

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NEW NEBRASKA-KANSAS EPISCOPAL AREA**

### **Why is this change being made?**

Delegates to the 2008 General Conference changed the formula that is used to allocate the number of bishops across the church. That action affects four of the five jurisdictional conferences in the United States, with each, including the South Central Jurisdiction, having one less bishop. The action leaves the South Central Jurisdiction with 10 bishops in 2012, rather than the 11 under the previous formula.

### **How are Episcopal Area boundaries established?**

The Book of Discipline gives the bishops in each area – known as the College of Bishops – the responsibility for establishing episcopal areas. An episcopal area can have one or more annual conferences. This authority is given in Paragraph 48 of the *2008 Book of Discipline* and Judicial Council Decisions 517 and 735. This action by the South Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops designates the boundaries of the 10 episcopal areas allotted to the jurisdiction.

### **What options were considered before reaching a final decision?**

The College of Bishops, consisting of active and retired bishops from within the jurisdiction, considered a wide range of alternatives. Options were put on the table that affected every annual conference in some way. Some options required considerable discussion. Some ideas required redrawing boundaries of annual conferences; some called for merging conferences; some called for aligning them into areas even though they were not geographically contiguous. Each option was weighed against the values of mission, demographics, geography, level of disruption, workload of bishops, long-term viability, and cultural affinity.

### **Will this change prompt other changes in the Jurisdiction?**

In its work, the College of Bishops recognizes there is a need for further study of our alignment, resources, and conference boundaries. The college will petition the 2012 Jurisdictional Conference to create a study process, known as Mission 21, to examine how we can best align resources and conference boundaries to accomplish our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The college will work with the annual conferences throughout this study.

### **When did this process begin?**

The College of Bishops began discussions about the process in June 2008 and began the process at the 2008 South Central Jurisdictional Conference in Dallas in July. At the Jurisdictional Conference, Bishop Ben Chamness, who was then president of the College, outlined the process in a report to the conference.

### **Who was involved in the decision-making process?**

Members of the College believed it was vital to seek opinions from laity and clergy throughout the jurisdiction before considering any options and making a decision. A questionnaire was distributed to each member of the jurisdictional conference, seeking feedback on the most

important criteria in determining episcopal area boundaries. A web site was created to receive additional feedback from laity and clergy. The information was then collected and developed into a report by the Rev. Dr. Lovett Weems of the Lewis Center for Church Leadership.

Information from Dr. Weems' report served as the foundation for listening sessions conducted by active bishops in each of the jurisdiction's 15 annual conferences in the spring of 2009. These sessions generated more ideas and responses.

### **What came out of the feedback and listening sessions?**

Clearly, clergy and laity wanted a solution that furthers the mission of the church – to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And they wanted an outcome which positions the church for future ministry, provides the least disruption to the mission, strengthens the viability of all the annual conferences, and reflects demographic trends in the region.

### **How did the College of Bishops reach its final decision?**

Members of the College studied the responses from the feedback and listening sessions, and discussed the various options during several of the College's meetings. They shared a host of creative alternatives, prayed together, and spent time in discernment with every active bishop and many retired bishops participating. The final decision was reached during a meeting of the College in August 2009, and announced on Sept. 18, 2009.

### **When will the new boundaries take effect?**

According to the *Book of Discipline*, the new episcopal area will take effect on Sept. 1, 2012.

### **Who will determine what happens to the three conferences that comprise the new area?**

United Methodists who live within the area will determine the mission and ministry of the new area. The South Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops is committed to a process of self-determination for the conferences in the area.

### **What do you mean by “self-determination?”**

The principle reason for announcing this decision early in the current quaddrennium is to maximize the opportunity for the conferences most directly affected to determine for themselves how best to work together under the assignment of one bishop. The transition process began upon the announcement of the new episcopal area. The two bishops, Bishop Ann Sherer of Nebraska, and Bishop Scott Jones of Kansas, immediately began communicating with leaders from the three annual conferences. A transition team will be named to develop a plan of ministry and organization for the new area.

### **Who pays for the transition and creation of the new area?**

The bishops from areas not affected by this decision have each committed to raise \$10,000 for a pool of funds to assist the conferences. From those additional funds, the conferences will be able to hire a consultant to guide them through this crucial planning and transition.

### **What will be the name of the new episcopal area?**

It will be up to the three conferences to determine if they desire to change the name.

**Where will be bishop be headquartered?**

That is one of the many questions to be answered by the transition team and approved by the three conferences as they plan for the future of the new episcopal area.

**Who will be the bishop for the new area?**

That the Jurisdictional Conference upon recommendation of the South Central Jurisdiction Committee on the Episcopacy will make decision, as prescribed by Paragraph 406 of the 2008 *Book of Discipline*. Each conference is represented on the committee. Bishop Sherer is scheduled to retire on Sept. 1, 2012, and Bishop Jones will have completed eight years of service to the Kansas Area in 2012.

**What happens with the three conferences in the episcopal area?**

This is perhaps one of the most exciting elements of the self-determination process that is now underway. United Methodists in those conferences will decide what happens to the conferences. They have a unique opportunity to look at mission, ministry, and their calling to make disciples of Jesus Christ. They have an opportunity to develop a vision of future ministry with the possibility of dramatically reshaping United Methodist ministry in the two states. The College of Bishops believes this opportunity is a gift from God, coming at an opportune moment in the life of the church. They have made their decision early in the quadrennium to maximize the time available for visioning and planning.

**What will happen to the existing organizations, staff, properties, and programs that already exist in the three annual conferences?**

The answers to these important questions, again, will be determined through this transitional self-determination process. Working together, the conferences will decide how they align, cooperate, and work together for the future to best serve Christ and the people in the two states. The United Methodist Church has a long and fruitful history of ministry in these states. The future is wide open for new forms of ministry to make disciples and serve the people.

