
DISTRICT LAY LEADER ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

The District Lay Leader (DLL) is the elected leader of the district laity. The DLL should have experience in leadership at the district level and local congregation in which they hold membership. That leadership experience might include serving on the church council, as a local church Lay Leader, helping to organize district events, or serving on district boards or teams.

District Lay Leaders are in a position to be key drivers in the development of vital congregations as they can share vision, help district and local church leaders set goals and instill enthusiasm among the laity. We can also begin to do this by working with the Conference Board of Laity and the district committees on Lay Servant Ministries to interpret the needs of the district for training opportunities. Such collaboration will bring about alignment, increasing the potential for accomplishing the mission exponentially. In some conferences, the District Lay Leader also serves as the District Director of Lay Servant Ministries cementing the relationship between Lay Leaders and Lay Servant Ministries even further. Together we need to look at how we can best focus on equipping and training the laity to accomplish the mission of the church.

Virginia Conference Standing Rules state that members of the district conference shall elect the District Lay Leader (§660.2) to serve a four year-term, not to exceed two consecutive terms. The term of the District Lay Leader will begin at the discretion of the district conference directive and be communicated to the Conference Lay Leader. There may be one or more Associate District Lay Leader(s) within a District. Associate or Co-District Lay Leaders may be elected by district conferences and would assume membership on the Conference Board of Laity.

General leadership skills for a District Lay Leader should include:

- Ability to communicate effectively and persuasively with people of all ages and backgrounds
- Good listening skills
- Accountability
- Organizational and time management skills
- A commitment to lead the whole Church in loving service to humankind, modeling servant leadership
- Being a person in whom the community can place trust and confidence
- Ability to share vision, set goals, and monitor progress.

In many ways, the roles and responsibilities for District Lay Leader mirror those of the local church Lay Leader. Paragraph 660 of *The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016* outline the following responsibilities of the DLL. Recognizing that all districts are unique, any additional requirements of a District Lay Leader's job description can be added at the discretion of the District Superintendent and the District Lay Leader subject to conversation and review as needed.

- Shall be a professing member of a local church within the district they represent. Districts may require that the District Lay Leader live within the boundaries of the district.
- Shall provide for the training of local church Lay Leaders for their ministries in the local churches.

- Shall have responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within congregations and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the Church, and supporting and enabling lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the district and the local churches in cooperation with the District Superintendent and pastors.
- Will meet regularly with the District Superintendent to discuss the state of the district, the Church, and the needs for ministry both locally and globally. Serve as the District Superintendent's laity counterpart in promoting district and conference programs.
- Is a member of annual conference (see ¶32). In the Virginia Conference, our tradition is for each District Lay Leader to sit on the floor of the annual conference with their District Superintendent.
- Shall be a member of the conference board of laity or equivalent structure. According to the bylaws for the Virginia Conference Board of Laity, one District Lay Leader from each of four regional prayer/work teams will be appointed to serve as Associate Conference Lay Leaders.
- Shall work with the District Superintendent to ensure that there is a District Director of Lay Servant Ministries and shall serve on the district committee on Lay Servant Ministries.
- Is a member of the District Conference and shall be a member of the district council on ministries or alternative structure and its executive committee. The District Lay Leader shall also be a member of the committee on district superintendency.
- May serve as a lay member of the district committee on ordained ministry (or equivalent agency) and the district board of church location and building (or equivalent agency).
- Shall relate to the organized lay groups in the district such as United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Youth and support their work and their activities.
- May designate persons to serve as proxy in any of the above groups except the annual conference, the district conference, district council on ministries, and the district council on ministries executive committee, district committee on ordained ministry, and the district board of church location and building. This is where the election of Associate District Lay Leaders can be beneficial. Just as with local church Associate Lay Leaders, if the Associate District Lay Leader(s) share in these responsibilities, the DLL must make sure there are clear plans to communicate with one another. Regular meetings may be the most helpful way to coordinate work and share information. Remember, identifying and mentoring Associate Lay Leaders is a great way to expand the leadership pool for the future.

It is recommended that District Lay Leaders be Certified Lay Servants. This is one way to model lifelong learning which is necessary for our own discipleship. As was stated previously for local church Lay Leaders, DLLs must also make it a high priority to nurture and cultivate spiritual disciplines and practices. Meetings can overwhelm us if we allow it. Our own spiritual growth and how we model that priority for others is vital to our health and wholeness as we offer leadership.

Sources: *The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*; *Virginia Conference Standing Rules, 2022*; Presentation by Jodi Cataldo, Former Director of Laity in Leadership, Discipleship Ministries, to the VAUMC District Lay Leader/Lay Servant Ministries Director Training Day, September 10, 2016; North Alabama Conference of The UMC, <https://www.umcna.org/jobdescriptionlayleaders>