

The Ministry Advisory Team & Conference Staff Relations Joint Report

The Ministry Advisory Team (MAT) provides an arena for Bishop Fairley to facilitate conversation and interaction between Program Services, Administrative Services and Clergy Services. The MAT strives to create a more efficient and productive ministry by advising the bishop and district superintendents, as well as the programmatic, administrative and personnel teams of the South Carolina Annual Conference. This team is composed of representatives from all aspects of ministry across the Annual Conference – Clergy Services and Ordained Ministry, Conference Secretary, Congregational Development, Connectional Ministries, the Districts, Finance and Administration, Benefits, and Lay Leadership. The leaders of these ministry areas have worked to plan and coordinate trainings, events and ministry opportunities together, utilizing the strengths and resources of each independent group.

In recent years the team has worked closely with the Conference Staff Relations Committee to help vision, organize, plan and implement changes in how we do ministry in the South Carolina Annual Conference. This work was most recently seen in the MAT/Conference Staff Relations Jeremiah Team task group reports at the Special Called Session of Annual Conference in October 2025. In many ways, the work of these teams continues, as reported below:

1. Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team Report

Across our Conference, one thing has become clear: God is calling us into a deeper, more connected, and more intentional way of being the Church.

Over the past year, we have listened—to clergy and laity, to ministry leaders and congregations, and to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us. What we heard was not just a list of needs, but a shared longing: to be more connected to one another, to ensure that all people are seen, valued, and included, and to use our resources in ways that truly make a difference for the Kingdom of God.

This work does not replace Our 4 Priorities. Rather, it enhances and sharpens our focus on them, helping us to live more fully into our shared commitments by aligning our actions, resources, and strategies with greater clarity and intentionality.

From that listening, several clear priorities have emerged—priorities that are not separate efforts, but part of one unified vision for who we are becoming as a Conference.

Investing in the Next Generation

If we are to be a thriving Church tomorrow, we must be intentional about who we are nurturing today.

We heard a strong and consistent call to strengthen our ministry with youth and young adults—not as separate groups competing for attention, but as a continuous journey of faith formation. This includes creating leadership that can guide and connect this work across the Conference, offering meaningful opportunities for spiritual growth, and building bridges that help young people stay connected to the Church as they move into adulthood.

At the same time, we are affirming that children's ministry is not an optional program—it is a Conference-wide priority. We are committed to creating spaces where children are formed in faith through worship, learning, and community. This includes equipping local churches, especially smaller congregations, with the tools and support they need, and creating shared experiences that remind our children—and all of us—that they belong to the body of Christ.

Strengthening Our Presence on College Campuses and Beyond

College campuses remain one of the most significant mission fields of our time. We recognize the need to strengthen and sustain campus ministries so they can continue to shape lives and calls to ministry.

This means ensuring that those who lead this work are supported in equitable and sustainable ways, and that ministries have the resources needed to meet students where they are. It also means expanding our reach—both to growing campuses and to young adults who are not connected to a college setting—so that no one is overlooked in this critical season of life.

Reclaiming Evangelism and Christian Hospitality

At the heart of our faith is an invitation—an invitation to know Christ and to be part of a loving, welcoming community.

We are being called to reclaim evangelism, not as a program, but as a way of life. This includes equipping both clergy and laity to share their faith with authenticity and confidence, and helping our congregations become places of genuine hospitality—where people are not just greeted, but truly embraced.

We also celebrate the vital role of laity in this work. Their leadership, witness, and service are essential to the life of the Church, and we are committed to recognizing and strengthening that contribution across our Conference.

Communicating More Clearly and More Effectively

Again and again, we heard a simple but urgent message: We must communicate better.

Strong communication is not just about sharing information—it is about strengthening connection, increasing participation, and ensuring that every church and every member knows they are part of something larger.

To support this, we are taking steps to expand our communication capacity, strengthen our digital presence, and provide tools and training that will benefit districts and local congregations alike.

Aligning Our Resources with Our Mission

These priorities are not simply aspirations—they are commitments.

We are approaching this work with intentional stewardship, making careful and faithful decisions about how to use the resources entrusted to us. This includes utilizing reserves in a strategic and time-limited way, redirecting underused resources toward areas of greatest impact, and seeking additional funding opportunities that align with our mission.

Importantly, this work continues to support and strengthen Our 4 Priorities, ensuring that they are not only named but actively lived out in ways that are measurable, meaningful, and sustainable.

