

A Common Table for Ministry

Our Context/Background

This is an exciting time in the Nebraska United Methodist Conference. There is great zeal for the mission, vision, core values, strategic initiatives and flow of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference. We have taken seriously our mandate to equip local churches for ministry. Three years ago the DiscipleMakers group took data gathered from members from around the conference in face-to-face meetings and from survey information and met for a year to craft the Nebraska United Methodist Conference Discipleship Plan approved at the 2006 Annual Conference Session.

The next year saw the Transition Team develop recommendations on how the Discipleship Plan would be accomplished. Those recommendations were adopted at the 2007 Annual Conference Session. During 2007-08, the second phase of the Transition Team's work embarked on giving those original recommendations structure and a plan for implementation.

Following are the Transition Team's recommendations for a new way to do ministry in the Nebraska Conference.

The key elements of the proposal include:

- 1) A primary focus on leadership development.
- 2) The introduction of The Common Table as an efficient and effective way to make strategic and conference business decisions.
- 3) The dissolution of a Council on Ministries, the sunset of all non-Disciplinary boards, commissions and committees, and the development of three strategic ministry teams.

Before presenting the recommendations, here is additional background on a tool used to identify the process or flow of disciple making. The flow of making disciples describes how the people of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference are focused, connected and working in their ministries. The flow describes how the body of Christ works together. The term "flow" refers to the primary process that leads congregations in developing world-changing disciples in the Nebraska Conference. One way to describe "flow" is to consider the work of the Holy Spirit among us. The Holy Spirit, creates and renews the church of Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, nations and races. The Holy Spirit is the manifestation of a ceaselessly working God who only wants the best for the community of believers. The Transition Team has named the work of the Holy Spirit among us, "The Flow."

The Flow

The following describes The Flow functions that work together to achieve the mission and vision of the Nebraska Conference.

Cast the Vision—Cast the vision means creating a culture that discerns God's vision as we engage in making disciples to transform the world.

Call Forth for Leadership—Provide environments that make people aware of their God-given gifts and encourage them to be responsive to their potential as servant leaders.

Develop Leaders—Develop ministries that provide leaders and potential leaders opportunities to deepen spiritually, identify and develop leadership skills to be a transforming presence in the church and the world.

Equip Congregations to Make Disciples—Create and sustain conference ministries and activities that empower each congregation with the people, information, and specific leadership training needed to fulfill the Six Signs of Discipleship.

Send Out to Transform the World—Cultivate ministries that inspire disciples to make a difference through acts of mercy and justice in the world.

All that we do together as United Methodists in Nebraska must be considered within The Flow. For instance, any strategy, objective or program must facilitate one or more parts of The Flow with the aim of sending the community of Christ out to transform the world.

Basic Structure

A structure of a Common Table and three teams is being proposed for the Nebraska United Methodist Conference.

The Common Table focuses on the overall strategic and administrative vision, system and flow for the conference.

Three teams focus on particular parts of The Flow and overall support:

Leadership Development—The Transition Team continues to hold up leadership development for clergy and laity as the primary focus. A critical element of leader development is the calling forth of people to be in ministry.

Congregational Transformation—Encompassing more than new church development, congregational transformation has the chief responsibility for equipping local churches for ministry.

Mission and Justice Work for the Transformation of the World—This is the visible and outward sign of our compassion, mercy and justice work in the world.

A Common Table

The Common Table structure is designed to support the conference's common work and help answer the question,

"What must happen to make disciples who transform the world?" Measures of success include the fruits of our ministry, the six signs of discipleship, as well as measures that could include increases in the number of people in weekly worship, the number of people participating in leadership development programs, the number of clergy participating in covenant groups, the number of people participating in risk-taking mission and justice work, etc. Quantitative measures will be used to articulate the progress of the work of The Common Table and the Teams. The proposed structure builds on the rich history of the Nebraska Conference and the work of the last several years through the DiscipleMakers and Transition Team.

