

A Proposal for Re-Structuring the Superintendency of the New South Conference



The New South Conference is faced with a challenge and opportunity in relation to providing for the superintendency of the conference. The challenge is to live within our means – that is, to be a self-supporting conference. The opportunity, thanks in great part to our current Interim Superintendent, is that we have the time to structure the superintendency in our conference so that it will fit our mission, our needs, and our resources.



Too often organizations that are facing challenges will develop organizational responses – for example, budget cuts, mergers, or restructuring – that draw focus and energy away from the mission (purpose and tasks) of the organization. What results is that the organization is repaired for a time and the mission or purpose of the organization fades into the background.

An organization facing challenges will seek to save itself first. In other words, an organization will reorganize only as much as required to save the organization or *status quo*. This default position for organizations is the proverbial self-licking ice cream cone: An organization that exists only in order to exist.

I have a proposal which I believe will address our challenge as a conference and take advantage of our opportunities to restructure our conference to allow us to fulfill our mission and provide for focused and decentralized leadership. I shall present this proposal in an un-scholarly manner (using the first person), but with enough supporting information to provide a framework for discussion.

The first item for this presentation will be to draw our attention to the mission or purpose of an annual conference and to sketch the job of superintendent. Next the organizational proposal for the New South Conference shall be presented. Third, the proposal will be tested to see if it is allowed within the parameters set by the Book of Discipline. Finally, the reasonableness of the proposal will be examined in relation to certain principles for success.

The Mission of an Annual Conference and the Role of the Superintendency

The mission of an annual conference is stated in *The 2011 Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church – USA, paragraph 5000 (the emphasis is mine):

Annual conferences, after the pattern of the Methodist Episcopal Church, have been a basic organizational structure of the Free Methodist Church since its beginning. After the first annual conference was organized in Pekin, New York, in 1860, twenty-two more were born in the next twenty-five years, as, in the words of Bishop Leslie Marston, early Free Methodism “marched across the nation.” Today, as then, the annual conference is the organization at the regional level that joins local churches into a network. The annual conference ensures that pastors and congregations are counseled and encouraged, identifies those who are being called into the ordained ministry and promotes and oversees church planting and evangelism.

Let us summarize the mission of an annual conference:

1. Join local churches in a network;
2. Counsel and encourage pastors and congregations;
3. Identify persons being called into ordained ministry;
4. Promote and oversee church planting and evangelism.

These four tasks are the mission or purpose of an annual conference. The mission is the starting point for any organization of the New South Conference.

Now, what is the role of the superintendency? You will notice that I say superintendency and not superintendent. The reason for this will be shown later.

The duties or role of the superintendency of an annual conference are found in *The 2011 Book of Discipline* of the Free Methodist Church – USA, paragraph 5110.D and I have abbreviated them. The conference superintendent shall:

1. *Look after the spiritual and temporal interests of the churches;*
2. *See that the provisions of Book of Discipline are enforced;*
3. *Visit each church;*
4. *Visit a society when requested to do so;*
5. *Convene and preside over area [meetings];*
6. *Labor as an evangelist;*
7. *Promote and oversee church planting;*
8. *Be a pastor to pastors;*
9. *Recommend appointment, reception and change of pastors;*
10. *Suspend a conference appointee [as needed];*
11. *See that deeds are properly made out and recorded;*
12. *Manage ad interim appointments;*
13. *Give the bishop all the necessary information regarding the state of the conference and cooperate in setting goals and framing plans;*
14. *Be the liaison between pastors and the general church;*
15. *Notify the superintendent of another conference before employing a minister from that conference; and*
16. *Be an ex-officio member of all boards and committees.*

The Proposal for the Re-Structure of the Superintendency of the New South Conference

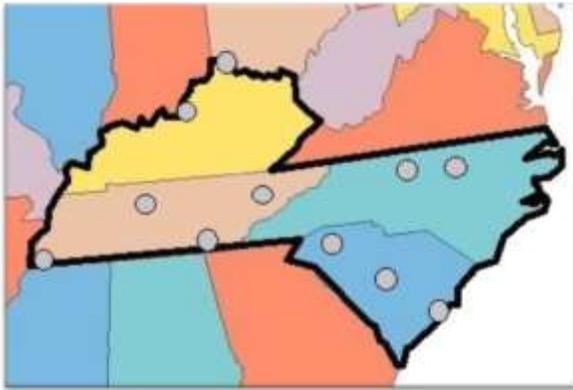
With the mission of an annual conference and the role of the superintendency from *The Book of Discipline* in mind, we can move to propose a new structure that will accomplish the mission and perform the tasks required. First, let us ask, “What and where is the New South Conference?”

