

2024-2025

Handbook for Lay Leaders

Local Church, District and Conference

October 2024



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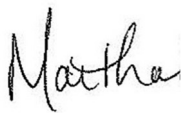
A MESSAGE FROM THE CONFERENCE LAY LEADER

Greetings Friends!

You may be discerning or have already accepted the role of Local Church or District Lay Leader. This responsibility is vital to the ministry and mission of the church. As a Lay Leader, you can have a tremendous effect on your local church, district, and annual conference. Your potential impact in creating a discipleship system that will bring about vital churches and transformed disciples cannot be overstated. As Lay Leaders and partners in ministry with our pastors, district superintendents and bishop, we are called to keep the laity involved, equipped, and accountable to the Great Commission and the mission of The United Methodist Church: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

This handbook was created to help us all understand the duties and functions of our roles as Lay Leaders within the various levels of our connectional denomination. While we can easily list the responsibilities and requirements from ***The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016***, it is much more important that we each prayerfully discern how we will live into this call given our unique gifts and talents. The job of Lay Leader is extensive, so extensive that it can easily lead us down a path of focusing on task over discipleship. Our own personal spiritual growth must be the priority. We cannot model how to be a true disciple of Jesus if we do not make the time for our own spiritual health.

As we grow and learn, we determine how best to use our gifts to accomplish the tasks of being Lay Leader. Each of us will have a different style in fulfilling this leadership position. It is my hope that this handbook will assist you in determining how best to approach this most important role, and thus build the Kingdom here on earth using your spiritual gifts, leadership style, and talents in ways that will glorify God.



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ALL CHRISTIANS AS MINISTERS: RECLAIMING THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING

What does it mean for the laity – the *laos* or the people of God from its Greek origin – to be in ministry?

We tend to make a huge distinction between laity and clergy and think everyone understands that difference. In reality, many wonder who the “laity” are. The Bible, in discussing the role of believers does not specify clergy or laity. It refers to the “laos” – the whole people of God. *Ministry* is not just a reference to clergy or other professionals who have specific training or education. Each of us is indeed a minister – called through our baptism to be disciples in all areas of our lives and examples of Christ’s love to the world. We are all given unique gifts to equip us for the task.

What does the ministry of all Christians look like? The ministry of the laity certainly includes the work we do IN CHURCH – serving on committees, mission teams, choir, and more. All these are important but not all there is to being in ministry. More broadly, lay ministry is discipleship. It is what we do every day, our 24/7 commitment to a closer relationship with God through Jesus Christ and the sharing of our faith outside the church doors. Being a minister means we must be willing to share our faith, our story, our call. Clergy can’t be everywhere or the only ones to be in ministry. We - the laity – are called to share what God has done in our lives.

James Fenhagen wrote *Mutual Ministry: New Vitality for the Local Church* in 1977 (Episcopal publishing through Seabury Press, New York, NY), but his description of the functions integral to all ministry still hold true today. Fenhagen noted that as the people of God we have four roles:

1. We are storytellers. We must be able to articulate our own story of redemption and share it with others.
2. We are value bearers. We bear witness to the Gospel and must show it in all our words and actions.
3. We are community builders. We are called, following the example of Christ, to be ambassadors of reconciliation.
4. We are spiritual journeyers. We should continually be seeking greater holiness and more authentic ways of living in the world.

We all have a call story. Have you ever shared your story with someone? That is Fenhagen’s first integral function of ministry. God has a history of calling people into servanthood and spiritual leadership who were simply minding their own business, recognizing their gifts and potential. God called out Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Isaiah, Mary, Peter, James, John...the list could go on. More than ever, the church needs spiritual leaders who understand that they are called. Not just as volunteers, not just as leaders of meetings or teams, but spiritual leaders who respond to God’s call which connects them in covenant with God and community.

WHAT WOULD IT LOOK LIKE IF WE TOOK THE MINISTRY OF THE BAPTIZED SERIOUSLY?

Let's look at the foundations of our United Methodist understanding of the ministry of all Christians. This is found in Part IV, Section II of ***The United Methodist Church Book of Discipline, 2016***. Have your Bible close at hand.

The Heart of Christian Ministry - BOD ¶ 126

“The heart of Christian ministry is Christ’s ministry of outreaching love. Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians that demonstrates a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration, and discipleship. All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment. The forms of this ministry are diverse in locale, in interest, and in denominational accent, yet always catholic in spirit and outreach.”

Consider reading 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 for a scriptural foundation.

The Ministry of the Laity - BOD ¶ 127

“The ministry of the laity flows from a commitment to Christ’s outreaching love. Lay members of The United Methodist Church are, by history and calling, active advocates of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Every layperson is called to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20); every layperson is called to be missional. The witness of the laity, their Christ-like examples of everyday living as well as the sharing of their own faith experiences of the gospel, is the primary evangelistic ministry through which all people will come to know Christ and The United Methodist Church will fulfill its mission.”

Remind yourself of the Great Commission by reading Matthew 28:18-20.

The Ministry of the Community - BOD ¶ 128

“The church as the community of the new covenant has participated in Christ’s ministry of grace across the years and around the world. It stretches out to human needs wherever love and service may convey God’s love and ours. The outreach of such ministries knows no limits. Beyond the diverse forms of ministry is this ultimate concern: that all persons will be brought into a saving relationship with God through Jesus Christ and be renewed after the image of their creator (Colossians 3:10). This means that all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free.”

Reflect on the words of Colossians 3:10–17.

Faithful Ministry – BOD ¶ 130

“The people of God, who are the church made visible in the world, must convince the world of the reality of the gospel or leave it unconvinced. There can be no evasion or delegation of this responsibility; the church is either faithful as a witnessing and serving community, or it loses its vitality and its impact on an unbelieving world.”

Ponder for a few minutes the words of Hebrews 12:1-3.

Ministry's Gift and Task – BOD ¶ 129

“This ministry of all Christians in Christ’s name and spirit is both a gift and a task. The gift is God’s unmerited grace; the task is unstinting service. Entrance into the church is acknowledged in baptism and may include persons of all ages. In baptism, water is administered in the name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) by an authorized person, and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands, ordinarily in the presence of the congregation. In this sacrament the church claims God’s promise and the seal of the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). Baptism is followed by nurture and the consequent awareness by the baptized of the claim to ministry in Christ placed upon their lives by the church. Such a ministry is confirmed by the church when the pledges of baptism are accepted through profession of faith and renewed for life and mission. Entrance into and acceptance of ministry begin in a local church, but the impulse to minister always moves one beyond the congregation toward the whole human community. God’s gifts are richly diverse for a variety of services; yet all have dignity and worth.”

