

A Lewis Center Report on
**Changes in Congregations,
Clergy, and Deployment**
2002-2012

South Central Jurisdiction
The United Methodist Church

Missouri Conference Report

Lewis Center for Church Leadership
Wesley Theological Seminary

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June 2013

In early 2013, the Lewis Center for Church Leadership of Wesley Theological Seminary was engaged by the bishops of the South Central Jurisdiction to analyze key trends related to church size and clergy deployment over the past decade. The Center collected and studied relevant data for each of the conferences. The following summary shows key trends for the Jurisdiction as a whole. It is followed by a more specific report for each conference.

Where possible, data from 2012 are used. In some cases the latest information for certain categories is from 2011. Wherever “elder” is used, it refers to ordained elders as well as provisionals seeking ordination as an elder. Questions about any of the charts or figures may be directed to me or to Joe Arnold, Lewis Center research manager, at jearnold@wesleyseminary.edu.

The charts on which many of the findings and recommendations are based can be found at the end of the report. Not all statistics are captured in charts but can be supplied if more specific details are needed.

The sequence of documents that precede the charts is:

Overview of the South Central Jurisdiction
Conference Overview
Conference Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

Some of the most valuable insights from the charts will come from your discussion of them in light of your intimate knowledge of your conference. Good wishes in your important work.

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Overview of South Central Jurisdiction

Congregations

Increasing impact of a smaller number of larger churches in each conference

- The number of churches that comprise 25 percent of the average worship attendance (AWA) of each of the conferences when totaled declined by 20 percent, from 191 to 152.
- The number of churches that comprise 50 percent of the AWA of each of the conferences when totaled declined by 15 percent, from 688 to 583.

Major decline in congregations averaging 100 or more AWA

- The number of these churches declined 25 percent, a loss of 414 churches.

Increasing proportion of smaller churches

- Median worship attendance declined from 48 to 44.
- Churches averaging 99 or fewer AWA now constitute 76 percent of churches, up from 72 percent ten years ago.

Clergy

Declines in

- Elders appointed to congregations by 16 percent
- Associate members by 35 percent
- Full-time local pastors by 19 percent

Increases in

- Part-time local pastors by 27 percent
- "Other" by 8 percent (includes retired, other denominations, supply, certified lay ministers)

Changes in ages of elders

- Modest increase in young elders (under 35) from 5 to 6 percent
- Significant decline in middle-aged elders (35–54) from 54 to 42 percent
- Major increase in older elders (55-72) from 41 to 52 percent

Deployment

Fewer churches served by an elder

- 6 percent decline in churches served by an elder lead pastor, from 50 to 44 percent

Fewer churches served by a typically full-time clergy (elder, associate member, full-time local pastor)

- From 69 percent of churches served by a typically full-time clergy in 2002 to 58 percent in 2011

More churches served by a typically part-time clergy (part-time local pastor, other denomination, retired, supply)

- From 31 percent of churches served by a typically part-time clergy in 2002 to 42 percent in 2011

**Overview of Missouri Conference
Changes in Congregations, Clergy, and Deployment
2002 – 2012**

Congregations

Increasing impact of a smaller number of larger churches

- The number of churches that comprise 25 percent of average worship attendance (AWA) within the conference declined by 39 percent, from 31 to 19.
- The number of churches that comprise 50 percent of the AWA declined by 25 percent, from 106 to 79.

Major decline in congregations averaging 100 or more AWA

- The number of these churches declined by 15 percent, from 227 to 193. [Chart 1]

Increasing proportion of smaller churches

- Median worship attendance (half larger, half smaller) declined from 44 to 40.
- Churches averaging 99 or fewer AWA now constitute 77 percent of churches, up from 75 percent ten years ago. [Chart 1]

In 2012 the declining pool of churches averaging 100+ AWA accounted for

- 75 percent of apportionments paid
- 71 percent of attendance
- 68 percent of membership
- 74 percent of professions of faith [Chart 8]

Clergy

Declines in

- Elders appointed to congregations by 26 percent, from 354 to 262
- Associate members by 65 percent, from 26 to 9
- Full-time local pastors by 13 percent, from 62 to 54

Increases in

- Part-time local pastors by 34 percent, from 120 to 161
- “Other” by 61 percent (includes retired, other denominations, supply, lay ministers), from 18 to 29

Changes in ages of elders

- Modest increase in young elders (under 35) from 5 to 6 percent
- Significant decline in middle-aged elders (35–54) from 55 to 44 percent
- Major increase in older elders (55-72) from 41 to 49 percent
[Lewis Center *Clergy Age Trends in the United Methodist Church, 2012*]
- Retirements will continue at a strong pace given the large number of older elders. [Charts 6-7]

