

Comparing the Missionary Conference and the Mission District

What are the pros and cons of a Mission District vs. a Missionary Conference structure?

Mission District

Pros

- Agency. We would be able to determine our own future. We would have the same voice in the PNW Annual Conference as any other district. The Annual Conference is the basic unit of the UMC (they have the agency to determine how ministry functions in their areas).
- We will still be able to organize for mission in the ways that we have historically.
- Pastors can still itinerate and raise funds outside of Alaska.
- Alaska would continue to have the ability to recruit clergy from outside its own annual conference, in addition to work with clergy colleagues under appointment in the PNW
- Clergy serving in Alaska could maintain clergy membership in other outside Annual Conferences if they so choose. Avenues will be created for them to serve in Extension Ministry or Cross Conference Appointments in the PNW and AK Mission District
- Alaska would maintain and even strengthen its clergy connection in Alaska through Mission District gatherings, where District Conferences (¶¶¶658 and 659) would be the equivalent for virtually all purposes of the current Fall/Spring Rendezvous.
- Alaska would be able to leverage additional resources (financial, expertise, trainings, etc.) as a part of the PNW.
- Alaska's already existing partnership with PNW for conference administrative services (which include the Treasurer's Office, Pensions and Benefits Office, Board of Ordained Ministry, Office of Vitality and Innovation) would continue and will be enhanced. Other services such as Camping and Ministries support, Media Center, Youth and Young Adult ministries will be made available through PNW.
- Alaska's partnership with PNW has the potential to provide opportunities for contextual Superintendent Leadership within discrete regions of Alaska, while maintaining relationship with other types of conference leadership.
- There is a real potential for increased financial stability through being linked with a larger entity, potentially allowing us to finance ministry in Alaska far into the future.
- Our churches will still exist, work, and worship in the same way that they do now.
- Alaska would be the first Mission District in the conference. As such, we have the potential to shape and form this body in a way that best fits and facilitates our needs and gifts. We can advocate and ask for the same benefits we currently enjoy as a Missionary Conference when we are a Missionary District (the criteria for mission and the context of our mission work remains the same). We can also be a model for the rest of the denomination.

Cons

- We would likely not be able to send a delegate to General Conference unless someone from Alaska was elected to be the delegate on behalf of the entire PNW Conference.
- Membership representation in other United Methodist organizations may shift. (i.e. United Methodist Women)
- We would not be exempt from the \$5,700 Defined Benefit of the clergy pension plan. However, assuming the plan from Wespath passes to change to the lower-cost clergy retirement plan AND Alaska becomes a Missionary District in 2021, then we would be required to pay ¼ of the total Defined Benefit in 2022, and the Defined Benefit cost would drop to \$0.00 in 2023 because of the change in the Wespath lower-cost retirement plan. Meaning the additional increase in cost for the Alaska District and PNW would be small and contained.
- In some ways, we will be yoked to the PNW Conference in terms of conference decisions

Missionary Conference

Pros

- We get two votes (one clergy, one laity) at General Conference
- We are independent of other conferences – Alaska doesn't have to follow the vote of a larger annual conference (i.e. PNW)
- Currently we are exempt from the \$5,700 Defined Benefit portion of Clergy Pension Plan.
- We can continue doing business as usual.

Cons

- Lack of agency. General Conference controls much of what we can and cannot do. We can't change our status without the General Conference. That body only meets every 4 years, and at its meetings our petitions are not guaranteed to pass even if we deem them necessary.
- Financial obligations. We are currently spending significantly out of our reserve funds. We have the capacity to continue this rate of spending for a few more years before we will be forced to shut down some ministries in Alaska (many of them vital to the communities they serve). The current financial picture does not support sustainable ministry in Alaska long term.
- GBGM is slowly decreasing the amount of funding they give to the Alaska Conference with the ultimate goal of discontinuing Missionary Conferences in the United States entirely. The final block grant funding from GBGM, which we use mostly for clergy moves, will be received this year. After that, we will have to fund that piece on our own or look for outside funding.
- Logistically, practically, and financially we are not an administratively viable independent conference (we are too small). We don't have enough people to carry out the functions of an Annual Conference, including finding people to serve on the required councils and committees of an Annual Conference as defined by the Book of Discipline: Conference Council on Finance and Administration

(¶611), Conference Board of Church and Society (¶629), Conference Board of Discipleship (¶630), Conference Board of Laity (¶631), Conference Committee on Ethnic Local Church Concerns (¶632), Conference Board of Global Ministries (¶633), Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (¶634), Conference Board of Ordained Ministry (¶635), Conference Administrative Review Committee (¶636), Conference Committee on Episcopacy (¶637), Episcopal Residence Committee (¶638), Conference Board of Pensions (¶639), Board of Trustees (¶640), Conference Commission on Archives and History (¶641), body relating to Christian unity and interreligious relationships (¶642), Conference Commission on Religion and Race (¶643), Conference Commission on the Status and Role of Women (¶644), Conference Commission on Small Membership Church (¶645), Conference Commission on Communications (¶646), United Methodist Women (¶647), United Methodist Men (¶648), Conference Council on Youth Ministry (¶649), Conference Council on Young Adult Ministry (¶650), Conference Council on Older Adult Ministries (¶651), Conference Committee on Disability Concerns (¶653), Conference Committee on Native American Ministry (¶654).