The area of ministry for the New South Conference consists of four contiguous states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. There are twenty-one Free Methodist



congregations as of 2012 in the New South Conference. The average worship attendance in 2012 was seventy-two.

North Carolina is the tenth largest state in the United States with a population of 9.8 million that is growing at a rate of about 1.5%. Tennessee is the seventeenth largest state with a population of 6.5 million that is growing at a rate of about 1%. South Carolina is the twenty-fourth largest state with a population of 4.8 million that is growing at a rate of 1.25%. Kentucky is the twenty-sixth largest state with a population of 4.4 million that is growing at a rate of .5%. Almost eight percent of the population of the United States resides within the ministry area of the New South Conference.

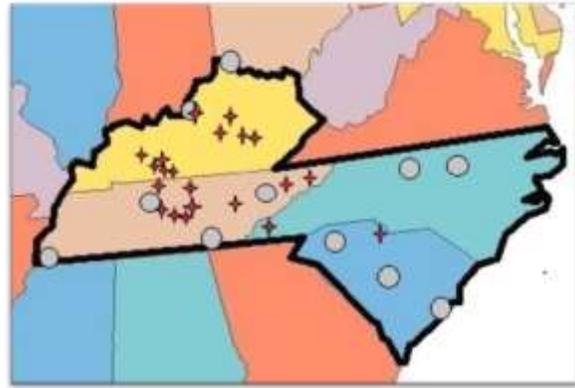


These states contain eleven of the one hundred largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) established by the United States Census Bureau. Two of these MSAs are located in North Carolina, three in South Carolina, four in Tennessee, and two in Kentucky. MSAs are not limited by state boundaries, and so, for example, the MSAs that include

parts of Kentucky are Louisville and Southern Indiana and Cincinnati (Ohio) and Northern Kentucky:

- MSA #28, Cincinnati OH, 2.1 million*
- MSA #36, Nashville, TN, 1.7 million*
- MSA #41, Memphis TN, 1.3 million*
- MSA #43 Louisville KY, 1.3 million*
- MSA #47, Raleigh NC, 1.2 million*
- MSA #64, Knoxville TN, .8 million*
- MSA #65, Greenville SC, .8 million*
- MSA # 72, Columbia SC, .8 million*
- MSA #78, Charleston SC, .7 million*
- MSA #81, Winston-Salem NC, .6 million*
- MSA #99, Chattanooga TN, .5 million*

The Free Methodist congregations of the New South Conference primarily are located outside of the eleven MSAs of the conference. Only one congregation – Breckenridge Chapel (Louisville) is located inside the urban portion of an MSA. The New South Conference may be considered, therefore, a rural conference located outside of the main population centers.



A quick look at the map suggests an administrative division of the New South Conference into three areas. The first part of this proposal is to divide the New South Conference into three sub-conferences or districts: The Bluegrass District, the Pennyryle District, and the Appalachian District. These districts will be unbalanced in many ways, but they will be geographically reasonable.

The next part of the proposal is to eliminate the position of District Leader and bring those duties into the conference superintendency. The elimination of these four positions may create some savings, but it is not proposed to save money.

The third and fourth parts of the proposed re-structure would be to nominate and elect three Superintendents – one Lead Superintendent and two Associate Superintendents, who would, as a body, assume the responsibilities of the current District Leaders and Conference Superintendent. These three Superintendents would also be appointed as lead pastors of a smaller church or society within the bounds of their respective areas (sub-conference or district).

An important part of this re-structuring would be to convince the denominational leadership that the New South Conference should be self-supporting, should have indigenous leadership, and should be viewed as a mission field for the planting of new societies, churches, and ministries.

We could summarize the proposed re-structure as follows:

1. Divide the conference into three geographic sub-conferences or districts;
2. Eliminate the positions of District Leader;
3. Nominate and elect three superintendents from the pool of active Elders in the New South Conference – one Lead Superintendent and two Associate Superintendents – each Superintendent to be appointed as the lead pastor of a church/society within the district; and
4. Divide the conference and denominational responsibilities of superintendency between the three Superintendents with the Lead Superintendent being the “first among equals.”