Use the words from Ephesians 1:11-19 as your prayer.

The Unity of Ministry in Christ - BOD ¶ 131

“There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidence of God’s grace in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16). 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.”

Look at Ephesians 4:4-16. What do you hear about “mutual interdependence”?

The Journey of a Connectional People – BOD ¶ 132.

“Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one charge conference to another. It is rather a vital web of interactive relationships. We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith, including Our Doctrinal Standards and General Rules (¶ 104); by sharing together a constitutional polity, including a leadership of general superintendency; by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusive and missional character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things.”

Reflect on the words of John 17:20-23.

PARTNERS IN MINISTRY: A LEADERSHIP MODEL

Everywhere you look you see the word *partner*—on billboards advertising banking services, in newspaper ads for insurance companies, on TV programs about nursing care, not to mention the number of Internet sites touting *partners* in their name.

In the church we have *talked* about a partnership between lay and clergy for several years. Many *written* articles have appeared across the denomination, and we *heard* about partners as a new style of leadership. While some conferences have even had Partner in Ministry themes, lay and clergy need to accept a few basics before actually knowing how to *practice* partnership in ministry.

First, we need to have a clear understanding of our call: **All baptized Christians are called into ministry.** For most of us, baptism means an invitational rite into the body of Christ that represents the forgiveness of sin and the newness of life in Christ. But who associates baptism with a call to ministry? In I Corinthians 12:13, the apostle Paul makes a connection between the Holy Spirit and baptism as a sign of entrance into ministry of the whole body. Historically, our emphasis in baptism has been on the benefits received and not on the claim of Christ on the one baptized. We forget that the Holy Spirit empowers us to give our life away in service to Christ—*that's* being in ministry.

We must understand, accept, and live the fact that in God's design **all** baptized Christians are called into ministry. That means none of us can sit back and coast or let someone else minister on our behalf. Each believer has God-given abilities to strengthen the whole body, and "ministry" is what God does through the *entire* body—not just clergy and not just laity, but the whole body, together as **partners**. It may take some transformation for that to happen, but then that should be the fundamental nature of the church—transformation in our own lives as we accept Christ as Lord and Savior...transformation for our churches as those called discover their God-given gifts...transformation when lay people catch the vision that ministry belongs to them, as well as to clergy.

Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good. You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone."

- Exodus 18:17-18 NRSV

There is a church where the Lord is using the laity in dynamic ways, in what were traditionally clergy-oriented roles of pastoral care. It began with a highly intentional school to equip individuals who already showed signs of spiritual giftedness. Even some indication of resistance from the larger church body which said "that is a job for the pastor" didn't keep the caregivers from tripling in size to meet the needs of the congregation. It became apparent that the laity, through the work of the Spirit, were the real transforming agents in the church. A congregation is limiting the church and limiting God if they say the pastor must be the only person to do the work of Christ.

Once we realize that we are all ministers called to be about the basics of transformation, we need leadership (see “Spiritual Leadership?” *Links*, May 1998). This new style of partnership calls for ministry and leadership to be *shared* by the pastor and local church laity. It calls for teams of lay and clergy to trust each other, to always seek win/win solutions, to keep agreements, and to assume full responsibility. We can’t become what we need to be by remaining what we are. When we risk enough to move from where we may have been for years by opening ourselves to the transforming work of God in Jesus Christ, there’s no telling what will happen in our lives, our churches, and our annual conferences.

Partners in Ministry, let’s reach out together to make disciples of Jesus Christ!

- Darlene Amon served as Virginia Annual Conference Lay Leader, 1994-2000

PARTNERS IN MINISTRY ASSUMPTIONS

1. All baptized Christians are called into ministry.
2. There are no levels of leadership in the church, only different functions depending upon personal gifts and graces, the call of God, and the confirmation of the church.
3. To be effective, laity and clergy need to work as teams in every local situation and abide by an agreed upon set of ground rules for behavior.
4. In order to fulfill assumption number three, clergy and laity need to receive skill training in how to live by the ground rules and they need to receive this training together.

GROUND RULES

- All team members are committed to Jesus Christ and to a shared vision for the church.
- All team members seek win/win solutions to problems, conflicts or any other issues that arise.
- All team members keep their agreements and are open and honest in their communications.
- All team members assume 100% responsibility for the results that are produced and do not engage in blaming and justifying.
- All team members agree to live by the **HEART** principles:
 - H**ear and understand me;
 - E**ven if you disagree, please don’t make me wrong;
 - A**cknowledge the greatness in me;
 - R**emember to look for my loving intentions;
 - T**ell me the truth with compassion.

LOCAL CHURCH LAY LEADER ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

An effective Lay Leader functions as the primary representative and role model of Christian discipleship and faith lived out in the church and in daily life. The main task of the Lay Leader in a local church is to connect the people of the church, the leadership of the church, and the local community. This connection is multi-directional. The Lay Leader works with the pastor(s) to fulfill the mission and vision of the congregation. As a member of important church leadership teams, the Lay Leader represents the laity and provides crucial insight into the wider community's needs. In the other direction, the Lay Leader helps to engage the people in the church's ministries.

It's important to note that you are in this position to work for Jesus - not to enhance yourself. You need to help your church focus on where God is leading. When people join The United Methodist Church, they promise to support it through prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness. As your church's Lay Leader, you should intentionally embrace these promises in your own life. Doing so will help sustain you and your community. ***Because of the example of discipleship and mentoring expected of the Lay Leader on any level – local church, district or conference, the decision to accept the position should only be made after much prayer and discernment, trusting where God is leading.***

Paragraph 251 of ***The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*** tells us that the Local Church Lay Leader:

- Is the primary lay representative of the laity in the local church.
- Must be a professing member of the local church.
- Is elected annually by the charge conference

There shall be one Lay Leader for each church on a charge. The use of Associate Lay Leaders is encouraged to assist with fulfilling responsibilities and to mentor future leaders. Always remember that your goal is to multiply and coach leaders. Associate Lay Leaders must also be elected by the charge conference.

There is no term limit in the ***BOD***, but it is strongly suggested that the local church commit to term limits and a rotation of leaders (generally after 3 years of service).

