

Bishops' Task Force on Annual Conference Boundaries
April 8th, 2006
10 A.M.
Liverpool UMC, Liverpool, New York

AC Boundary Taskforce Chairs:

Jan Marsi, Wyoming
Henry Frueh, Troy
Ted Anderson, WNY
Bill Gottschalk-Fielding

Attendees North Central New York

Jeff Losey
Ed Enstine
Nelson Stafford
Chuck Forbes
Pat Jelinck
Hal Garman
Christine Doran

Kathleen Barden
Aaron Bowens
Wendy Rhodehamel
Steve Deckard
Nelson Stafford
Dick Deitzler

Joe Colvin
Bob Sherburne
Sharon Bassett
Bob Stoppert
Beth Quick
Mike Huber

Attendees Troy

Sue Petrosino
John Marshall
Alan Delamater

Barb Lemmel
Caroline Griffin
Sandra Brands

Paul Wiley
Emily DeSalvatore

Attendees Western New York

Larry Baird
Laura Schaal Calos
Jim Pollard
Tom Kraft
Matt Anderson

Dan McBride
Eleanor Collinsworth
Jan Rothfuss
Larry Lundgren
Grace Vesneske

Cathy Steugel
Ron Isaman
Jim McNoil
Keith Griswald

Attendees Wyoming

Jim Krager
Frank Marino

Joyce Miller
Blenda Smith

Report on Illinois Trip - Bill Gottschalk-Fielding:

- The BTF chairs of NCNY, Troy, WNY and Wyoming Annual Conferences met in the new conference center of the Illinois Great River Annual Conference in Springfield, IL, March 14 & 15, 2006. Bishop Sharon Brown Christopher convened meetings and brought thirty-five people from across the conference, both lay and clergy, to share reflections on their uniting process. Bishop Christopher led the group in Bible Study – inviting the spirit to teach out that word.
 - Reading from Acts 2 (The Message):
 - These folks moved from something, to something. What was it? They moved from: known-to-unknown; confusion-to-community; playing it safe-to-risk taking; being in hiding-to-being in public; old identity-to-new identity; need to build trust; small group-to-large group; human power-to-holy spirit power; one mind in a small gathering-to-one mind in a scattered gathering.
 - What is the message ‘you’ are hearing in this? Listen to each others’ gifts and assets in a positive manner so we can allow the spirit to grow in us; this chaos we are seeing now is the fulfillment of God’s promise; God needs chaos to bring things out/develops – does a new thing; things done without warning – we don’t like not having a warning; of one mind located in one place – get our minds/hearts together in one place, we can move forward with the spirit (working toward what God has put us here for); validates what Jesus taught; fearful of death – death has no match (this is not going to kill us, we will continue with our faith in the Lord).
 - What phrase or word spoke to you?

Report on Illinois Trip - Henry Frueh:

- History: Central and Southern ACs merged into the Illinois Great River AC: in the early 80’s, the conferences started to talk about merging (had been sharing programs). They asked themselves: How can we live together organizationally? Southern AC voted to unite; Central AC voted 556 for and 556 against – merger did not take place. Merger was voted on again, four years later: Southern AC yes; Central AC – no. Southern AC began looking outward (elsewhere); Central AC looked inward. Both conferences became aware that their jurisdiction would do something for them. In 1993, more discussions took place that were missionally focused, not organizationally. In 1995, move to ‘unite’ was approved. Joint Cabinet meetings; cross conference appointments; then, full union.
- Observations:
 - Union needs to be missionally driven, not organizationally.
 - Building relationships before a union takes place is critical.
 - Wish that they had joint VIM trips/common mission and vision.
 - Not wise to make decisions before their time – do a lot of work first.

- Living into the merger – strong Episcopal leadership makes the union work. Bishop Christopher helped create ownership.
- Continue to build relationships after union.
- Tend to the grieving process – there will be anger and hard times after the union.
- Pay attention to ‘systems’ thinking.
- Difficulties or opportunities:
 - Union created ‘perfect storm’ for church finances. Costs do not go down after a union; local churches blamed the conference. Need to focus on the mission, not the structure.
 - Take time to focus on clergy effectiveness.
 - Union unfreezes the system - changes the rules.
 - Purpose of AC is equipping and connecting. Will our union enhance equipping/connecting or not?
 - Increased in size: use video and web conferencing. Take staff to local churches instead of local churches going to the conference.
 - Built new conference center – focus on people coming together; sense of community.