Deployment

Fewer churches and charges served by an elder

- 10 percent decline in the proportion of *congregations* served by an ordained or provisional elder lead pastor, from 47 to 37 percent [Chart 2]
- 10 percent decline in the proportion of *pastoral charges* served by an ordained or provisional elder lead pastor, from 61 to 51 percent [Chart 5]

Fewer churches served by a typically full-time clergy (elder, full-time local pastor, associate member)

- From 61 percent of churches served by a typically full-time clergy in 2002 to 47 percent in 2011 [Chart 4]

More churches served by a typically part-time clergy (part-time local pastor, other denomination, retired, supply)

- From 39 percent of churches served by a typically part-time clergy in 2002 to 53 percent in 2011 [Chart 4]

Elders serve both large and small churches

- 51 percent of elders who are lead pastors of churches serve at least one congregation with 100 or more in worship (elders serving on larger church staffs are not included). [Chart 3]

All other clergy typically serve churches with 99 or fewer AWA

- 69 percent of associate members serve under-100 AWA churches.
- 78 percent of full-time local pastors serve under-100 AWA churches.
- Virtually all part-time local pastors and other serve under-100 AWA churches. [Chart 3]

**MISSOURI CONFERENCE
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Prepared by Lovett H. Weems, Jr., Director, Lewis Center for Church Leadership**

CONGREGATIONS

Finding A: Increasing impact of a smaller number of larger churches

Implications

This is not necessarily a negative trend. It often shows greater vitality and growth among some larger churches than in the conference as a whole. However, it does make the conference more vulnerable to any negative trends among this smaller cohort of large churches. These churches have the greatest potential for growth and decline in any one year.

Recommendations

1. Embrace a large church imperative.

Any conference seeking to be stronger ten years from now must maintain and strengthen a group of churches that can grow to or maintain attendance at levels that put them among the larger churches of the conference. (Decide what this attendance marker will be going forward.) This will require:

- Careful attention to clergy appointments (both lead and associates) for these churches and prompt action to remedy mismatches
- Identification of churches with the greatest potential to become larger churches
- Identification of current larger churches with the greatest vulnerability to decline
- Partnering with these largest churches to achieve other conference goals, including new church starts, new sites, training for renewal, and mentoring

Think of the very largest churches as an “affinity district” to which the bishop and respective superintendents give regular attention.

2. Focus on larger new church starts.

New church starts are the primary way that denominations increase membership. In earlier chapters of United Methodist history, smaller churches met the needs of a dispersed and rural population. Today the need is for new larger churches (or new campus sites) that can reach over 80 percent of the population that is non-rural and tends to be more heavily clustered.

Finding B: Major decline in congregations averaging 100 or more AWA

Implications

This decline is not new. Today there are 4,000 fewer United Methodist churches in the United States with 100 or more in worship than in 1975 when this trend began. But conferences cannot grow, even with superior large church growth, without stopping the decline of other churches. In virtually no conference has the growth in larger churches alone been sufficient to offset the losses in smaller congregations.

Also, the declining pool of churches with 100+ attendance accounts overwhelmingly for apportionments, attendance, membership, and professions of faith. While the decline is not new, the number of these churches is getting precariously small for the role they play in the conference's witness.

Recommendations

1. Focus on mid-size churches.

District superintendents must focus on churches with 100+ AWA, no matter how few or many there are in a district. Without a deliberate effort to arrest the collapse of this group of churches, United Methodism within the district will continue to decline.

2. Give special attention to churches surrounded by population growth.

Many areas are not growing, and most United Methodist churches are not immediately surrounded by growth. Many churches continue to decline in the midst of population expansion; yet it stands to reason that those in growing areas have a greater chance for growth.

3. Evaluate the possibility of church relocations.

Congregations in existence prior to 1990 are a locus of decline in worship attendance. More than half of these congregations are losing in worship attendance. One reason is that they tend to be located where the population is no longer growing. Review the location of churches, plotting existing churches against population changes past and projected, and track the location of members. This can indicate where relocation may extend the United Methodist witness.

Finding C: Increasing proportion of smaller churches

Implications

Even with the growing proportion of smaller churches, there will be fewer churches each year into the foreseeable future. For the denomination as a whole, the decline will be about 23 percent between now and 2030. Most of these churches will be very small churches.

Recommendations

1. Identify the small churches capable of growing for consecutive years.

Among even the smallest churches, about one-third will grow each year. So, the challenge is to identify and help those with the potential and leadership to grow and achieve the size needed to serve even more people. As churches get smaller, the likelihood that they will grow decreases, but when churches grow, the likelihood of further growth is enhanced.