Before we look at actual responsibilities listed in the ***Book of Discipline***, there are general leadership skills needed for the role of Lay Leader that we need to list. These skills are necessary in any lay leadership function. Those in lay leadership in the church must be able to:

- Listen well.
- Demonstrate one or more of these spiritual gifts: compassion, discernment, faith, helping, leadership, and servanthood.
- Communicate with people of all ages and backgrounds.
- Show evidence of working well with both clergy and laity and with various teams and task groups.
- Keep a broad view of separate parts of the congregation such as leadership committees, small groups, and specialized ministries while helping all to work together toward the mission of the church.

- Work collaboratively to connect the congregation and the community and inspire the congregation to care for those beyond the walls of the local church
- Be a living example of one who “loves God and loves neighbor,” emulating the servant ministry of Jesus.

The Book of Discipline gives us the job description for Lay Leaders. These responsibilities are lived out with a great deal of variation among local churches and individuals. As Lay Leader, your responsibilities are as follows.

Foster awareness of role of laity

- Emphasize the culture of call
- Encourage laity to discover and use their gifts, skills, talents, treasure, and witness to love and serve God and neighbor.
- Represent the laity of the church in the community
- Help laity of all ages recognize that they represent the church in the larger community and workplace
- Recognize and celebrate the ministry of the laity
- Advocate for the laity and promote Laity Sunday
- Assist with local church communications and networking: personal letters, e-mail groups, newsletter articles, website resources and other forms of communications

Meet regularly with your pastor

- Meet and talk with the pastor regularly to understand their hopes and dreams for the congregation and for the Lay Leader’s role in advancing toward the vision for ministry. Ask how you can engage in shared ministry for a more vital congregation. Each pastor and Lay Leader must discern the way to accomplish goals in your unique setting. Develop as close a working relationship with your clergy counterpart as you can, not only to discuss needs and make plans, but to vision and pray together. Meetings out of the regular location and format can go a long way in helping you get to know one another better.
- You and your pastor are a team, sharing responsibilities. Identify opportunities to share, such as leading special events, visiting the sick and homebound, or contacting visitors to your church.
- An effective relationship begins with open minds and mutual respect. You must respect each other as people as well as the importance of the roles. Above all, both must recognize that the Church is God’s Church. It doesn’t belong to the laity or the clergy. Egos and agendas must be put aside. Congregations respond in a positive way to pastor-lay leadership when they see that both are spirit-filled and working in harmony for effective ministry. This kind of partnership ministry, with the whole congregation involved, becomes very important when pastoral leadership changes.
- Serve as confidant and sounding board for how ideas, vision, and plans of the clergy might be received by other laity.
- Filter multiple messages from the congregation into those things that the pastor should hear to help them prioritize where to act.
- Encourage teamwork between the pastor(s) and lay leadership and work to strengthen the relationship between the pastor(s) and the congregation.

Engage in continuous learning and study

- The Lay Leader should be a growing Christian disciple who understands that we never stop learning and growing in our faith. You will be seen as an example for the rest of the congregation. Model an attitude of continual learning.

- Study the mission of the church and learn about United Methodist polity and heritage.
- Engage personally in spiritual practices that build attentiveness to God’s will and direction. Ministry is not just a job; it is spiritual endeavor. A Christian leader must be in a healthy, dynamic, and active relationship with God.

Advise church council on needs

- You are in the unique position of being able to feel the “pulse” of the congregation and the community because you are a part of both. You sense the pulse and learn of needs as you support the church through participation in worship, attendance at events, and fellowship. You model the gift of “presence” through involvement in congregational activities.
- The Lay Leader works with the pastor and other leaders to launch or strengthen ministries that build discipleship. Help the church council and the church ask the hard questions about ministry and vision.
- There are several committees or teams you will serve on because you are the Lay Leader. The key reason for you to participate on all these bodies is your perspective. You provide an important connection between these groups. You help ensure that each group is pulling in the same direction. You or an Associate Lay Leader(s) should be present at each meeting. If the Associate Lay Leader(s) share in these responsibilities, you 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.
- By virtue of being Lay Leader, you are a member of the following.
 - Charge Conference which has ultimate authority for directing the mission and ministry of the local church. You are a voting member of the charge conference which generally meets once per year.
 - Church Council, as the administrative agency for the charge conference, is the congregational group that does planning, goal setting, implementation, and evaluation of ministry to fulfill the mission and vision of the congregation. *The leadership team may be called the administrative board, church council, or council on ministry.* As Lay Leader, you are tasked with bringing the broad perspective of the laity in implementing mission and vision, and then to interpret to the congregation plans and decisions of the council.
 - Finance Committee proposes a budget; then raises, manages, and distributes the financial resources of the congregation to support and strengthen the mission and ministry of the congregation. Lay Leaders should have a role in interpreting the importance of apportioned funds to the congregation. Lay Leaders have a unique role in modeling tithing and stressing the importance of supporting the ministries of the church from the pew to the General Church level. A part of your role is also to assist the church in focusing on a holistic model of stewardship: prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.
 - Nominations and Leadership Development: The role of the Nominations and Leadership Development (NLD) Committee is in calling others to leadership and service. The Lay Leader’s vision and overall knowledge of the congregation is especially needed on this committee to help with gift discovery. You need to speak out for efforts to raise up new leaders, mentor, and equip leaders. This is a great place to demonstrate your shared ministry with the pastor as co-leader. As Lay Leader, you should ensure that people receive training and support for their ministries. This training and support are tasks of the NLD Committee. Also encourage the celebration of lay ministries. People tend to do what is rewarded and valued. If we don’t treat lay ministry as if it matters, it doesn’t.

- Staff-Parish Relations Committee works to build a strong positive relationship between pastor, other staff, and congregation so that the congregation carries out its mission of making disciples. This committee will work with the lead pastor and other staff to fulfill legal and ethical responsibilities related to personnel. As Lay Leader, you represent interests of laity, including those laity who may be feeling a call to ordained or specialized ministry.

Inform and attend training events

- Take advantage of training opportunities. These trainings provide a great opportunity to connect with Lay Leaders from other congregations and the District Lay Leader to share ideas and provide mutual support.
- Local church Lay Leaders have the role of introducing the laity in their congregations to all kinds of learning and training opportunities at the conference or district level and elsewhere. As you hear of good workshops and training sessions, encourage others to attend. Pass the word along about upcoming events.