The desired structure:

- Is built on the values, mission and vision of the conference.
- Brings various groups to the same table for conversation and alignment.
- Is flexible enough to adapt when needed.
- Develops common language, terminology and visual images.
- Enables teams to be more purpose oriented than administrative in function.
- Offers clear lines of accountability and responsibility with evaluative measures.

Integration

All areas of the structure are connected to and affected by the other areas. By working the process of The Flow, and by utilizing clear structure groups, we no longer work in isolation from each other. Instead, a framework emerges for organization, strategic work and implementation, and accountability is created that seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit at every level.

The recommended structure effectively undergirds and implements the mission and vision of the Nebraska Conference. Teams and methods of operating are being recommended. The goal is to strengthen the connection and streamline the organization so that the Conference can aid the local church to become more effective in making disciples who transform the world.

Function

The Common Table is comprised of spiritual leaders who focus on the “big picture.” This is the place where generative work is done to chart the vision. This generative or creative work is key for the conference to stay nimble and flexible as it cares for and sets the judiciary and strategic direction of the conference.

Function of the Common Table

- Creates a culture that discerns God’s vision for the Nebraska Conference.
- Casts the vision, monitors the flow, and ensures alignment to the mission and vision of the conference.
- Sets strategic direction and future for the annual conference guided by the Nebraska Annual Conference Session.
- Recommends Nebraska conference-wide strategies and initiatives and refers these to specific teams and groups.
- Monitors the connections between the groups in order to insure healthy relationships and effective implementation of strategy.
- Reports to and is accountable to the members of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference.
- Prepares and presents (with the help of CFA) the conference funding plan.
- Prepares and presents the conference staffing plan.

- Provides formats for conference-wide dialogue and input to address the issues, challenges and vision of the conference.
- Acts on behalf of the annual conference between sessions.
- Works closely with the cabinet and conference staff to support and resource the successful implementation of local church discipleship plans.
- Evaluates and holds accountable all missions and ministries of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference.
- Monitors the work of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference to ensure diversity and full inclusivity for all persons.
- Maintains transparency about decisions regarding Conference Programs and Ministries by making agenda of future meetings and minutes of past meetings available through UMConnect in time to allow for feedback.

The three teams operate using The Flow and help shape overall direction and support for conference, district and local church work. Teams are comprised of spiritual leaders who focus on the three strategic initiatives identified by the Nebraska United Methodist Conference.

Function of the Teams

- Uses the The Flow process to facilitate the achievement of one or more of the conference strategic initiatives.
- Develops and implements the work plan and funding plan for the Team's designated strategic area.
- Measures the effectiveness of the work plan.
- Develop new strategies as needed to achieve identified results and works with The Common Table to make sure strategies are aligned with the mission and vision of the annual conference.
- Builds bridges and cooperative activities among related groups. Actively seeks input and encourages dialogue.
- Understands how their work impacts and connects (feeds in and feeds out) to the other parts of the structure.
- Determines which committees, task forces, groups, etc., are necessary to implement the work plan for their part of The Flow.
- Is able to administer funding plan dollars allocated to the Team's strategic area.
- Maintains transparency about decisions regarding Conference Programs and Ministries by making agenda of future meetings and minutes of past meetings available through UMConnect in time to allow for feedback.

Composition of the Common Table

Common Table members have passion and skills in specific strategic areas that complement the strategic initiatives of the Nebraska Conference.

The Common Table members are selected for their particular ability to understand The Flow, frame the issues facing the conference, create and assign conference-wide strategies, and enable cooperative functioning of teams and task forces. The role of the persons from each area is not to “represent” a specific group or program, but to understand what is happening in that arena and connect with individuals and groups. The Teams’ primary role is to ensure its work plan is effective. Teams are to bring topics of concern to The Common Table, and The Common Table is to include others in its dialogue, as needed, to enhance its knowledge and understanding. The work of The Common Table is not to “micro manage” the teams, but to approve their ministry and funding plans and let them move forward.

