

**HOLSTON CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**  
**CONFERENCE STRATEGY TEAM**

**PROPOSAL**

HOLSTON ANNUAL CONFERENCE

JUNE 2017

In the early days of the Christian Church, Paul encouraged fledgling churches to be mindful of their unified role in revealing God’s vast wisdom through the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

*“Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God’s grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in Him.”* **Ephesians 3:7-12**

Our faithful commitment to this role compels us to examine the health of the Church today as it fulfills its mission through the Holston Conference of The United Methodist Church. This examination leads us to believe we can revitalize and fortify our mission to bring people into a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ.

These recommendations from the Holston Conference Strategy Team provide more effective and contemporary means for carrying out the mission of the Church in a dynamic and challenging world. At the core of this Proposal is a periodic ‘health check’ to maintain a high level of fruitfulness in carrying out its mission for generations to come for the Holston Conference.

I. THE PROCESS

*“The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.”*

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016, §120*

The work of the Holston Conference Strategy Team, (‘HCST’), builds upon the foundation for change begun well before the HCST was established. The conversation has evolved during the tenures of previous episcopal leadership in Holston Conference. It has included the insight of church consultants,

dedicated lay and clergy of Holston Conference and various teams and task forces created to examine how Holston Conference can enhance its effectiveness in making disciples of Christ in a changing world. The history and findings of previous iterations of these efforts provided the groundwork upon which the HCST has worked to discern God's vision for the people and ministries of Holston Conference.

More recently, we were privileged to hear the wisdom and experience of Bishop Robert Schnase of the Missouri Conference of The United Methodist Church. Bishop Schnase is author of *Seven Levers: Missional Strategies for Conferences*, a guide for strategic development in a Conference setting. We also received guidance from renowned church consultant, Dr. Tom Bandy, in examining the structure of our Conference to maximize our resources and tools for mission.

As an outgrowth of these conversations, a committee was established in September of 2015 with the initial objective of re-designing district boundaries to enhance our ability to do ministry and to best utilize our resources more efficiently for the advancement of our mission. It was assumed that many of the objectives for mission and ministry could be achieved by simply consolidating and strengthening our districts.

However, as we began to meet with and discuss these objectives with groups and members of Holston Conference, it became evident that the needs and issues raised in feedback required a much more comprehensive approach. It became necessary to address the elements of change that would accomplish a new vision for vital mission and ministry in Holston Conference. At this point, the committee (originally set up as a 're-districting' effort) emerged as the Holston Conference Strategy Team.

In navigating its mission, the HCST has been conscientiously attuned to the ideas and concerns of the people and groups who make up Holston Conference. During our initial consultations, we received hundreds of comments and suggestions from clergy and laypersons. All of these comments and suggestions were thoroughly reviewed and discussed. In the course of processing this feedback, we were able to discern several recurring issues along a broad spectrum of ideas that gave credence to their importance. While these recurring issues formed a core for examination and discussion, we were also open to various insights and ideas of individuals who were perceptive to needs that may not have been universally recognized, but were seen as significant issues that deserved attention.

In addition to processing feedback from within our Conference, we also examined the strategies of other Conferences and church-related groups (who were undertaking similar initiatives) to help guide our decision-making.

During our thoughtful examination of the 'life' of Holston Conference, we were guided by recent developments in our region and denomination. One development of note was the 2012 General Conference designation that District Superintendents are to be 'Chief Missional Strategists'. Another emphasis of The United Methodist Church is to help lay and clergy in their development as leaders and to seek out and identify new leadership for the Church. Also, we have considered the painful struggle within our denomination with social issues that passionately divide and weaken us. In our region we recognize the monumental changes in population, economic growth and contraction, socioeconomic diversity, transportation routes, and shifting municipalities within the boundaries of Holston Conference – and yet the external structure of the Conference has largely remained unchanged since the 1950s.

We recognized that while re-aligning the district boundaries to more closely reflect the areas of mission and ministry of our Conference was still integral to a new vision, other structural changes were necessary to accomplish making the Church more fruitful. Our vision grew as the value of the 'Connection' was revealed in the various ministry and mission needs we were attempting to meet. These collective goals required that changes needed to be made in tandem to be effective; that a *Comprehensive* Conference Strategy was necessary.