Discussion Questions: Jan Marsi

1. What are the biggest drawbacks to merging or uniting conferences? Another way of putting it: what would the most significant losses be? What would have to be let go of?
 - Loss of familiar relationships/intimacy
 - Loss of predictability where pastors can serve and where they may be sent; wider pool of pastors
 - May be more a clergy issue than laity issue
 - Larger issue with lay involvement
 - Where do you find your place in a larger org
 - Distance
 - Perceived loss of power
 - Perceived loss of powerlessness
 - Loss of who we are: history, intimacy
 - Loss of economy
 - Let go of thinking small
 - Let go of ‘our stuff’
 - Not every church will see their Bishop
 - Loss of identity
 - Missional needs may not be clear
 - Potential unemployment/loss of staff positions
 - Loss of leadership
 - Perceived loss of Conservative influence
 - Clergy issues with retirement/benefits and career path

- Loss of support for on going missions; momentum is lost
 - Fiddler on the roof theory: kingdoms will tumble; territorialism
2. In what ways could some of these things be addressed? What would be some creative ways to address these concerns?
- Districts would need to become 'intimate' organizations
 - Encourage sitting with new 'friends'
 - Would be critical the way the Bishop works with the staff: bringing these people into the process so that there is a sense of collegiality across the conferences.
 - Reclaim some of our Wesleyan Heritage – help to create the intimacy. Put mission before structure.
 - Find out what itinerancy looks like in large conferences. Gather and share info.
 - Need to have a lot of Bible Study and prayer. Need clearly defined goals. Hold social events so people can get to know each other. Clarify and articulate our vision.
 - Conference goes out to the churches – have a mobile unit that moves around the conference.
 - Request from jurisdiction that we have a strong Bishop with leadership and may have experience in unions.
 - Be more youthful – be 'unformed'
 - Groups need to be formed around common concerns
 - Candor needed – name the elephants in the room.
 - Challenging people with influence in the conference as to their point of view – find out where they stand up front.
 - Provide fellowship opportunities/relationship building
 - Cluster around passion not geography
 - Sidewalk theory: when we see where the paths are going, then build the form.

Proposed Four-Conference Resolution: Henry Frueh

Should resolution be presented to AC? And if so, which one?

Allow each Annual Conference to proceed as they choose.

Steve Deckard moved that the wording 'joining of the' be removed. Motion seconded: all in favor, motion carried. Also adopt 'this multi-conference' wording.

Resolution now reads:

We, the members of the _____ Annual Conference, endorse the further exploration of greater effectiveness as servants of Jesus Christ in the world through the gifts and resources of the North Central New York Annual Conference, Troy Annual Conference, Western New York Annual Conference and Wyoming Annual Conference.

To this end, we will:

- *Seek opportunities for common experiences of ministry, service and community building (e.g., the 4-WORD youth events).*
- *Discern the strengths of ministry and life together of each annual conference,*
- *Enter dialogue concerning administrative, financial and other practical matters the joining of resources would require.*

We commit ourselves to prayer and ongoing conversation with each other to discern God's will for ministry in this multi-conference area.

Tentative Plans

1. Three additional joint meetings
2. One meeting of Annual Conference Officers and Conf. Committee Chairs (meet together and talk). Propose Sept. 8-9, 2006. Request that the 'system' information be distributed to the officers and chairs prior to the meeting in Sept.
3. October 27-28, 2006 or snow date November 3-4, 2006
4. January 26-27, 2007 or snow date February 9-10, 2007
5. March 23-24, 2007
6. Invite expert on 'systems thinking' (Rev. John Wynn) to attend one of the meetings.

Closing Worship: Jan Marsi

Minutes respectfully submitted by Chuck Forbes