Train to be Certified Lay Servant

- It is recommended in the **BOD** that the Lay Leader become a Certified Lay Servant. There is more to come about Lay Servant Ministries later in this handbook.
- Lift up and support leadership development through Lay Servant Ministries.

Serve as Lay Member to Annual Conference

- To be better equipped to serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general church, it is recommended that the Lay Leader also serve as a Lay Member of annual conference from your local church. However, this has not been the tradition in most of our churches. If the Lay Leader and Lay Member to Annual Conference roles are not filled by the same person, you need to confer and work together as you both have responsibility for:
 - Interpreting the actions and programs of the Annual Conference and the General Church to the local church and
 - Communicating the vision and needs of the local church to the Annual Conference and general church.

Each Lay Member has the responsibility to:

- Attend the annual conference orientation session whether held in-person or virtually.
- Attend all the sessions (in-person or virtual) of the annual conference.
- Become familiar with the organizational structure and existing programs of the annual conference, parliamentary procedure and the conference standing rules as printed in the annual Book of Reports.
- Read pre-conference reports in the Book of Reports available to download and print from the conference website and become familiar with specific programs and items that might be presented during the sessions. Dialogue with others ahead of time if there are issues for which you need additional information or insight.
- Participate fully in the work of the annual conference policy-making decisions.
- Form your own opinions on issues and vote your convictions.

Sources: *The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*; *UM Discipleship Ministries at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/lay-leader>*; *Central Texas Conference UMC and Upper New York Conference UMC Lay Leader Handbooks*

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. A change in the new **Book of Discipline** which will be available in January 2025 is an addition to §660.2 which reads: *“When the district lay leader is not a young adult, care should be taken to ensure selection of a young adult (as defined in §256.3) as an associate district lay leader.”*

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>

CONFERENCE LAY LEADER ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

The roles and responsibilities of the Conference Lay Leader are very similar to those of the district and local church Lay Leaders. According to ¶603 of *The Book of Discipline – 2016*, the “Conference Lay Leader is the elected leader of conference laity and is an officer of the annual conference.” The Bishop is the partner in ministry for the Conference Lay Leader.

According to Virginia Conference Standing Rules, the Conference Lay Leader is to be nominated by the Board of Laity and elected every four years by the Annual Conference to a term of not less than four years, not to exceed two consecutive terms. Associate Lay Leader(s), to work with the Conference Lay Leader, may be elected by the annual conference as it may determine.

Paragraph 607 of the **BOD** notes that the Conference Lay Leader:

- Has responsibility for fostering awareness of the role of the laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world in achieving the mission of the Church and for enabling and supporting lay participation in the planning and decision-making processes of the annual conference, district, and local church in cooperation with the bishop, district superintendents, and pastors.
- Shall relate to the organized lay groups in the conference such as United Methodist Men, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Youth, and Scouting Ministries, encourage and support their work and activities.
- Shall have the general responsibility in: (1) developing the advocacy role for laity in the life of the Church; (2) increasing the participation of laity in the sessions and structure of the annual conference; and (3) encouraging laypersons in the general ministry of the Church.
- Shall chair the conference board of laity or equivalent structure, shall be a member of the annual conference, the conference council on ministries or equivalent structure, the executive committee, if any, of the conference council on ministries, the conference committee on nominations, the conference committee on episcopacy, and the committee planning annual conference sessions; and may be designated by virtue of office to membership on any conference agency by the annual conference.
- Shall be responsible for presenting a report to the annual conference.
- May serve on the conference board of ordained ministry and will participate in the Service of Ordination at annual conference.
- Shall meet with the cabinet when matters relating to the coordination, implementation, or administration of the conference program, or other matters as the cabinet may determine are on the agenda.
- Will meet regularly with the bishop to discuss the state of the annual conference, the Church, and the needs for ministry both locally and globally.
- Shall ensure that the annual conference has a conference director of lay speaking ministries filled in the manner determined by the annual conference and the Conference Lay Leader shall participate in Lay Speaking Ministries.
- Shall be a member of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders and the Southeast Jurisdiction Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders.

In the Virginia Conference, the Conference Lay Leader has traditionally carried out several responsibilities related to the Annual Conference session. These include:

- Planning the Laity Session or other celebration of the laity
- Training for lay members of the Annual Conference
- Working with Connectional Ministries staff and the Worship Planning team to honor the lay members of the Annual Conference who have died between conference sessions.

There are some specific responsibilities that the Conference Lay Leader has with the District Lay Leader and that is to work with the District Superintendent to:

- Recruit qualified District Lay Leaders who are gifted and equipped for such a leadership task,
- Train District Lay Leaders in their new leadership role,
- Communicate regularly with both district and local church Lay Leaders, and
- Support District Lay Leaders as they endeavor to equip local church Lay Leaders and other laity.

In turn, District Lay Leaders are to:

- Develop relationships between the district office and local church Lay Leaders,
- Train and equip local church Lay Leaders for their ministries in local churches,
- Train local church Lay Leaders on the culture of call for all laity,
- Communicate regularly and build networks with local church Lay Leaders, and
- Participate in congregational or cluster charge conferences along with the District Superintendent. This is an often-missed opportunity. Imagine the potential of engaging with the laity throughout the district as they also set goals at charge conferences and celebrate laity in ministry, sending forth gifted laypersons as they respond to the Call of God upon their lives.

Sources: *The United Methodist Book of Discipline – 2016*; *Virginia Conference Standing Rules, 2022*; *Virginia Conference Board of Laity By-Laws, October 31, 2020*; 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.

BOARD OF LAITY

The Book of Discipline outlines the general responsibilities of the Conference Board of Laity (BOL) or equivalent structure. According to ¶ 631, this board:

- Fosters awareness of the role of laity in overall ministry
- Develops and promotes programs that will enable laity of all ages to serve more effectively as leaders in both church and community.
- Cultivates understanding of the theological and biblical basis for lay ministry
- Develops and promotes stewardship of time, talent, and possessions
- Relates to Lay Servant Ministries and other organized lay groups within the conference and supports their work by coordinating activities within the conference to maintain connectional relationships.
- Promotes the observance of Laity Sunday
- Provides organization, direction, and support for development of leaders
- Devotes attention to inclusion of all persons
- Provides for the training of lay members of annual conference.
- Provides for ministry of the laity related to the objectives of the General Board of Discipleship (Discipleship Ministries) as set forth in ¶¶ 1101-1126 of *The Book of Discipline*.