What emerged after a year of thorough examination, discussion, and prayerful consideration was a Strategic Plan comprised of seven (7) elements that we feel will comprehensively impact the effectiveness of Holston Conference to fulfill its role as the church in mission and ministry in today's world. But there's more. The Strategic Plan being proposed is not just a set of recommendations to help Holston Conference synchronize its mission to today's mission field, but is a mechanism for future leaders of Holston Conference to utilize periodically to easily and effectively adapt and modify its structure to meet emerging needs in a changing world as we journey together as a Conference into God's future.

## II. WHY CHANGE?

The catalyst for change was the recognition that today's Church faces unprecedented challenges in how we communicate the message of the Gospel, the ways we engage new generations of persons disconnected with the institutional Church, and a breakdown in unity of spirit and grace in a world of conflicting perspectives and ideas.

We are moved by the foresight that things are changing. Social issues, division, distrust, globalization, and anxiety about the future have encroached upon our daily lives. We had grown accustomed to a life cycle in the church where children grew up in the church, went to college or new jobs as young adults, often strayed from the church, yet returned when they settled down and began raising a family. That life cycle no longer applies and many young families do not return to the church. Children and young adults are no longer routinely being raised in the church family. Many are struggling with questions but not looking to the church for answers. The mainstream Church of the 1950s that occupied a central role in society has given way to a Church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that must govern itself more wisely and efficiently to accomplish the same goals.

We are increasingly cynical about institutions and also distrustful of leadership. We lack confidence in the ability of our organizations to meet our needs. The church is clearly among those institutions suffering from these perceptions. Some perceptions are valid, others the consequence of dysfunctional public leadership in general.

But the Church is not just another institution.

The Church is the body of Christ incarnate in the world today. We are all members of this body and properly see ourselves as brothers and sisters, the children of God who are called to see the world

differently. We each have a role in creating space for the Kingdom of God to break through—here on Earth—by helping bring each other into a transformative relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

We are different.

God reveals to each of us the special ways in which we are called. We are compelled to share the amazingly transformational experience that a relationship with Jesus Christ brings. In addition to our individual transformation, we seek the transformation of the World, where kindness, mercy, justice, compassion, and love fulfill our desire to fully be what God created us to be.

Out of this realization that the church needs to be more agile and responsive to the changing needs of God’s beloved children, we created ‘new’ wineskins to live into this new vision of what the Church needs to be in our time – and in the future.

### III. WHAT

The Comprehensive Conference Strategy has seven (7) components, each of which is realized by recommended changes to structure and emphasis, systematic use of evaluative tools, and completely new designs for mission and ministry:

#### 1. Re-Connecting the Connection:

*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*  
**John 13:34-35**

*“There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidences of God’s grace in the body of Christ. The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another. All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence and to be guided by the Spirit into the truth that frees and the love that reconciles.”*

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016, §131*

**Because** as one Body of Christ, we recognize that we are stronger working together, we commit ourselves to nurturing a trusting relationship. One way we do this is by intentionally communicating the stories that reveal the value of our connectional relationship and by strengthening this vital relationship as we:

- **shift the source and focus of ministry programming and leadership from a centralized Conference level to the local church level**

- **seek and share stories of missional and ministry achievements at the local church and district level as a means of instruction to others as well as collective rejoicing in God’s work**
- **unite clergy persons, lay persons, and congregations in their ministry with their local church and throughout the Holston Conference by resourcing and empowering people through the connectional system**

This element of the Strategy is first in recognition of its importance. However, it is also admittedly the least defined, because its success is derived from the success of the overall Comprehensive Conference Strategy. If innovative and effective ministry is accomplished by implementing other elements of the Comprehensive Strategy, the strengthening of our Connection is also necessarily achieved. The purpose here is to inform, equip, and enable churches, lay, clergy, and districts. All of these will realize greater success for the Kingdom of God by working collaboratively and by sharing our burdens and resources, our successes and failures with those who support each other as the One Body of Christ.

## 2. Supporting Our Clergy and Churches:

*A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer.  
Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.* **Ecclesiastes 4:12**

At the very core of our Methodist heritage, John Wesley exhorted followers of Christ in the Methodist way to commit to accountability with each other. Wesley understood the importance of support, encouragement, and discipline. The clergy must meet regularly to learn, share each other’s burdens, and equip each other for the challenging call to be ministers in the Church.