A Shared Call Forward

These priorities are not the work of a few—they belong to all of us.

They call us to be more connected.

They challenge us to be more inclusive.

They invite us to be more intentional in how we serve.

Most importantly, they remind us of who we are: a people called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

As we move forward together, may we do so with courage, clarity, and faith—trusting that God is already at work among us, leading us into what is next.

- I. Youth & Young Adult Ministry: Recommendation: Establish a Full-Time Director of Youth & Young Adult Ministry with programming support.

Key Components:

- Intentional focus on Youth and Young Adults
- Youth/Young Adult Council (named by the Director of Ministry with Young People)
- Training for clergy, lay servants, and CLMs (Certified Lay Ministers)
- Partnership with Salkehatchie and other mission pathways
- Annual Young Adult Retreat

- II. Children's Ministry (Conference-Wide Priority): Recommendation: Establish Children's Ministry as a conference priority.

Strategic Focus:

- Conference-wide Children's Event (grant-supported in 2027)
- District-level training and resourcing
- Pop-up District Children's Ministry Events/Trainings in every district through Camps and Retreats Ministry
- Support for small churches
- Annual Conference intergenerational highlight
- Create a bridge to Youth Ministry to help children stay engaged in the life of the Church as they are formed and confirmed in their faith and begin their journey of discipleship.

- III. Campus Ministry Restructuring: Recommendation: Develop equitable salary structure and programming support.

Key Elements:

- Fund salaries for campus ministers equal to at least the current minimum for full-time clergy (to be adjusted annually based upon any increases of conference staff or clergy as well as cost of living)
- Fund operational/programming costs based upon the needs of the campus ministry
- Expansion plan for campuses with over 2,000 students enrolled
- More connection and oversight alignment with Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministries with the Office of Congregational Excellence
- Engagement strategies for non-college young adults
- Create a bridge to Youth & Young Adult Ministry to help students retain a connection with the UMC into adulthood

- IV. Evangelism & Christian Hospitality

- Clergy and Lay Servant evangelism training
- Christian Hospitality training for congregations
- Celebration and recognition of laity at Annual Conference to include newly certified lay servants

- V. Communications Expansion (Foundational Priority)

Recommendation: Add Full-Time Digital Communicator.

- 2026 reserve-funded Digital Communication position
- Website redevelopment and digital upgrades (already in progress)
- Conference-wide support for districts and local churches through information and training

How We Align Our Resources with Our Mission to Fund These Priorities

- Strategic reserve utilization (time-limited bridge)
- Reallocation of underutilized funds to fund the named missional priorities
- Seeking and securing other funding opportunities that match with our mission and values
- No overall 2027 structural expansion at this time, but work within the bounds of what we have as we continue to adjust and right size

Respectfully Submitted by the Missional Priorities Jeremiah Team

Millie Nelson Smith Matthew Alexander David Bryant Megan Gray
Sylvia Harris-Greene Tiffany Knowlin-Boykin David Salter

2. District Realignment: Logistics Team Report

Across our Conference, one thing has become clear: God is calling us into a deeper, more connected, and more intentional way of being the Church.

Purpose and Audience: This report is intended to inform and provide resources to the laity and clergy of the South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, with particular

emphasis on churches and clergy who will be moving into a new district. The purpose of the report is to explain the work of the Logistics Team and to provide clarity about the processes, plans, and resources supporting the transition from twelve districts to ten districts by July 1, 2026.

Background and Charge

The Logistics Team was established following action taken by the South Carolina Annual Conference on October 18, 2025, when recommendations related to District Alignment were adopted. The specific charge of the Logistics Team was to create an implementation plan to manage the logistical details associated with reducing the number of districts from twelve to ten by July 1, 2026.

This work focused on identifying key operational areas affected by the realignment, developing clear processes to support the transition, and providing resources to help clergy, churches, and laity understand what to expect and how to engage faithfully and effectively with their new districts.

Membership of the Logistics Team: The Logistics Team was composed of the following members: Martha Alewine, Brenda Fleming, Bob James, Sandy Shaffer, Steve Brown, Ken Nelson, Thomas Smith.

Each member brought experience and perspective related to conference operations, district life, and local church needs.