Membership on the conference board of laity is outlined in ¶ 631. The bylaws of the Virginia Conference BOL and standing rules of the VAUMC state that membership is composed of the following:

- Conference Lay Leader
- Associate Conference Lay Leader - One District Lay Leader from each of the four prayer/work groups.
- District Lay Leaders - Associate or Co-District Lay Leaders would assume membership on the Conference Board of Laity.
- Conference Director(s) of Lay Servant Ministries
- President of the Conference United Methodist Men or appointed representative
- President of the Conference United Methodist Women or appointed representative
- Young People's Representative selected by the Youth or Young Adult Council
- Conference Director of Scouting Ministries
- Clergy (no more than three) appointed by the Executive Committee as members who model excellence in the lay-clergy partnership for ministry
- One District Superintendent to be appointed by the Bishop.
- Resident Bishop
- One Connectional Ministries staff representative
- Individuals may be co-opted to assist with specific tasks as needed.

The Virginia Conference board is divided into four Prayer/Work Groups to engage, equip, and empower the laity of the conference. These groups serve as conduits for advocacy, needs assessment, communications, networking, mentoring, and training for conference laity. Specifically, the groups focus on discipleship opportunities for all conference laity, beginning with District and Local Church Lay Leadership.

Each district may organize to best address the missional life, advocacy needs and ministries of the district. In some districts, that organization includes a District Board of Laity. If such a structure is present, its responsibilities would include:

- Developing and promoting an increased role for laity in the life of the church
- Increasing participation of the laity in sessions and programs of the district
- Encouraging laypersons to participate in the general ministry of the church in the world
- Equipping local church Lay Leaders and others in leadership roles within the local churches
- Encouraging partnerships and working relationships between clergy and laity
- Developing and promoting stewardship of time, talent, and possessions
- Relating to the Lay Servant Ministries program

Most of our Virginia Conference districts have moved to a district leadership team model that encompasses this work and more on behalf of district laity and clergy. These teams vary in name and composition. Most carry the name of Common Table or District Leadership Team. On the conference-level, the Common Table is a circle of spiritual leadership empowered by the Virginia Annual Conference to coordinate and prioritize the ministries and resources of the Conference. The Common Table is a catalyst for the creative and cooperative functioning of the boards and agencies of the Annual Conference. The Common Table interprets, engages and advances the vision of the Virginia Annual Conference, as well as the mandates of ***The Book of Discipline***, to benefit both the ministry of the local churches and the connectional ministry of the Annual Conference.

Conference and District Lay Leaders will often be asked to help lead change. Appreciative inquiry and asset-based community development are great processes in leading change. Appreciative inquiry is a way of seeing things as they are and creating a plan for the future, a new reality, using the best of the church and community. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a process that identifies possible partners for action. Both processes have proven to be extremely effective across the globe.

Lay Leaders on every level of the church are and will be the prime movers and shakers in the transformation of the world as we participate in God's mission to the world by making disciples of Jesus Christ. Lay Leaders have a call and a mission to equip God's people for the work of serving and building up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12). This is an awesome responsibility that the Church has entrusted to you.

The United Methodist Church is in a challenging place right now. Because of where we find ourselves today, the smallest adaptive change in how we do ministry on the local church level can create a tsunami of positive movement through every level of the church, from the smallest of faith communities to the largest mega-churches. By becoming mission-focused and through intentional development and empowerment of laity, we can change the trajectory from decline to growth, from church centered to community focused.

Sources: *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church – 2016*; *Virginia Conference Standing Rules, 2022*; *Virginia Conference Board of Laity By-Laws, October 31, 2020*; *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*

TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON

Everybody's term of office comes to an end some time. Just as the beginning of your role as Lay Leader called for discernment and decision-making on your part so, too, the time of ending needs to be marked by good judgment and wisdom. There is no set term of office for a local church Lay Leader. However, many churches ask Lay Leaders to consider serving for four years, just as the local church's lay member to Annual Conference often is asked to serve for a full quadrennial. The Virginia Conference extends the opportunity to serve a maximum of two consecutive terms for most conference-level elected leadership roles. This term of offices allows enough time to get to know the job, decide some direction, and work toward having an impact within the congregation. To allow for continuity in the local church's lay leadership, however, it might be wise to have the lay member's term and that of the Lay Leader overlap, so that succeeding Lay Leaders are elected in second or third year of a quadrennial.

Another way to provide continuity is for an Associate Lay Leader, or Co-Lay Leader, to work with the Lay Leader during the last year of their service. When ending your service as Lay Leader, you can make the next person's job more successful in several ways. First, as already mentioned, suggest to the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development that an associate or co-Lay Leader work with you during your last year in office. During that time, you could help the next person "learn the ropes." Frequent meetings together with the past Lay Leader and other lay people will enable the next Lay Leader to have a sense of the job and some working relationships with others. Keep a file of useful information that can be turned over to the next person. Include resources that you've found meaningful, notes from meetings that would give some sense of history to various church programs and decisions, and a list of people within the district and conference who have been able to answer questions and give assistance. Giving a sense of history enables the next person to begin the task without operating in a vacuum.

At the same time, it's important not to have past experience become a block. One should be cautious of this happening if the famous phrase "but we have always done it this way" is heard! Once your time as Lay Leader is over, look for new ways to be of service in the congregation and beyond it. Be available to church leaders for support and counsel, and yet, be careful to let new leaders have room and time to develop their own style and role in the life of the church.

When the Pastor, District Superintendent or Bishop Leaves

When the appointment of a different pastoral leader is made, the Lay Leader can work to ensure a smooth transition. Providing continuity in leadership for the church, you may work with Staff-Parish Relations or equivalent structure on the district or conference level to be certain that the leave taking of the current pastoral leader is marked with good graces and blessings of the congregation. Encouraging the congregation to take appropriate time to lift up the ministry of this person and to celebrate the church's life during that time of leadership is important.

If you are continuing as Lay Leader as the next pastor begins an appointment, your role again can be vital in promoting a smooth transition. You may work with Staff-Parish Relations or equivalent structure on the district or conference level and program areas to plan an installation service and reception. Support the Board of Trustees or parsonage committee to ensure the parsonage, if

provided, is prepared for new residents. With the chairperson of the church council, keep important programs and ministries functioning effectively while the new pastoral leader is in the beginning months of service. Welcome the new pastoral leader and express anticipation for new and continued work together.