Many clergy already participate in informal accountability groups in addition to district meetings and other opportunities for fellowship. We encourage the evaluation of mandatory meetings and fellowship opportunities on a district level, while insisting that those who do not presently participate in a Clergy Small Group create one or seek one to join. The District Superintendent will help shepherd clergy into Clergy Small Group participation by either: 1-helping them find a group, 2-creating a group, or 3-encouraging an existing group to receive additional members.

Additionally, Missional Hubs will be created in each district. A Missional Hub is a region within a district determined by a strategic, geographic grouping of four to ten congregations within that region. The purpose of each Missional Hub is to coordinate, encourage, and facilitate mutual support among clergy and laity in making a transformative impact on the people in their region. The objectives include, but are not limited to: 1) developing cooperative support among clergy and congregations; 2) identifying the assets, strengths, and opportunities available to meet the needs within their shared mission field, and; 3) collaborating and partnering in fruitful mission and ministry. The general spirit of these gatherings should take shape around the questions: “What can we accomplish together, working cooperatively and collaboratively, that we cannot accomplish, either as well or at all, by ourselves?”

Laity and clergy involvement is essential for the Missional Hub to work. The lay leaders best suited to take the lead in this effort may not be the currently elected officers of the congregation. Instead, key participants should be identified by asking, “Who has a passion for the mission of the church in this way and a proven track record of leadership in or outside of the church?” These Missional Hubs will create opportunities to share struggles and rejoice in successes, learn from each other, and exchange resources to better meet the ministry needs of the mission fields in which we live.

**Because** we want to encourage and support fruitful leadership among clergy and laity, nurture healthy professional relationships, and reach compliance with *Discipline* standards for periodic clergy evaluation, we offer the following measures:

- **All clergy shall actively participate in at least one Clergy Small Group. The goal of the Clergy Small Group is to include spiritual and emotional support and accountability to their calling. Each clergy member will be asked to report to his or her District Superintendent confirming he or she is participating in a Clergy Small Group, describing the frequency with which the Clergy Small Group meets, and identifying the names of other members of the Clergy Small Group. Best practices in how to start, end, and grow Clergy Small Groups will be made available to District Superintendents.**
- **The Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) will implement the action of the 2016 United Methodist General Conference found in paragraph 349, section 3 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline* that requires a formal 6-month clergy evaluation to take place every eight (8) years to ensure that each clergy person is continuing to discern and progress in his or her call to ministry. NOTE: BOM will decide and recommend how to use volunteers and staff to accomplish this goal.**
- **Each district shall create its own form of ‘Missional Hub’ structure so that clergy and congregations cultivate shared ministry. Various examples from within our Conference and the General Church will be made available to District Superintendents.**
- **The Appointment Cabinet will continue to give prayerful discernment regarding the mission field of congregations and the distinct gifts and graces of clergy when making clergy appointments.**

### 3. Right-Sizing the Districts:

*“And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. The he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest’.”* **Matthew 9:35-38**

**Because** right-sizing Holston Conference’s districts offers a new opportunity to allocate financial and human resources and bring fresh energy to our mission, we propose the following evaluative mechanism. This formula enhances the agility to respond to cultural changes and shifts in population within Holston Conference and to discern the appropriate size and location of the districts that comprise Holston Conference:

- **The Conference Strategy Team, in consultation with the Bishop and the Cabinet, shall propose the boundaries and size of each new district by evaluating the following criteria throughout Holston Conference:**
  1. **Mission Field**
  2. **Population**
  3. **Urbanization**
  4. **Number of Clergy and Churches Supervised**
  5. **Financial Resources**
  6. **Geography**

**Because** it is necessary to reduce the number of districts in Holston Conference to accomplish the goal of realizing the appropriate size and the boundaries of the districts:

- **The Conference Strategy Team proposes that the number of districts in Holston Conference be reduced from 12 districts to 9 districts.**

The purpose for evaluating the size and location of Holston’s districts is to provide the *means* by which the rest of the Comprehensive Conference Strategy can be effectively accomplished. The present location and boundaries of Holston’s 12 districts are based upon population data, transportation routes, and church locations that existed in the 1950s. Although the 12 districts with which we are familiar have served valuable ministries for the advancement of the Kingdom of God for years – something for which we give God great glory – the reality in 2017 is that people don’t live where they used to, churches don’t exist where they used to, the diverse make-up of the people who live in our mission field is different than it used to be, and the resources available for mission and ministry are not what they used to be.