Members of The Common Table would include:

Bishop (non-voting)

Convener

Leadership Development (five persons)

- Three at large
- One Board of Ordained Ministry representative
- The Conference Lay Leader

Congregational Transformation (three persons)

Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries (three persons)

District Superintendent

Conference Treasurer, Director of Administrative Services (non-voting)

Director of Connectional Ministries (non-voting)

CCFA Member (non-voting)

Members of the three Teams:

Each Team is composed of six to 12 people chosen for their passion, spiritual leadership, and willingness to work in an innovative fashion using the L3 Leadership model as a guide for the way the team works together—loving, learning and leading in a covenant relationship. (L3 Leadership is a model of the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Discipleship.) The L3 process of loving God, learning together and then leading will be the model for Team life. The Cabinet has been trained in the L3 process and spent the past year implementing L3 training in their districts. The L3 process is now moving into congregations. Team members may also be chosen for their expertise in a specific ministry area.

It is anticipated that each Team will meet for eight hours a month for the first year. Team building, identifying and understanding Team roles and implementation of the Conference Discipleship Plan strategies are among the Teams’ first tasks. Each Team’s work will benefit from the direction of and interaction with The Common Table.

How the Teams operate is of utmost importance. Each group will write its own covenant describing how it will live and work together, including such items as participation, prayer for each other, operating methods, minimum standards, etc. The covenant style is a shift away from administrative and reporting groups to purpose and accountability teams.

Teams have the authority to implement their ministry plan. Each Team must gain The Common Table endorsement on overall direction of work, however, once endorsed, the Team is responsible for implementing the details. No individual would serve on more than one Team in addition to The Common Table.

Leadership Development Team

Desired leadership characteristics and skill sets for clergy and lay leaders are identified in the Conference Discipleship Plan.

Signs of Vital Discipleship For Clergy

- Has a vital personal spiritual life.
- Excellent ability to preach, teach and lead worship.
- Self-differentiated, emotionally secure and able to connect with people without becoming enmeshed.
- Is a spirit-driven visionary living and working in The Flow.
- Practices sound stewardship including proportional giving working toward tithing.
- Models the six signs of discipleship in personal and public life.

Signs of Vital Discipleship for Laity

- Has a vital personal spiritual life.
- Is actively involved in the life of the church, helping to build a community of faith.
- Participates in at least one small group and provides leadership for others.
- Practices sound stewardship including proportional giving working toward tithing.
- Is Spirit-filled; able to share their faith in God with others.
- Models the signs of discipleship in personal life and in public.

The work of the Leadership Development Team will take on the development of a formalized Nebraska United Methodist Conference Leadership Academy. This Team's work will hone the recommendations from the 2007 Transition Team for spiritual and leadership formation, with the goal of empowering the local church to do ministry. The emphasis is on supporting the local church.

The original recommendation was for a series of academies. The current recommendation is for a single academy with many offerings for both clergy and lay people. The Leadership Development Team is responsible for program development for spiritual and leadership formation for all ages. This Team is charged with developing a children's spiritual growth program, rejuvenating a youth program, integrating young adult, adult and older adult ministries in order to achieve a continuum of life-long spiritual and leadership formation. In other words, spiritual calling forth is a key element of leadership development.

Most of the current monitoring committees will dissolve and be cared for within the academy offerings. Other groups' work will be evaluated for effectiveness and relevance to the conference strategic initiatives. This Team is responsible for program design that will deliver the recommendations set out in Transition Team work over the past two years. The illustration on page 8 shows how existing boards, commissions and committees will be cared for within the new structure. These existing groups will be working at the discretion of the Leadership Development

Team to determine the overall academy design and what group structures will be useful once the existing groups sunset in December of 2008.