Source: Western North Carolina Conference UMC Local Church Lay Leader Manual, <https://www.wnccumc.org/files/tables/content/11730268/fields/files/fbb9e9b55bdb45bcbd3f87309b12e866/2010localchurchlayleadermanual.pdf>

LAITY SUNDAY

Laity Sunday is a special Sunday defined by General Conference “to celebrate the ministry of all Christians” (*The Book of Discipline - 2016*, ¶ 264.2). Traditionally observed on the third Sunday in October, Laity Sunday is one way we express the deep conviction that all are called to participate in God’s mission and live this calling through the ministry of the church. Laity Sunday themes for each quadrennium (4-year cycle) are set by the Executive Committee of the Association of Annual Conference Lay Leaders (AACLL).

For 2020-2024, the themes for all four years were based upon 2 Timothy 1:1-14 (NRSV).

- 2021: RISE UP! - and **Revive** God’s gift (2 Tim 1:3-7)
- 2022: RISE UP! - and **Reveal** God’s grace (2 Tim 1:8-12)
- 2023: RISE UP! - and **Remain** committed to Love’s teaching (2 Tim 1:13)
- 2024: RISE UP! - and **Retain** the Spirit’s good and beautiful things (2 Tim 1:14)

The Laity Sunday themes for the 2025-2028 quadrennium are based upon Ephesians 3:14-21 (NRSV).

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. ¹⁶ I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit ¹⁷ and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. ¹⁸ I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- 2025: *Be Strong in the Spirit* – Ephesians 3:16
- 2026: *Be Grounded in Love* – Ephesians 3:17
- 2027: *Behold Love’s Breadth/Depth* – Ephesians 3:18
- 2028: *Be Filled with God’s Fullness* – Ephesians 3:19

To find resources for Laity Sunday, visit the Discipleship Ministries website at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/lay-ministry> and search Laity Sunday.

LAY SERVANT MINISTRIES

Lay Servant Ministries is one of the most significant lay leadership development programs available within the United Methodist connection. Through this equipping and empowering system, lay servants have the opportunity to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ who then go and make other disciples. Lay Servant Ministries can be a significant component of any intentional discipleship system, particularly systems based on the core process or cycle of discipleship described in ¶122 of *The Book of Discipline*.

The United Methodist Church has established three categories for laypersons in Lay Servant Ministries to develop, prepare, and engage principled Christian leaders for the mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world:

- Certified Lay Servant
- Certified Lay Speaker
- Certified Lay Minister



Certified lay servants who wish to develop their skills further may choose a track to become certified as lay speakers (those who are called specifically to pulpit supply) or as lay ministers (those who are called to long-term, intentional ministry as part of a ministry team).

There are currently certified lay minister specializations in the areas of:

- UM Parish Nurse
- Children's Faith Formation
- National Plan for Hispanic/Latino Ministry Lay Missioner
- Men's Ministry Specialist
- UMC Path 1 Lay Church Planter
- Congregational Care Minister (CCM)
- Certified UM Church Administrator (CUMCA)

To become a certified lay minister (CLM) with a specialization in a particular area, the CLM would need to complete additional educational/training requirements specific to that area of ministry. Each specialization has its own accreditation body.

The chart that follows defines the three categories, outlines requirements for certification and requirements for renewal. For additional information, visit the VAUMC website at <https://vaumc.org/lay-servant-ministries/> or Discipleship Ministries at <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/lay-ministry>

CERTIFIED LAY SERVANT	CERTIFIED LAY SPEAKER	CERTIFIED LAY MINISTER
<p>Serves the local church or charge (and/or beyond) and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides program leadership, assistance, and support • Leads meetings for prayer, training, study, and discussion • Conducts, or assists in conducting, services of worship, preaches the Word, or gives addresses • Provides congregational and community leadership and fosters caring ministries • Assists in the distribution of the elements of Holy Communion • Teaches the Scriptures, doctrine, organization, and ministries of The United Methodist Church. 	<p>Serves by preaching the Word when requested by the pastor, district superintendent, or committee on Lay Servant Ministries, in accordance and compliance with ¶341.1.</p>	<p>As part of a ministry team with supervision and support of a clergy person:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducts public worship • Cares for the congregation • Develops new faith communities • Preaches the Word • Leads small groups • Establishes outreach ministries • Serves as a class leader • Engages in specialized ministries after appropriate training such as in parish nursing and church planting • Assists in program leadership
REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION:	REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION:	REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTIFICATION:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Lay Servant Ministries BASIC course • Lay Servant Ministries advanced course • District committee on Lay Servant Ministries, or equivalent structure (See ¶668.3) approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified as a lay servant (<i>or equivalent as defined by his or her central conference</i>) • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Completion of a track of study as defined in ¶267.3.c. • Conference committee on Lay Servant Ministries approval after interview with and recommendation from the district committee on Lay Servant Ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Certified as a lay servant, lay missionary (<i>or equivalent as defined by his or her central conference</i>) • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Completion of a track of study as defined in ¶268 • District Superintendent recommendation • Appropriate screening & assessment • Conference committee on Lay Servant Ministries approval after interview with and recommendation from district committee on Ordained Ministry
REQUIREMENTS FOR RENEWAL:	REQUIREMENTS FOR RENEWAL:	REQUIREMENTS FOR RENEWAL:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report & renewal application • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Lay Servant Ministries advanced course in the last three years • District committee on Lay Servant Ministries, or equivalent structure (See ¶668.3) approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report & renewal application • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Lay Servant Ministries advanced course in the last three years • Conference committee on Lay Servant Ministries approval every three years after interview with and recommendation from the district committee on Lay Servant Ministries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual report • Pastor and church council or charge conference recommendation • Ministry review • Lay Servant Ministries advanced course or approved continuing education event every two years • District Superintendent recommendation • Conference committee on Lay Servant Ministries approval every two years after interview with and recommendation from district committee on Ordained Ministry
<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div style="margin-left: 20px;"> <p>ADOPTED LEGISLATION AT 2016 GENERAL CONFERENCE</p> <p>For more information visit: www.UMCdiscipleship.org</p>  <p>DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES The United Methodist Church</p> </div> </div>		

INTERPRETING OUR STRUCTURE AND CONTEXT: THE GENERAL CHURCH

The structure of The United Methodist Church centers around mission and ministry for Christ. The United Methodist Church is organized structurally as:

- The General Conference which meets every four years (quadrennium) to enact legislation and adopt resolutions and is the only body that can speak for the entire denomination.
- The Judicial Council which interprets legislation from the General Conference
- The Council of Bishops which has oversight of the Episcopal areas in the US and the Central Conferences
- Jurisdictional Conferences based on geographical and regional divisions of the United States
- Central Conferences for the Church outside the United States
- Annual Conferences
- Districts
- Local churches and charges.