We are consistently called by God to wisely use the resources God has graciously provided: human, physical property, and financial – for efficient and effective use to make disciples of Christ. By evaluating the boundaries and size of the districts in 2017, we are simply acting to ensure that Holston Conference is optimally structured to be more effective in carrying out its mission. This evaluative process will determine the exact size and boundaries of districts that makes sense to achieve these goals.

The primary goal is to equalize – to the greatest extent possible – each of the preceding metrics so there is relative equity in the distribution of resources among all of the districts of Holston Annual Conference.

Recognizing that a completely even distribution is not achievable due to geography and other factors, the intent is to diminish the disproportionate range that presently exists among districts due to shifts in population, church locations, and economic fluctuations in certain geographic regions.

In addition to the obvious consideration of population and financial resources, urbanization is a key metric in deciding upon the boundaries of each district. There was a recognition that key ‘anchor’ churches – providing leadership and collaborative energy to neighboring churches – are often located in metropolitan areas.

The Team also recognized that the current number of clergy supervised by District Superintendents ranges from 38 to 66. A reduction in the number of districts will increase the number of clergy supervised, but the intent is to not exceed a manageable number. Creating new internal structures, such as ‘Missional Hubs’, can relieve District Superintendents from administrative overload and create space for District Superintendents to more effectively and creatively be Chief Missional Strategists.

Additional scrutiny must be given to the actual geographic area – the unique attributes of topography, transportation, cultural alliances, etc., to see if the boundaries ‘make sense’ from a practical standpoint.

Finally, specific missional priorities and realities will be examined to ensure that the financial, population, clergy, district, and local church resources are situated to provide the support necessary to address the specific missional needs of that area.

Our assessment reveals that the reducing the number of districts in Holston Conference from twelve (12) districts to nine (9) districts accomplishes this goal. Although the exact boundaries and size of those districts will need to be determined through the comprehensive process outlined above, as a preliminary step, we are asking the Conference to approve this structural change to allow the comprehensive assessment of district size and boundaries to move forward.

Data reflecting the impetus for action and a map projecting the approximate location of these 9 districts are attached as Appendices to this report. The rendering of the districts in this map necessarily show only general estimated locations because, in accordance with Paragraph 415.4 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016*, it is the Bishop in consultation with the District Superintendents who has authority to set the actual boundaries of the districts. Approval of the evaluative procedure described above will insure that the deliberative process setting the boundaries incorporates these key elements of healthier and more resourceful districts.



4. Revitalizing The Conference Life: Evaluating The Health of Our Boards,  
Committees & Agencies:

*There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.*

**I Corinthians 12:4-6**

**Because** it is healthy to evaluate the way we do things and to cultivate a broader and deeper circle of leadership in the Conference:

- **The Holston Conference Strategy Team will convene a Task Force to evaluate the purpose, effectiveness, and role of each Conference committee, agency, board, and team to ensure that it is accomplishing its purpose in alignment with the Conference missional objectives based on the Four Areas of Focus<sup>1</sup> identified by The United Methodist Church.**

**The task force will be responsible for the following:**

- i. Where it is found that a Conference committee, agency, board, or team no longer fulfills its role in Conference missional objectives, it will either be modified, merged, or eliminated, understanding that no committee required by the *Discipline* will be eliminated or modified beyond its prescribed function.**
- ii. Where it is found that a Conference missional objective or ministry is not presently being met by an existing committee, board, team, or agency, such a committee, board, team, or agency will be proposed for creation.**
- iii. All persons serving on any committee, board, team, and/or agency will be trained for the purpose of educating, clarifying, and defining the purpose of the group and the requirements of the *Discipline* as it applies to that group.**
- iv. The Conference Nominating Committee will continue to identify and cultivate new leadership among the laity and clergy of Holston Conference. Recognizing that many talented and uniquely skilled persons do not presently participate in Conference leadership positions, the Conference will enhance leadership opportunities by:**
  - 1. Where appropriate, the Conference will create ‘short-term/defined purpose’ project-based teams to address specific needs and concerns that arise**

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<sup>1</sup> See ‘Glossary of Terms’ at conclusion of Report for details of the Four Areas of Focus