2. Provide resources to help very small churches discern their future.

Provide resources the smallest churches can use to consider ways to renew their witness or to evaluate whether they might best sustain their legacy by discontinuing their congregational ministry and using their assets to expand the United Methodist witness elsewhere. Such efforts can be simple and modest lest they overwhelm the time and energy of conference leaders due to the sheer number of these very small churches.

CLERGY AND DEPLOYMENT

Finding D: Fewer churches served by elders

Implications

The total number of elder positions will continue to decline as the number and size of churches and pastoral charges decline, even with more elders serving new church starts or on the staffs of larger churches. Despite the need for fewer elders in the future, there is not likely to be an oversupply given the dramatic number of retirements coming.

Recommendation

Set high standards for elders to meet the challenges facing the church.

While elders will serve fewer churches in the future, the demands on them will be greater as the church seeks to deal with changing cultures and contexts. More and more churches will require the full engagement of an adaptive leader who can guide the people in facing their challenges. Priority should be given to identifying new elders who have the spiritual, personal, intellectual, and professional skills to serve effectively in their early appointments and across the full range of church sizes over the course of their ministries.

Finding E: Changes in ages of elders

Implications

In the past ten years, the United Methodist Church has shifted from being a church primarily served by middle-aged elders to one in which over half of elders are older (55 to 72 years old). This trend has depleted the number of middle-aged elders available for appointment. And it brings a challenge for the coming decade as this huge cohort of older clergy moves into retirement. The number of young elders has remained low but stable since 2006 after dramatic decreases between 1985 and 2005. Their numbers have been inadequate to replace the middle-aged clergy aging into the older group.

Recommendation

Continue efforts to identify, enlist, and retain gifted younger clergy.

Apart from clergy supply and demand issues, gifted young clergy are needed for their energy, passion, and closeness to the culture of emerging generations. No conference is in danger of having too many young elders, especially given their relatively low numbers across the denomination.

Finding F: More churches served by typically part-time clergy

Implications

The distinction between full-time and part-time clergy will probably become increasingly more important than the differences between elders, local pastors, and others. Full-time clergy will be deployed to those pastoral charges that require and can afford a full-time, residential pastor. There will be fewer such placements. Part-time clergy will play an increasing role in pastoral leadership. New systems and structures are required to account for this reality.

Recommendation

Develop a plan to supply the growing need for part-time appointments.

Develop a specialized enlistment, training, and mentoring plan for those called to a part-time, bi-vocational, or supply ministry built exclusively around the context and needs of small membership churches. Develop a tailored program of enlistment, encouragement, and support for retired pastors willing and able to continue serving churches.

Finding G: Pastoral leadership patterns are evolving and changing.

Implications

Over the past ten years, there have been many changes affecting clergy deployment. It is important to stay abreast of the many variables that will determine the number of elders and other pastoral leaders needed in the future.

Recommendations

1. Develop a comprehensive clergy supply and placement strategy.

The Board of Ordained Ministry, Cabinet, District Committees on Ministry, and others need a common understanding about the changing dynamics of church demand and clergy supply to make appropriate decisions for the future. Division of tasks among groups makes sense, but the overall strategic plan needs to be developed for the whole. Some components include:

- The changing makeup of churches by size
- The types of ministers needed (elders, deacons, full-time local pastors, part-time local pastors, lay ministers, supply)
- Standards for each of these types of ministry given how they will be used in placements
- Criteria for determining appropriate placements for various types of ministers
- The impact of minimum salary on placements
- The needs among large churches for clergy in associate staff roles
- The implications of new church starts on the types and numbers of clergy needed

2. Monitor trends carefully

Develop a plan for the Board of Ordained Ministry, Cabinet, and others to monitor annually clergy supply issues. Some things to monitor include:

- Retirements account for about 75 percent of the loss of elders. Other factors account for 25 percent, such as deaths of active clergy, transfers, and surrender of credentials or other forms of exit.
- Other variables that impact the number of elders needed include the number of elders appointed as associates, number of churches with enough size and financial strength to support an elder, age of entering clergy, and retention.

About the Lewis Center for Church Leadership

Established by Wesley Theological Seminary in 2003, the Lewis Center for Church Leadership has worked to help the United Methodist Church address its current challenges. The Center is building a vision for church leadership grounded in faith, informed by knowledge, and exercised in effective action. It seeks a holistic understanding of Christian leadership that brings together theology and management, scholarship and practice, research and application.

Committed to the broad goal of helping the church reach more people, younger people, and more diverse people, the Center focuses on improving leadership effectiveness and providing actionable insights and best practices to promote effective ministry. The Center seeks to be a trusted resource for church leadership, helping congregations and denominations serve, thrive, and grow. The Center staff of six, along with other researchers and consultants who assist with special projects, also draws on the expertise of the entire Wesley faculty and a wide array of gifted practitioners.

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