

Call for re-evaluation of 2011 Annual Conference Task Force on new formation of districts in conference.

**Submitted by William H. Pearsall, Sr. Local part-time pastor Devon Park UMC
Wilmington, NC**

Reasons:

At 2011 annual conference a recommendation was made by the bishop and cabinet and approved by the conference to restructure the districts in our annual conference. Reasons given were to save money, and allow the district superintendents to be more fully utilized for teaching and, planning by relieving them of some of the administrative duties associated with their office.

A transition team made up of laypeople and clergy would be appointed to work out the details. Some of the details that they have worked out have been in conflict with the task force recommendations, and had already been 'approved' and put into place as if no vote was needed from the conference for the changes.

While the Discipline gives the presiding bishop and cabinet authority to design the districts as they seem fit in order to advance the Church, these vast changes, in all fairness, needed to be voted and approved by the conference. laity. As pastors are in fact employees of the conference, they should not have vote on these matters.

The task force recommended that we go from 12 to 8 districts, and that each district have a full time, trained layperson who will focus on non-appointive and non-judicial matters. Several of the appointed administrative assistants are in fact pastors, and not lay people.

The transition team in their job description of the Administrative Assistant. to the District Superintendent gives the administrative assistant authority over discipline matters in the district, albeit is supposed to be under the guidance of the Superintendent. According to the Discipline, these matters are to be handled only by the D.S.

No mention was made by the task force as to the elimination of district secretary for each district, but the transition team has seen this position as not needed. Instead, there will be 3 new hires in the conference office to attend to these duties for all of the districts.

The task force recommended that all districts have an office and D.S. parsonage to be simply a parsonage. The transition team had implemented plans to have no district office, and sell all of the district parsonages, which were paid for by the districts, and not the conference.. The money from these sales would be used to pay housing allowances for the D.S, and, presumably, the Adm. Asst

While each district held a district conference on the parsonages, plans had already been made to sell them until a retired elder pointed out that districts had to approve. At our Wilmington district conference, at which Rev. Taylor attended and made no comments during the meeting, people I talked with afterwards said they came with the assumption that this was already a 'done deal', so we might as well sell the parsonages.

There had been no reports put out as to how much new salary and benefits these new hires would cost; i.e, housing allowances, travel, office expense, benefits, etc. These figures were all grouped together in the budget at 2012 annual conference, but no effort

was to break these costs down to the conference members until asked for at conference, and then were not fully disclosed.

Why was not the transition team held to the 2011 task force recommendations that were voted on and passed? What was the make up of the transition team as far as clergy and lay people? And were the lay people truly lay people and not connected some way to the conference other than church membership, i. e. employees in some way of the conference or spouses of clergy? This could be seen as a conflict of interest.

How is it that the transition team leader, who has never pastored a large congregation is made the only new District Superintendent in the conference? Or the fact that barely 2 months after conference appointments had been made, the clergy spouse of the conference 'lay leader' on the transition team was appointed a D.S.?

These changes only further remove the people in the pews from the leadership, and create an unneeded bureaucracy.

Each D.S. will now have one third more charges to supervise, and the perception given is that he will be in the charges more?

For the people in the pews, the ability to have personal contact with the D.S is very important, and the perception of easy access to leaders and conference business seems to be slowly eroding.

One case in point is resolutions and petitions. First, it was that resolutions and petitions would be looked over by a committee, then it was that they could only be submitted in one a certain format, then it was only one submission by a person, and now it has to be submitted by church board or group.

Now, we have cluster charge / church conferences which can be held by an appointed elder, but not necessarily the D. S. We have no place to have face to face contact with a district secretary or D.S., and the ownership in a district parsonage has been taken away.

While some of these issues are addressed in the Discipline, it seems a great leeway has been taken as to the specifics involved.

As Rev. Bill Simpson, an elder and former D.S. has asked for the bishop's ruling on several questions on this matter, and as it will be going to our judicial council, I ask that these comments would be considered in the deliberations, if you deem them appropriate.

As a life-long Methodist and local part-time pastor for 19 years, I am deeply concerned for the direction our bishop has taken us, and for the future of the United Methodist Church.

Sincerely yours,
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To:
Rev. F. Belton Joyner, Jr.
Secretary, UMC Judicial Council

Bishop Alfred W. Gwinn, Jr.

Dr. James L. Bryan

Dr. William C. Simpson, Jr.

Rev. Linda Taylor

Rev. Timothy J. Russell

Rev. Francis Daniels

IN RE UMC Judicial Council docket 1012-7
Review of a Bishop's Decision of Law in the North Carolina Annual Conference
Regarding Report of the Transition Team

Enclosed is a brief sent to the Judicial Council. As an *amici curiae* I am required to send each of you a copy as you are listed as interested parties.

Sincerely yours,
William H. Pearsall, Sr.