2. **Evaluating meeting times and locations as well as technological and communication tools to create more opportunities for persons in other fields and professions to participate more easily from a logistical standpoint**

5. Exercising Our Financial Stewardship:

*“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...”*

**Ecclesiastes 3:1**

**Because** it is necessary to prioritize the allocation of our resources to prioritize our mission of saving souls over saving structures:

- a. **The Cabinet and the Conference and District entities responsible for congregational development will collaboratively conduct a ‘Wellness Check’ of local church charges and ministry programs to discern if resources flowing to a local church charge or ministry program would be more fruitfully re-directed to other church charges or ministry programs;**
- b. **The ‘Wellness Check’ will be conducted at each ‘health check’ period, by evaluating the following criteria:**
  - i. **The amount of financial resources being directed to the local church charge or ministry program**
  - ii. **Review of church statistics and Vital Signs**
  - iii. **Assessment of the ministry/community and mission field in view of the overall missional objectives of Holston Conference**

Our Christian faith and teaching informs our sense of vitality and vanquishes the fear of death – even to the outward manifestations of ministry reflected in our churches and ministries.

There are times when our churches and church facilities are no longer capable of serving their roles as vital congregations growing the Kingdom of God. Arriving at such a determination is a painful conclusion, because each church, congregation, and ministry was born out of a vision, hope, and desire to serve God fruitfully. But when it becomes apparent that a church is about to close, we are called to celebrate its life, its meaning – and allow it to experience a dignified closure – so that the resources used to extend its existence can be re-directed for the re-birth of ministry or a new congregation in a more fertile manner.

The expression ‘saving souls over saving structures’ serves to express the priority of our call to make disciples over covering the costs of a local church that can no longer sustain itself. This is how we respond to God’s call to use God’s gifts wisely and with discernment.

However, we also recognize that there are some churches and ministries that – while not self-sustaining and in need of external resources to survive – are nonetheless of such critical importance to our missional objectives, that additional resources are required to sustain them. The availability of additional resources that are re-directed from closed churches and ministries may make these critical churches and ministries viable. And in doing so, we experience the beautiful life-cycle of God’s creation revealed in death and rebirth.

Finally, this formal analysis will benefit the Conference in strategically discerning the wellness of churches and ministries on a periodic and uniform basis of analysis. In doing so, it maintains our focus on the stewardship of our resources and ensuring that inefficient drains of resources are quickly identified and resolved.

#### 6. Staffing the Conference for Districts and Local Churches:

*I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything.* **John 15:5**

**Because** a revised model for staffing in Holston Conference will help districts and local churches better discern their mission fields, connect them with resources to fulfill their missions, and align them with the 4 major areas of focus established by our denomination, we propose the following:

**An evaluative mechanism will be used to determine if the deployment of Holston Conference personnel is configured to maximize the fruitful development of mission and ministry in Holston Conference:**

- **The Conference Strategy Team will convene a task force in consultation with the Conference Personnel Resources Committee to conduct a ‘vision-based’ assessment of Conference personnel to determine:**
  - i. **If there are logistical impediments to access Conference expertise and resources needed to conduct ministry at the local church and district level**
  - ii. **If Conference personnel are deployed so that they are easily accessible, either physically and/or via video technology to interact with local churches and districts to ensure coordinated efforts in ministry throughout the Conference**

- **The Conference Personnel Resources Committee shall make recommendations to the Bishop and the Executive Team for the deployment of Conference staff, including the number of staff and positions necessary to carry out the fruitful ministry of districts and local churches throughout the Conference, in addition to where staff will be physically located, and positioned to meet the following objectives:**
  - i. **develop a closer relationship with and among local church and district staff through Missional Hubs to share a greater understanding of mission and ministry in those geographical areas and to promote these ministries throughout the Conference**
  - ii. **promote resources and assistance to local church and district staff through Missional Hubs in either providing or locating expertise in specific areas of ministry**
  - iii. **provide liaison assistance and professional services to local churches and districts in matters relating to denominational responsibilities, finance administration, budgeting and other areas as required by the *Book of Discipline***
- **The Director of Connectional Ministries, along with the District Superintendent, will connect with each district missional hub to maximize capabilities. The objective of this collaboration shall be to help and encourage districts and local churches to use programs such as *MissionInsite* to determine the makeup of the mission field in their area(s).**