The General Conference may modify ***The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*** and adopt resolutions to be placed in ***The Book of Resolutions***. Legislation is passed by General Conference; however, legislation that would change the Constitution of The United Methodist Church must be affirmed “by two-thirds affirmative vote of the aggregate number of members of the several annual conferences present and voting....” (§159, ***The Book of Discipline - 2016***)

The Judicial Council is in attendance during General Conference sessions. When requested to do so, the Council reviews the constitutionality of proposed legislation.

The annual State of the Church Report is a resource to help evaluate our current realities within The United Methodist Church, to celebrate the momentum of our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and to identify opportunities and challenges as we move forward in ministry.

The *State of the Church* report is presented by the Connectional Table (the denomination’s “church council”) in collaboration with the Council of Bishops and the General Council on Finance and Administration. The State of the Church report is a great educational resource for all church leaders. The report can be found at: <https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-united-methodist-church-releases-2022-state-of-the-church-report>

In our connectional system, many often think we have a headquarters or “home” of the denomination when we do not. The general (churchwide) agencies of The UMC are spread across the United States.

- The office of the Council of Bishops, Board of Church & Society, and General Commission on Religion and Race are in Washington, DC.
- The office of the Connectional Table (the “church council” for the denomination), Wespath (Pensions & Benefits), and General Commission on the Status and Role of Women are in the Chicago area.

- Global Ministries is in Atlanta.
- Archives and History is in Madison, NJ.
- The United Women in Faith's office is in New York City.
- Communications, Discipleship Ministries, Finance & Administration, Higher Education, United Methodist Men, and the Publishing House are in Nashville.

The general agencies and commissions are mandated to work within the provisions of **The Book of Discipline** and in harmony with **The Book of Resolutions**. So, just as an example, what might seem to some like a very political topic these days - climate change - is a part of our Social Principle on Global Climate Stewardship. When the agencies of The UMC speak in support of caring for God's creation, they are voicing what is in our Social Principles.

JURISDICTIONS

Annual conferences in the United States are grouped regionally into 5 jurisdictions: North Central, Northeastern, South Central, Southeastern, and Western. The Virginia Conference is among the fifteen annual conferences in the Southeast Jurisdiction (SEJ).

- The Jurisdictional Conference which meets every 4 years following the General Conference elects the bishops who serve within that jurisdiction.
- A Jurisdictional Committee on the Episcopacy determines which Bishop will serve in each annual conference.



Regional bodies, similar to our jurisdictional conferences, outside the United States are called Central Conferences. There are currently seven Central Conferences outside the United States: Africa, Congo, West Africa, Central and Southern Europe, Germany, Northern Europe and Eurasia, and The Philippines. Action at the most recent General Conference in 2024 created an additional Central Conference in Africa. As of 2025, the Central Conferences will be as follows.

- East Africa
- Southern Africa
- Mid-Africa
- West Africa
- Germany
- Central and Southern Europe

- Northern Europe and Eurasia
- The Philippines

DISTRICTS AND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The local church is the basic unit of the denomination’s structure. Each local church in the United States is part of a district, an administrative grouping of generally 40 to 80 churches with a full-time superintendent. The Bishop appoints full-time Elders to serve as District Superintendents. This group is referred to as the Bishop’s Cabinet.

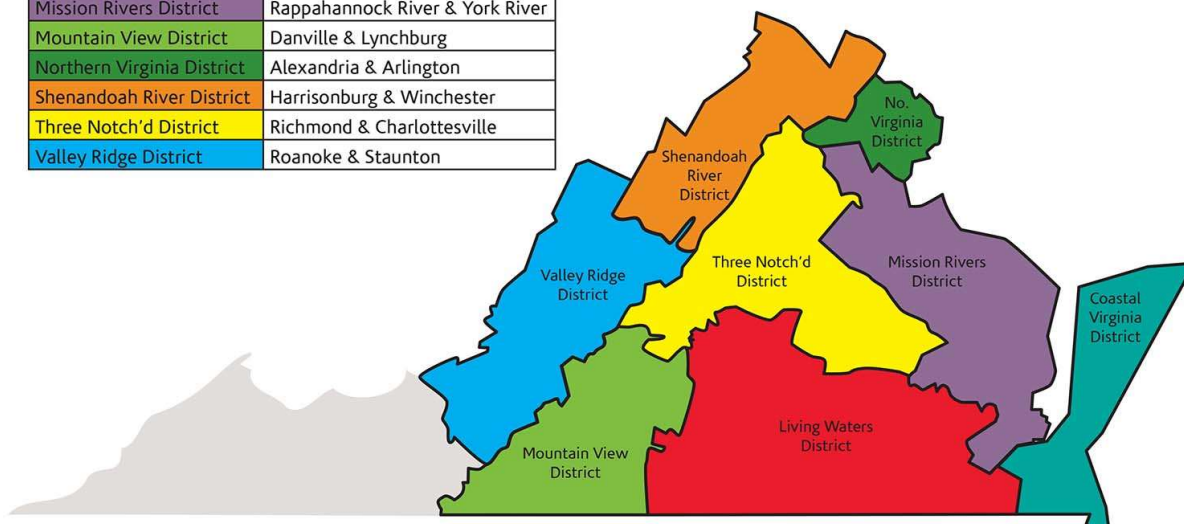
Local churches are organized into annual conferences that meet yearly for legislative purposes. Annual conferences approve programming and budget, examine, and approve candidates for ministry, elect conference leaders, and in our case, approve continuing relationships with health and welfare institutions.

People jokingly say the Virginia Conference covers the state by geographical boundaries to the north, east, and south, but only as far west as Virginia Tech. The western boundary line is basically the borders of Montgomery and Patrick Counties. The Virginia Conference takes in one local church in Knotts Island, NC.