Such a re-structuring would allow for de-centralized leadership, vision, and church planting while continuing a centralized and consolidated administrative structure. It would also allow the superintendency to have a primary focus of ministry support and expansion and church planting within the conference. Spreading conference and denominational responsibilities and negotiating a less time-consuming denominational role for the New South Conference superintendency would allow the conference leadership to focus on growth and expansion.

It is highly recommended that these superintendents NOT be appointed to the larger churches in their “sub-conference.” This is not to suggest that the elders appointed to these larger churches do not have the ability – they most certainly do! It is, however, a recognition that the superintendency requires more time, energy, and focus than the elders appointed to our larger churches could possibly spare. This practice would allow for appropriate time to be given to the superintendency and provide smaller churches with experienced pastors.

The Cost of the Proposal for Re-Structure

In order to examine the cost of the proposed re-structure we need to consider the current and projected costs of leadership to the conference. Changes in the costs from 2014 to 2015 occur primarily with the interim superintendent coming from retired status. 2016 reflects the reality of a self-supporting conference. Here are the approximate budgeted leadership costs for 2014 – 2016:

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	2014	2015	2016
Superintendent Base Salary*	\$48,000	\$49,000	\$40,000
Superintendent Benefits**	\$12,000	\$7,000	\$8,000
Superintendent Travel	\$20,000	\$24,000	-0-
Superintendent Housing***	\$12,000	-0-	-0-
District Leader Travel****	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$2,000
TOTAL COSTS	\$94,000	\$82,000	\$50,000

* Considered half-time salary when compared to other WAVE conferences.

** Pension, Medical Insurance, Workman's Compensation Insurance, Long Term Disability Insurance.

*** Housing provided by Bratcher's Crossing FMC.

**** Estimated for four District Leaders.

The chart easily shows the need for the superintendency of the New South Conference to have either a single minimum salary superintendent who may be serving another church, or sharing a single superintendent with another conference, or re-structuring the superintendency in an imaginative way.

Sharing a single superintendent with another conference is a plan for removing the superintendency from immediate leadership of the conference. In order to reach a "full-time" package for a superintendent the New South Conference would need to partner with a larger conference that could support the preponderance of the package. The New South Conference budgets less than thirty-six percent (approximately one-third) of a projected full-time superintendent's package for 2016. Let us do the math:

	Half Salary Set for 2014	Full Salary Based on 2014	2016 Budget	%age of Full-Time
Superintendent Base Salary	\$48,000	\$96,000	\$40,000	
Superintendent Benefits	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$8,000	
Superintendent Travel	\$20,000	\$20,000	-0-	
Superintendent Housing	\$12,000	\$12,000	-0-	
TOTAL COSTS	\$92,000	\$140,000	\$50,000	35.7%

At this level then the New South Conference would need to partner with a conference that could double the New South Conference's support for a superintendent. Based on that ratio we could estimate that the partnering conference would have twice the number of churches as the New South Conference and a claim on two-thirds of the shared superintendent's time, attention and energy. Is every church, committee, organization, and pastor of the New South Conference prepared to decrease the time the superintendent devotes to each of them by two-thirds?

As an example the church I serve, Breckenridge Chapel, has received one visit, and as a pastor, I have received one visit from the superintendent in the last twelve months. These visits have been very generous, well-received, and appreciated. Each visit probably "costs" one workday for the superintendent. Sharing a superintendent with another larger conference would reduce such visits to one every two or three years. Is that the sort of leadership model we need as a conference?

I would argue respectfully that we need a model that will allow for superintendency that is even closer to the churches, committees, organizations, and pastors of the New South Conference and can develop indigenous and decentralized plans for expansion, growth, evangelism, and church planting.

The cost of my proposed plan could lower the costs of leadership for the conference and increase the opportunity for immediate and effective superintendency. To remind us, the proposal eliminates the four district leader positions and has one Lead Superintendent and two Associate Superintendents. Here is the cost of the proposal:

	Current 2016 Budget	Lead Superintendent	Associate Superintendent	Associate Superintendent	Total Proposed Budget
Superintendent Base Salary	\$40,000	\$12,000	\$10,000	\$10,000	\$32,000
Superintendent Benefits	\$8,000	\$3,000	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$7,000
Superintendent Travel	-0-	\$2,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$4,000
Superintendent Housing	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-	-0-
TOTAL COSTS	\$48,000	\$17,000	\$13,000	\$13,000	\$43,000

Does *The Book of Discipline* Allow for the Proposed Restructuring?