#### 7. Communication:

*But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them?*

**Romans 10:14**

**Because** we recognize that the manner in which we communicate has evolved dramatically in just a few years, we evolved as well. Because we know the critical importance of communication to achieve unity in mission and understanding, we recognize that the Conference requires a dedicated focus to achieve a reliable and accessible means of communication. We can do this in the following ways:

- **The Holston Conference Strategy Team shall convene a Task Force which includes professionals in the field of mass communications, in consultation with the Communications Advisory Council, to evaluate the current technological capabilities of Holston Conference and, in response, to determine how to most efficiently communicate with – and nurture communication among – local churches and districts**

- **Invest in the technology and professional staff or contractors to develop the communication capabilities of Holston Conference by incorporating new and innovative technology that redefines the manner in which various teams, members, clergy, and lay persons interact and communicate with each other to conduct the mission of the church.**
- **Develop a web presence that is not only a website where information can be broadcast, but a means for engagement with individuals utilizing content generated by the Church – and which also serves as the preferred site for locating resources and equipping people in Holston Conference for ministry at the local church and district levels.**

#### IV. EMBRACING CHANGE

**Because** we understand that our call to bring people into a transformative relationship with Jesus Christ requires us to continually monitor, evaluate, and adopt new, relevant, and contemporary means to engage the world in mission and ministry:

1. In the year following the meeting of The United Methodist Church’s General Conference, the Resident Bishop of Holston Conference will convene the Conference Strategy Team to examine the life of the Conference by using the evaluative tools set forth above to recommend changes to the Conference structure, if any.
2. At the gathering of the Holston Annual Conference subsequent to the Conference Strategy Team examination, referred to as a ‘Health Check’, the Conference Strategy Team will present a Report to the Annual Conference assessing the health of the Conference and offering recommendations for modifications to the Conference structure to ensure maximum fruitfulness of its mission, and ministry. The Team shall oversee the implementation of changes, if any, adopted by the Annual Conference.
3. The Conference Strategy Team will be a standing team of the Holston Annual Conference and will be set up in three panels that will rotate. The Resident Bishop will name the members of the team.
4. The Conference Strategy Team will consist of no less than nine (9) and no more than fifteen (15) members. No more than three (3) Conference Strategy Team members can serve consecutive terms on the Conference Strategy Team.

## V. WHEN

The Comprehensive Conference Strategy set forth in this proposal is the fruit of many hours and days over the course of several years of dialogue, discussion, feedback, debate, evaluation, and revision.

The end-product is a Strategic Plan for *change*.

The Comprehensive Conference Strategy Proposal for consideration set forth here is a two-phase initiative that begins with the agreement as to ‘how’ the elements of Holston Conference will be evaluated for structural change and then concludes with implementation of the changes produced by the evaluative process.

Some elements of the Comprehensive Conference Strategy can immediately begin to be implemented upon approval of the Annual Conference; other more extensive elements, such as the size and boundaries of the districts will be determined by the data collection and analytical process under consideration in this proposal. Consequently, not all of the elements of this Strategic Plan will be fully operational until the completion of the second phase which we hope to celebrate at the 2018 Holston Annual Conference.

Stated another way, if the Holston Annual Conference blesses this vision for fruitful mission and ministry by means of the evaluation stratagem articulated here, the necessary tools of change will then be activated to make these proposed changes a reality.

Moreover, the Comprehensive Conference Strategy is purposefully engineered for dynamic change and adaptation to our mission field on a periodic basis.

The wisdom of this feature is that it keeps the Church nimble and responsive to the evolving and emerging needs that Holston Conference will encounter in the years ahead.

As described in Section IV of this Proposal, the process being proposed for adoption at this 2017 meeting of the Holston Annual Conference is the same process that our future church leaders will utilize each year following the meeting of General Conference. The outcome may be different – because the mission field may well be different – but the course of evaluation and discernment will continue to ensure that Holston Conference will be positioned to respond creatively, flexibly, and fruitfully to the challenges that will surely come our way in the years to come.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This Comprehensive Conference Strategy is in a mechanism to synchronize the mission with the mission field – and the means for future church leaders to periodically assess the health of the Conference to maintain vitality.