Congregational Transformation Team

Congregational transformation will focus on two areas—equipping local churches for ministry so that new disciples are made through revitalized congregations; and the development of new congregations and faith communities through and with the transformation of existing congregations.

This Team is most engaged in providing training and resources to help churches achieve the Six Signs of Discipleship. It all begins with a church's individual discipleship plan with intentional outreach to their communities.

One of the goals of the Congregational Transformation Team is to create a new culture of churches that exhibit one or more of the following characteristics to the end that they achieve the Six Signs of Discipleship.

Characteristics of Congregational Transformation

- Centered on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Live out their commitment to disciple making.
- Exhibit diversity and multi-cultural acceptance.
- Provide culturally relevant experiences.
- Tries innovative and entrepreneurial ways of doing ministry.
- Boldly represent God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for the transformation of the world.

The 2007 Transition Team set a number of recommendations for equipping local churches. Chief among them were an improved database and technology platform, access to video resources and access to demographic and market data specific to individual communities.

The Congregational Transformation Team is charged with taking existing groups with congregational transformation interests and determine their effectiveness and evaluate their alignment with the conference strategic initiatives.

Again, existing boards, committees and commissions will sunset in December 2008. The Congregational Transformation program design and implementation is the responsibility of this Team. The existing groups cared for by this Team are shown on page 8. The program design will include a delivery system for such things as the steps to creating a church discipleship plan, best practices in the use of the Church Vitality Indicator, how to use the new conference demographic study service called MissionInsite, as well as a host of resources supporting the achievement of the Six Signs of Discipleship, such as hospitality training, worship resources, stewardship planning, spiritual formation and risk-taking mission and justice work.

Connectional work between and among the Teams will be standard operating procedure with The Common Table ensuring that integration occurs.

There are many opportunities for congregational transformation. Nebraska's population has changed drastically in the past 20 years. Who is better positioned to embrace our brothers and sisters in Christ than the people of the Nebraska United Methodist Church. We are called to address the changing needs and caring for the least of these in our society.

Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team

A three-year risk-taking mission and justice ministries emphasis on children and the poor was established during the 2007 Annual Conference Session. The work of this team will focus on delivering resources and support for the local church so that each congregation can incorporate impactful risk-taking mission and justice work into their church's discipleship plan. The goal of this Team is to facilitate focus to risk-taking mission and justice ministries and help develop individual characteristics for this work.

Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Characteristics

- Imitates the radical, counter-cultural witness of Jesus in daily life.
- Integrates John Wesley's personal piety and social holiness in spiritual journey.
- Understands evangelism to include the prophetic dimension of Scripture.
- Appreciates the local, national and global nature of our connectional witness.
- Understands the need to address not only direct service in missions but also systems and structures of power.
- Believes that the image of God is placed within every person, even those whom we call enemy.

The fruit of The Flow ministry process is most visible in risk-taking mission and justice work. This Team is charged with developing a continuum of support for churches engaging in this work.

One key strategy the Team will be asked to do is to evaluate and implement a district facilitator model. A district facilitator's primary role is to equip local churches to do risk-taking mission and justice work, to the end that not only systemic change is achieved, but in the process people are brought to the knowledge and saving grace of Jesus Christ.

The Team will be asked to review identified young adult and youth internship models for their application to the Nebraska Conference. Additionally, churches benefit when they understand and know how to use community organizing techniques and know how to discuss weighty issues using the holy conferencing style of dialogue.

The Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team will have the responsibility of the program design that will aid churches in all categories of risk-taking mission and justice work—education, mission, risk-taking mission and justice work. A theological understanding of these categories of work are integral to the Team's program design. These risk-taking mission and justice categories are in keeping with a continuum that begins with an individual's personal compassion and grows through trying to affect systemic change.

Existing boards, commissions and committees will sunset in December 2008. The Team will establish the program design and the needed group structures by evaluating existing ones and determining their effectiveness and alignment with the conference strategic initiatives. The current boards, committees and commissions cared for by this Team are illustrated on page 8.