- Many people are surprised to find that approximately 86% of our local churches in the Virginia Conference have 150 or fewer people in average worship attendance, putting them into the small membership church category.
- More and more small churches are being served by Part-Time Local Pastors and Lay Supply, the majority of whom work other full-time jobs.
- Only about 4% of our Virginia Conference churches had an average worship attendance of 351+ pre-COVID. This puts them in a “large church” category for our conference; however, this average worship attendance is small compared to true large size churches in the denomination.

Technically, the Virginia conference is called the Richmond Episcopal Area.

NEW DISTRICT	FORMER DISTRICTS
Coastal Virginia District	Eastern Shore & Elizabeth River
Living Waters District	Farmville & James River
Mission Rivers District	Rappahannock River & York River
Mountain View District	Danville & Lynchburg
Northern Virginia District	Alexandria & Arlington
Shenandoah River District	Harrisonburg & Winchester
Three Notch'd District	Richmond & Charlottesville
Valley Ridge District	Roanoke & Staunton



LOCAL CHURCH LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Each local church has the right to determine the structure which will enable the church to effectively engage in ministry. The suggested structure in *the book of discipline* is the N.O.W. organization. The important key to the N.O.W. organization is that the local church is given the flexibility to mold its ministries to follow god's vision for the local church, to meet the needs of its congregation, and to be in mission to the local community and to the world. No longer is the local church bound by rigid structure that may inhibit the mission and ministry of the church. Freedom, within certain guidelines, has been given for ministry to be created following god's instructions thereby meeting the needs of both the congregation and the community.

- Nurture ministries in a local church include the Sunday School, various kinds of worship services, and stewardship as a lifestyle.
- Outreach is the community ministries of compassion and advocacy. These are ministries that deal with church and society issues, global ministries (missions), welfare ministries, issues concerning women and race. Outreach ministries may be ministries that feed the hungry, that reach those in jail and prison, that care for abused women and children, that minister to older adults or young children, that repair homes of the needy, that minister to people of differing cultures.
- Witness includes evangelistic outreach, membership care perhaps through shepherding programs, spiritual formation through bible study and prayer ministry, communications through a church newsletter, lay speaking to better prepare laity to be in nurturing and caring ministries and to speak for Christ.

Many churches are moving toward a simplified church structure. From the **2016 Book of Discipline – Alternative Structure (§ 247.2)**:

*The charge conference, the District Superintendent, and the pastor, when a pastor has been appointed, shall organize and administer the pastoral charge and churches according to the policies and plans herein set forth. When the membership size, program scope, mission resources, or other circumstances so require, **the church conference may, in consultation with and upon the approval of the district superintendent, modify the organizational plans, provided that the provisions of § 243 are observed.***

Churches are encouraged to develop a church management structure that best serves the mission and ministry of the congregation in accordance with the **Book of Discipline** and in conversation with the people of the church and your District superintendent.

Resources:

- ***Mission Possible: A Simple Structure for Missional Effectiveness*** by Kay Kotan and Blake Bradford can be used as a book study for church council, nominations and leadership development and other ministry teams. Contact Dwayne Stinson in the Influencing Office for more details about Virginia Conference training sessions.
- A PowerPoint presentation for the Virginia Conference churches participating in Next Level Innovations: <https://www.nextlevelinnovations.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PresentationHandoutVA040718-Kay.pdf>

REGIONALIZATION

At the recent general conference session held April 23 – May 3, 2024, in Charlotte, NC, delegates passed eight legislative petitions that would restructure the United Methodist denomination to be more contextual in different regions served by the church. Regionalization is a plan to restructure The United Methodist Church with the goal of making us more just and equitable at the worldwide level while also enabling us to be more missionally effective and contextually adaptable in our various regions throughout the world. Worldwide regionalization is the most important structural change our denomination has seen in a generation! Regionalization stands as distinct from the other work of General Conference. It had been in development for many years, with the Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters, our denominational Connectional Table, and a team of clergy and laity from Central Conferences outside the United States collaborating on the petitions that were submitted. It received support from delegates from every region.

One of the legislative petitions is an amendment to our constitution. Constitutional amendments must be ratified by an aggregate 2/3 majority vote of all voting members at every annual conference across the connection to be passed. The ratification process should begin no more than 30 days after the close of the general conference and will continue through November 2025. Reporting on the outcome is anticipated in the spring of 2026. The Virginia Conference will vote on worldwide regionalization at Annual Conference in June of 2025. Over the next year, leading up to AC 2025, many opportunities for education, Q&Q, and further discussion will be provided.

You can find resources about regionalization – including presentations from general conference and information from the Virginia delegation – on the conference website at:

<https://vaumc.org/regionalization/>

For more information, visit ResourceUMC at <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/connectional-table/home/resources/legislation/regionalization-legislation>

As Local Church Lay Leader, you and your Local Church Member to Annual Conference (if you are not also serving that role) need to be as informed as possible on the amendments that will be before the Annual Conference in 2025.

MINISTRY OF THE LAITY RESOURCES

General Church

- The United Methodist Church website: www.umc.org
- United Methodist News Service website: www.umnews.org/en
- Ask The UMC information service: www.umc.org/en/what-we-believe/ask-the-umc-faqs
- Resource UMC website: www.resourceumc.org
- Discipleship Ministries website: www.umcdiscipleship.org
David Teel, Director of Laity in Leadership
615-340-7179
dteel@umcdiscipleship.org

Virginia Conference

- VA Conference website: www.vaumc.org
- Ministry of the Laity: <https://vaumc.org/laity/> (File Path: VAUMC > The Ministry of the Laity)
- Lay Servant Ministries: <https://vaumc.org/lay-servant-ministries/>
- United Women in Faith: <https://www.vauwf.org/>
- United Methodist Men: <https://vaumc.org/umm/>
- Scouting Ministries: <https://vaumc.org/scoutingministries/>

Favorite Books for These Changing Times

Being the Church in a Post-Pandemic World: Game Changers for the Post-Pandemic Church
by Kay Kotan, Rodney Smothers, et al. Publisher: Market Square Publishing, 2021

Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory by Tod Bolsinger.
Publisher: InterVarsity Press, 2015

Embracing the Wilderness: The Shared Convictions of The United Methodist Church by
Kenneth H. Carter, Jr. Publisher: Abingdon Press, 2018

Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church for People Not in the Church by Kenneth
H. Carter, Jr. and Audrey Warren. Publisher: Abingdon Press, 2017

How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going: Leading in a Liminal Season by
Susan Beaumont. Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019

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