Areas of Focus: To best support the annual conference in managing the logistical details of district reduction, the Logistics Team organized its work around five key areas:

1. **Record Retention, Management, and Transfer:** *Martha Alewine & Brenda Fleming*
This area focused on identifying required district records, determining appropriate retention practices, and clarifying responsibility for maintaining and transferring records during and after the transition.
2. **District Nominations:** *Thomas Smith & Ken Nelson*
This work addressed the alignment of district committees and nominations processes within the new district structure, ensuring continuity of leadership and clarity in roles.
3. **Communications:** *(Dan O'Mara, Logistics Team, Extended Cabinet)*
This area emphasized the importance of timely, accurate, and consistent communication to clergy, laity, and congregations throughout the transition.
4. **Continuing District Reductions:** *Bob James & Sandy Shaffer*
This focus area examined ongoing implications of district reductions, including administrative functions and long-term sustainability.
5. **Workload:** *Ken Nelson & Steve Brown*
This work considered the impact of district realignment on workload for clergy, district leadership, and conference staff, with attention to identifying pressures and opportunities for improved efficiency.

Goals and Desired Outcomes: The Logistics Team identified the following goals and outcomes to guide its work:

- Reduce anxiety among clergy, laity, congregations, districts, and staff affected by the transition.
- Minimize disruption to local churches, clergy, laity, and district employees by providing clear and consistent communication about transition processes, plans, and timelines.
- Ensure a smooth transition and successful incorporation of clergy, laity, and churches into their assigned districts.

- Equip local churches to take the necessary steps for fruitful integration into their new districts.

These goals shaped both the planning process and the resources developed by the team.

Key Actions and Deliverables: To support the transition and meet its stated goals, the Logistics Team completed the following actions:

- **Tri-District Listening Sessions:** The team planned four Tri-District listening sessions to be held on March 1, 8, 15, and 22 of 2026. The purpose of these sessions is to share with clergy and laity an overview of the steps taken to help churches transition successfully from one district to another, and to provide space for questions, concerns, and feedback.
- **District Assignment Documentation:** The team prepared and distributed a document outlining the new ten districts and listing the churches assigned to each district. This document is intended to provide clarity and transparency regarding district boundaries and assignments.
- **District Records Guidance:** The team identified the district records that must be maintained and clarified who will be responsible for maintaining these records going forward. This guidance is intended to ensure continuity, accountability, and proper stewardship of conference records.
- **District Map:** A map outlining the boundaries of the ten new districts was created and shared to help churches and clergy visualize the new alignment.
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs):** The team created a Frequently Asked Questions document addressing common concerns related to district realignment. This document was shared with participants prior to the listening sessions and posted on the conference website for broader access and ongoing reference.

Conclusion: The work of the Logistics Team is intended to support a faithful, orderly, and transparent transition to the new ten-district structure. By focusing on clear communication, thoughtful planning, and practical resources, the team seeks to help clergy, laity, and congregations navigate this change with confidence and clarity.

As the South Carolina Conference moves toward July 1, 2026, the Logistics Team encourages churches and clergy—especially those entering new districts—to utilize the available resources, participate in listening sessions, and remain in conversation with district and conference leadership as together we live into this new alignment.

3. District Realignment: Legalities Team

The Legalities/Property/Finance Transition Team met several times to review issues we know are being impacted by the reduction of districts.

The first action of this Transition Team was to research and confirm that the conference's actions are aligned with The UMC Book of Discipline, Conference Standing Rules, existing contracts, and other legal requirements.

Articles of Incorporation for all districts have been reviewed. A title examiner was used to ensure all properties are identified in districts being eliminated. The team utilized a detailed district map to ensure all properties are accurately located. The corporations for the Florence District and Greenville District are being dissolved effective June 30, 2026.

A District Conference was held in the Florence District to approve deeding the parsonage to the conference trustees for action. Proceeds from the future sale of the parsonage will be divided proportionally to the Hartsville, Marion, and Orangeburg District parsonage funds depending on the number of churches received by the respective districts.

Also in the Florence District, the lease for the office property has been terminated effective June 30, 2026.

A District Conference was held in the Greenville District to approve the sale of the district parsonage. The parsonage was vacant and the Greenville District trustees have sold the property. Proceeds from the sale of the parsonage will be divided proportionally to the Anderson, Greenwood, and Spartanburg District parsonage funds depending on the number of churches received by the respective districts.

Also in the Greenville District, questions arose about disposition of the Scuffletown acreage. The property was purchased by the district with the intent of planting a church. In our transition team investigation of the property, a number of discrepancies were identified relating to easements and their specific locations on the property. The recommendation is to transfer it to the conference trustees for disposition by the cabinet and the Office of Innovation and Strategy.