Consistent with the two-year work of the Transition Team, the Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team's focus is on building local church capacity to understand and support the historical asset of the United Methodist connection. Most important in that understanding is the ability to tailor that work to each congregation's unique context or community.

Timeline

The new structure would take effect July 1, 2008. This gives The Common Table and the three new Teams approximately six months to further evaluate and align existing programming with the strategic initiatives.

The Teams will embark on developing new program designs with a goal of presenting those designs to The Common Table in January 2009.

Program design and implementation will continue throughout 2009 with any recommended board, commission or committee structure brought to The Common Table for review and endorsement.

Key in the work that takes place between July 2008 and January 2009 is meeting the Book of Discipline requirements for structure, ensuring that each area stipulated in the Discipline is cared for appropriately in the new Nebraska Conference structure. Also, a determination will need to be made regarding any necessary changes in the Nebraska Conference bylaws.

The goal is to implement new program designs throughout the 2009 funding plan year. In other words, the leadership academy becomes real with detailed program offerings. During 2009, congregational transformation resources will be further packaged for ease of use by the local church, which is another example of Team work during this transition.

Nomination Process

A pool of names was solicited and developed for the purpose of matching spiritual gifts with the leadership needs of the Nebraska Conference. The Conference Nominating Committee working closely with the Transition Team has identified a slate of candidates to fulfill the roles outlined for The Common Table and the three Teams.

Project Status Summary

Much research, time and commitment has been afforded to both the process for developing and perfecting the Conference Discipleship Plan and a structure recommendation to support it. The Flow process has guided much of this work and has also informed many intermediate steps already taken to begin to transform the Nebraska Conference.

Examples of those intermediate steps include the process for developing a local church discipleship plan around the Six Signs of Discipleship. Another example is the accountability model developed to work collaboratively between the Episcopal Office, District Superintendents, the Board of Ordained Ministry and the local church.

The Church Vitality Indicator and the L3 Leadership Incubator are both tools in support of leadership development and will be staples of the Leadership Development Academy. Professional development for new church start pastors was begun and will also be incorporated into the academy. A recent Laity Convocation offered training on the effective use of the local church Lay Leadership Committee. All of these examples point the way to a conference commitment to leadership development.

The three Teams will build on these first steps to design programs and delivery systems to empower local congregations to do ministry relevant to where they live.

Transition Team

The Transition Team members met monthly during 2008 (sometimes twice) as a whole group with subgroup assignments in-between. Subgroups often included United Methodists not on the designated Transition Team, but who hold expertise valuable to the Team's work.

The group crafted a covenant at the beginning of the year and was faithful to its commitments and standards of conduct throughout. Many committed United Methodists, both laity and clergy, devoted much time and talent to the

development of this proposal. Please recognize Transition Team member contributions and keep them in your prayers. Marilyn Moore and Darrell Stock serve as co-chairpersons. The Rev. Steve Griffith serves as recorder/secretary. Team members include Bishop Ann B. Sherer, the Rev. Chad Anglemeyer, Jerry Bockoven, District Superintendent Carol Roettmer Brewer, Pastor Ann Gatobu, Rev. Doug Griger, Pastor Pauletta Lehn, Rev. Mel Luetchens, Lisa Maupin, Gabriela Machado, Lavina Schwaninger, Rev. Russ Tompkins, Rev. Jim Wallasky, Tom Watson and Kathryn Witte.

Many others were involved in small adhoc groups on an asneeded basis. Staff members also contributed to the process. Donna Gaither from the General Board of Discipleship served as a strategic consultant using the principles from the L3 Leadership program.

Once a new structure is accepted, the Transition Team will work with the Nominating Committee to begin turning the work over to The Common Table and the Teams.

