a culture of legacy for small congregations that are nearing the end of their life cycle
- i. Explore jurisdiction staff or shared staff for urban ministry, evangelism, and reaching immigrant populations.