The short answer to this question is: “Yes.” The Free Methodist Church allows for creativity and flexibility in structuring annual conferences. Let us look at the applicable paragraphs. ¶5070 of *The Book of Discipline* states:

In consultation with the bishop of record, the annual conference may organize itself in ways that more consistently reflect the operational values and desired outcomes of the Free Methodist Church. Organizational structures and functions shall be reviewed periodically to insure missional priorities and to assess the conference in light of the benchmarks of conference vitality established by the Board of Bishops and National Oversight Team. When such assessment reveals failure or decline, the conference shall seek help in formulating appropriate strategic responses.

This disciplinary paragraph deserves our attention in another process of self-evaluation. The germane point of this paragraph for the proposal at hand is that the conference may organize itself. Though the bishop's involvement and approval is desired, the paragraph does not require any permission from the bishop, simply consultation from the bishop.

¶5110.A.1 states:

Each annual conference shall elect one elder as superintendent, except as otherwise provided (see ¶5110.A.7). A conference may elect, appoint, or make provision to employ one or more elders to serve as assistant(s) to the superintendent.

This disciplinary sub-paragraph allows for the proposed three superintendents. This proposal has called them "Lead Superintendent" and "Associate Superintendents;" but the title is irrelevant to the execution of the proposal.

¶5110.A.7 states:

A conference may propose to have a stationed superintendent and/or stationed assistant(s) to the superintendent, in which event the ministerial appointments committee will nominate candidates.

This provision of *The Book of Discipline* reiterates the permission for assistants to the superintendent – what I have called Associate Superintendents. Though The Book of Discipline does not define the term "stationed," ¶5110.C. 3 suggests that a stationed superintendent or assistant are elected to and serving in their conference positions as well as appointed to serve as a pastor of a church.

¶5110.C.1-3 also allows for the proposal in giving the rules that govern how a superintendent is paid by an annual conference. The three sub-sub-paragraphs of this regulation state:

1. Annual conferences in the United States are expected to demonstrate fiscal viability by providing a workable budget, including a base remuneration for the superintendent that is at least equivalent

to the level of a denominational executive director. Each society shall contribute is proportion as adopted by the annual conference.

This portion of ***The Book of Discipline*** sets a minimum salary for a superintendent. It also places the responsibility of reaching that minimum on the conference and the individual churches.

2. Where this salary level is not attainable, the assigned bishop of record shall assist the conference Administrative Committee in preparing a leadership plan that shall be presented to the Board of Bishops, and upon its approval, implemented.

The Book of Discipline provides for the possibility that a conference will not be able to reach the minimum salary. This sub-sub-paragraph appears to conflict somewhat with ¶5070 of ***The Book of Discipline*** by requiring a more proactive role by the bishop of record and permission from the Board of Bishops to enact an appropriate plan.

3. Superintendents shall be supported by the conferences to which elected in the manner determined by the conferences. Stationed superintendents shall receive an appropriate portion of their support from the pastoral charges to which appointed. The conference shall remain responsible for assuring that the total compensation of a stationed superintendent is consistent with provisions of ¶5110.C.2. A conference shall provide for the superintendent's office and travel expenses, whether stationed or itinerant.

This provision simply suggests an appropriate division of remuneration for stationed superintendents and assistants.

Before I conclude, allow me a disclaimer. I am not a candidate for any of these proposed positions. My family responsibilities will not allow me to have the time to fulfill all of the responsibilities that these positions will require.

We, the New South Conference, have the time to study this challenge and opportunity. We should seek the bishop's guidance as to the proper process for studying and implementing a change of structure.



This proposal is a workable option and should be considered – not for the institutional or financial benefits, but for the missional emphasis that is integral to this proposal. A change in structure without a missional re-focus would be meaningless.

The New South Conference, its churches and organizations, and the Free Methodist Church need to view Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina as a mission field where the institution is focused on expanding the witness to God's love in Jesus Christ that is carried by the presence and ministry of individual Free Methodist societies and churches.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. John Wesley Slider