Current Events, Programs, Boards, Committees and Commissions and Where They Will Be Cared For

As the current configuration of boards, commissions and committees sunset in December 2008, the work of these groups will be cared for by the Teams as indicated below. Any group not listed below will be cared for by the Team for which it has the most affinity. Disciplinary considerations will be closely monitored.

The Common Table

Transition Team
Council on Finance and Administration
Board of Trustees
Board of Pension and Health Benefits
Technology
Archives and History
Committee on Equitable Compensation
Personnel Committee
Investigative Committee
Administrative Review Committee
Episcopacy Committee
Annual Conference Planning Committee
United Methodist Foundation
Representative to Institutional Boards
Representatives to United Methodist Related Institutions and Agencies
Representatives to Ecumenical Ministries
District Committee on Location and Building

Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team

Peace With Justice Ministries
Christian Unity and Interfaith Ministry
United Methodist Committee on Relief
Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee
Health Committee
Mission Share Funds for Mission and Justice Work
Board of Mission Outreach
Rural Response Committee
Disaster Coordinators

Children and Poverty
Hunger Committee
Nigeria/Nebraska Partnership
Bishop's Committee on Children and the Poor
Disaster Committee
Volunteers In Mission Committee
Disaster Coordinators
Volunteer In Mission Coordinator
Native American Ministries Committee

*United Methodist Men

*United Methodist Women

*UMW and UMM are independent organizations and relate to the Risk-taking Mission and Justice Ministries Team.

Leadership Development Team

Youth Ministries Council
Commission on the Status and Role of Women
Christian Social Witness
Clergy Ethics
Board of Ordained Ministry
Board of Laity and Discipleship
Superintendency Committee
Lay Leaders
Lay Speaking Committee
Nominating and Equipping
Camping and Retreat Development Committee
Higher Education/Campus Ministry
District Committees
Commission on Religion and Race
Healing Amidst Conflict/Unity Amidst Diversity
District Committees on Ordained Ministries & Superintendency
Stewardship

Congregational Transformation Team

Council on Ministries
Congregational Development
Resource Development Committee
Communications Commission
Hispanic Ministries Committee
Small membership churches

2009 Funding Plan—Making Disciples to Transform the World

Funding the Strategic Priorities

The five categories of the 2009 Funding Plan align with the ministry initiatives of the Nebraska United Methodist Conference. As the Funding Plan shifts to match the recommended change in structure, the following pages show the 2007 and 2008 Funding Plan information for comparison purposes, while at the same time demonstrating the shift in structure.

The Common Table and its three Teams will further define the 2009 ministry plans, especially Section IV, to provide specific allocations for ministry programs. While this funding plan requires a great deal of trust, it aligns dollars with priorities to encourage greater disciple making in the conference. At the same time, it provides flexibility to The Common Table and its Teams as they strengthen ministries to achieve greater effectiveness and accountability.

How the Dollars Are Allocated

The pie chart (above right) represents the five categories of the 2009 Funding Plan. The pie chart illustrates how the 2009 Funding Plan matches funding to the strategic priorities and recommended structure. Dollars have been allocated to the Teams and The Common Table to carry out their ministry objectives. The work for the Teams and The Common Table over the next 18 months will be to design and implement each Team's ministry program within the allocated Funding Plan.

Feedback

This an exciting time in the Nebraska United Methodist Conference. There is renewed vigor and urgency in our work in making disciples to transform the world. The Common Table and the establishment of three Teams will empower the conference to further invigorate our work together. Bringing the administrative and ministry arms of the conference together for holy conferencing around the strategic direction and the funding plans for the conference is a milestone in creating integrated ministry best suited to serve the local church.

Your feedback to this plan is important to us. Please take the time to complete the survey located on our Web site at www.umcneb.org/feedback. Click on the "Feedback" button to access the survey. The survey includes areas for open comments.

For any other questions or concerns please contact the Rev. Chad Anglemyer at 402-464-5994 or canglemyer@umcneb.org.