We – the Church – move as one unified Body of Christ for the sake of sharing the Gospel of Christ with a broken, hurting, and confused world. The adoption of a Comprehensive Conference Strategy is not the response to God’s call; our individual and collective unified commitment to serve, share, love, and walk humbly with our God and God’s Children is how we respond to God’s call. The Comprehensive Conference Strategy proposal is simply a way to make our response to that call more powerful and effective.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

**Anchor Church:** A vital congregation that can provide leadership and collaborative energy to struggling churches.

**Clergy Small Group:** A clergy small group shall be comprised of clergy. This group shall meet monthly in person or assisted by technology. This will be a confidential space where clergy can encourage accountability and deepen their spiritual walk. The District Superintendent will include conversation about a clergy person's participation in a 'Clergy Small Group' in the annual clergy consultation.

**Conference Life:** The means by which the mission of the Church is carried out through boards, committees, teams and agencies of The United Methodist Church.

**Connection:** Our denomination continues to be organized in a "connectional" system, which "enables us to carry out our mission in unity and strength" (*Book of Discipline 2016*, ¶ 701). Every local church is linked to an interconnected network of organizations that join together in mission and ministry, allowing us to accomplish far more than any one local church or person could alone.

**District:** A geographically-defined area of ministry comprised of churches, congregations, circuits, stations, and mission fields led by a District Superintendent and unified by the common call of clergy and laity to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world.

**Executive Team:** Includes the Bishop and the following staff positions: Director of Administrative Services/Treasurer; Director of Clergy Services/Conference Secretary; Director of Communications/Bishop's Executive Assistant; Director of Congregational Development and Revitalization; Director of Connectional Ministries.

**Four Areas of Focus:** The 2008 General Conference identified 4 main areas of focus for the United Methodist denomination. They are:

1. Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world
2. Creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations
3. Engaging in ministry *with* the poor
4. Stamping out the killer diseases of poverty by improving health globally

**Health Check:** In reference to Article IV of this Proposal a 'Health Check' is the periodic examination of the health of Holston Conference by the Conference Strategy Team utilizing the evaluative tools established by this Comprehensive Conference Strategy.

**Mission Field:** *Wherever* we find people in need of experiencing the love of Christ.



**Missional Hub**: In short, a Missional Hub is a group of churches working together to meet a need in the community. It is contextually relevant to the geographical area and interests of the churches of that area. Its shape is organic and cultivated around a shared and fruitful ministry. Through this experience, clergy and laity will share wisdom, experience, and dreams of what God is doing in and through their community.

**Task Force**: A short-term group for a specific purpose, not a standing committee. Membership is assigned at the discretion of the chair.

**Urbanization**: As used in evaluating the size and location of a District, the term ‘urbanization’ means a municipality with a broad commercial and industrial economic base, a large and diverse population, and a geographic area supporting a wide range of social agencies and private as well as public services

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A.

Please note that the numbers on this summary were manually and/or hard-copied from old journals and appointment books. Therefore, the accuracy cannot be guaranteed. This document is meant as a guide and trend indicator only.

<u>Conference Data Summary by Decade</u>				
<u>Decade</u>	<u># of Churches</u>	<u>% of Change</u>		<u>1960-2016 % of Change</u>
1960	1072			
1970	1088	1.5%		
1980	1,021	-6.2%		
1990	1,017	-0.4%		
2000	949	-6.7%		
2010	899	-5.3%		
2016	880	-2.1%		-17.9%
<u>Decade</u>	<u># of Members</u>	<u>% of Change</u>		
1960	195102			
1970	197041	1.0%		
1980	187096	-5.0%		
1990	176956	-5.4%		
2000	170846	-3.5%		
2010	166133	-2.8%		
2016	162291	-2.3%		-16.8%
<u>Decade</u>	<u>Prof/Faith</u>	<u>% of Change</u>		
1960	6077			
1970	3584	-41.0%		
1980	3211	-10.4%		
1990	2876	-10.4%		
2000	3031	5.4%		
2010	2499	-17.6%		
2016	1827	-26.9%		-69.9%
<u>Decade</u>	<u>Avg. Worship #</u>	<u>% of Change</u>		
1960	78612		(*Recording began in 1964)	
1970	74620	-3.0%		
1980	76155	2.9%		
1990	73018	-4.1%		
2000	74018	1.4%		
2010	68773	-7.1%		
2016	61840	-10.1%		-21.3%

**APPENDIX B.**