With the invaluable help of district administrative assistants, contracts, leases, and agreements were identified in the Florence and Greenville Districts.

The team recommends the distribution of remaining assets of districts being closed be distributed to the districts receiving churches based on the number of churches received, respectively.

The Legalities/Property/Finance Transition Team acknowledges that there will be unforeseen unintended consequences from the reduction of districts and requests that the conference, clergy and laity alike, respond with grace.

4. Reimagining Congregational Development Team

The Reimagining Congregational Development Team was formed in response to the actions of the called Annual Conference. The team worked diligently to evaluate the logistics of transferring current projects and historical records of Congregational Development into the Office of Congregational Excellence (formerly Connectional Ministries).

The Team also reviewed the role and duties of the Director of Innovation & Strategy and developed an updated job description. In addition, the team examined the current Standing Rules related to Congregational Development and revised the language to align with the new structure. These revisions were presented to the Standing Rules Committee for action.

As the work of Congregational Development transitions into incorporation with the Office of Congregational Excellence (formerly Connectional Ministries), the new Director of Innovation and Strategy is tasked with leading projects from inspiration to implementation. The DIS and the Director of Congregational Excellence will work together with the Conference Committee on Congregational Development as active partners in the work of church growth, renewal, new church starts and provide strategic planning and innovative frameworks for all the efforts of the Annual Conference related to new faith/church/missional development, church redevelopment and congregational revitalization.

5. Black Church/Ethnic Ministries Strategy Jeremiah Team Report

If we are honest, this report does not just reveal our opportunities—it exposes our gaps, our hesitations, and our unfinished work.

The Black and Ethnic Churches and Ministries Team was charged with developing and resourcing an effective Conference-wide strategy to strengthen Black Churches and other Ethnic Churches and Ministries, while remaining attentive to the new movements of God emerging in these communities.

What Have We Learned?

- The South Carolina Conference is home to **246 Black churches**, representing **more than one-third** of all churches in the Conference.
- While six churches are identified as multi-ethnic in Conference statistics, **only one demonstrates a substantial multi-ethnic identity**.
- There is **one Korean congregation** within the Conference.
- There are **no active Hispanic churches or ministries currently identified**, and **no Native American congregations**, though there are active ministries among several Tribal communities across the state.
- **Significant geographic gaps** exist across South Carolina where there is no active Black or Ethnic United Methodist presence.

What Are Our Next Steps?

- **Develop a forward-looking, mission-driven strategy** to strengthen leadership, resourcing, and discipleship within Black and Ethnic Churches and Ministries.
- **Create and distribute a standardized assessment tool** by Spring 2026 to evaluate current realities, future needs, and missional opportunities. Available results will be shared to guide focused initiatives.
- **Launch a 10-year narrative project** to document the stories, histories, and contributions of Black and Ethnic Churches and Ministries across South Carolina (now nearing completion).
- **Establish intentional discipleship frameworks** to develop spiritually grounded, principled, and maturing Christian leaders—both clergy and laity—focused on spiritual wellness, congregational vitality, and long-term fruitfulness.
- **Examine current charge and church configurations** to assess their effectiveness, sustainability, and capacity to form world-transforming disciples of Jesus Christ.

How Will We Accomplish This?

- Engage in **intentional listening and learning**, fostering meaningful conversations with Black and Ethnic clergy and laity to address declining membership and increase missional relevance in their communities.
- Identify and study **growing and thriving ethnic congregations** across the Conference to learn and share best practices—regardless of size or location.
- Explore **innovative models for sustainability and growth**, including mergers, cooperative parish models, and multi-point charges supported by team-based clergy and lay leadership.
- Analyze **worship attendance trends over the past 3–5 years**, including both in-person and online participation where data is available.

Goal for the Next 2–3 Years

Increase membership in Black and Ethnic Churches and Ministries by **10%** through intentional discipleship systems, coaching, cohort training, and practical applications in: **worship, leadership, discipleship, stewardship, fellowship, apostleship, and apprenticeship.**

Rationale

Because of the enduring faithfulness of Black and Ethnic Churches to The United Methodist Church—particularly in South Carolina—we are committed to strengthening these congregations and ministries for continued impact and future growth.

Funding Requests

Any future funding for this work will be requested through the Ministry Advisory Team.

Action Requested

The Black and Ethnic Churches and Ministries Strategy Jeremiah Team respectfully request a **vote of affirmation** from the 2026 Annual Conference for this strategic direction.

History will not ask what we discussed, it will ask what we did with what we knew.