

Western Plains District

Proposed Structure Changes

Revised November 7, 2009

The 2009 District Conference directed the District Board to review the comments made by District Conference small groups and to bring back updated structure recommendations and a plan for implementation if approved to the 2010 Conference. This paper incorporates key feedback from the 2009 District Conference small group responses.

The proposals outlined below represent such a review by the Structure Working Team named by the Executive Committee. The Working Team consisted of members of the Inspired Future Team being sunset in 2009, and four members of the Executive Committee. These proposals are ready for review and action of the District Board at its November meeting.

A Biblical Basis for a New Understanding of Structure in the Church

In the Church of the Brethren we have come to see that “Continuing the work of Jesus” is central (John 20:21). Christ continues to live through the Church. That reality requires us to think differently about the church and our membership. Biblically, when we respond to the call of Christ, we are gathered, not simply as a loose association of individuals, but as an organic body. Specifically, the New Testament calls it the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12-14). As we are drawn to Christ, God creates the new body of Christ as a new Spirit is breathed into that body (again, John 20:21, also Acts 2). That life and breath is the Spirit of God in Christ.

As American individualists, we may think differently. We may think that the church is created by our decision to join. That logic implies that the church is dependent upon us for its life. Biblically however, the Church is the body of Christ and our belonging to that body is by God’s grace.

Since it is God who enlivens the body and our being a part of the body is a gift of grace, we already have a place and a function within that body. Our task as the church is to help persons discover and develop the ways in which God’s grace shows itself as opportunities to function as a part of that body (1 Peter 4:10). The hope is that in helping each person discover and fully exercise the way in which God has graciously gifted them, we will “grow up in every way ... into Christ,” (Ephesians 4:15) so that, as we mature congregationally as the body of Christ, we are increasingly able, together, to continue the work of Jesus.

Therefore, as we increasingly discover the ways in which God continues to transform us as congregations and individuals, we see the importance of structuring ourselves in a way that opens us more fully to how God works among us and through us. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 12 – 14, help us understand that the discernment of and the development of the gifts of grace among us is central to the full functioning and the transforming of the church as the body of Christ.

Structure Recommendations Outline

Foundational recommendation: The District Board recommends that a new structure for the District be designed to help us live out our vision and to utilize our spiritual gifts and human resources more effectively. These recommendations do not change the role of District Conference as the primary governing body of the District.

Vision Statement (adopted at the 2008 District Conference)

Rooted together in Love, to be Christ's transforming hope and power!!

Recommended New Structure for a Five-Year Trial Period

1. *Adapt the congregational structure model suggested by Annual Conference* to focus the resources of the Western Plains District on its transformation movement, calling persons to specific three-year assignments on a Transformation Vision Team in areas of strong interest/aptitude/passion.
2. *Move to a smaller board (Transformation Vision Team) and supporting ministry area teams (Vision Fulfillment Teams)* where only the chair of the Vision Fulfillment Team needs to attend the regular Transformation Vision Team meetings, or in the case of a necessary absence another member of the team would attend as the chair's designee. The Transformation Vision Team would serve as a district-wide spiritual discernment team, seeking the mind of Christ. Mindful of Christ's presence, they would envision and embody a culture for transformation.
3. *Integrate the transformation movement as a primary focus of the Transformation Vision Team.* The Transformation Vision Team would take on the functions of the current Transformation Steering Committee and as such would be entrusted with casting the vision for the spiritual transformation of individuals and of congregational and district ministries and mission. The Team would include an area of ministry work called Transformation Training that would support shaping a culture of discipleship to and transformation in Christ .
4. The following is the recommended initial composition of the smaller Transformation Vision Team along with possible roles and examples of responsibilities:
 - **Chair** (convener, leader, ex officio member without vote on the Gift Discernment Team, counsels with District Executive on personnel and other matters, and convenes a Personnel Committee to make recommendations to the Transformation Vision Team on personnel matters. The Personnel Committee consists of the Chair, Vice Chair, Stewards Chair and Moderator, with the District Executive serving ex officio without vote.)

- **Gift Discernment Team Chair** (leads the Gift Discernment Team—see description in points 5-7 below.)
 - **Transformation Training Chair** (coaching network, pastor/leader training, congregational covenants, and Gathering events.)
 - **New Church Development Chair** (advocacy of new church development, relationships with new church development projects and leaders.)
 - **Outdoor Ministries Chair** (relationships with camp boards, promotion of camping, naming of camp managers and camp leaders, and long-range planning and financial oversight of camping programs.)
 - **Congregational Resourcing Chair** (youth program, disaster response, BVS promotion, peace advocacy, Christian education, men/women’s retreats, deacon ministry and other congregational life needs.)
 - **Stewardship Chair** (financial overview and reporting, property management, risk management, supervision of Treasurer and Financial Secretary and stewardship education.)
 - **Ministry Chair** (credentialing of ministers, advocacy for pastoral call and for pastoral support and development, ethics training and overview of EFSM and TRIM training.)
 - **Communication Chair** (newsletter, website, directory, the use of and training for emerging media and technologies.)
 - **Vice Chair** (a member of the Transformation Vision Team with another portfolio—other than the Chair of Stewards or Gift Discernment-- designated by the Team to serve in the Chair’s absence and to serve as a member of the Personnel Committee.)
 - **Secretary** (a member of the Transformation Vision Team with another portfolio or an ex officio member designated by the Team to take minutes of the Team’s meetings.)
 - **Ex officio members without vote** (the District executive staff, Moderator Elect, Treasurer and Standing Committee member.) The Moderator is ex officio member without vote except when functioning as a member of the Personnel Committee.
5. *A Vision Fulfillment Team would implement the work of each Transformation Vision Team area. Members of the Vision Fulfillment Teams would not need to attend regular Transformation Vision Team meetings, but would attend the annual retreat for both Transformation Vision Team and Vision Fulfillment Team members. The Vision Fulfillment Teams would meet primarily around their area of program assignment. One possible meeting pattern would be one face-to-face meeting annually for in-depth planning and training and then subsequent phone meetings.*

6. *The Gift Discernment Team would lead out in calling qualified persons to assignments in areas of **their spiritual gifts, passion, and experience**.* The Gift Discernment Team would consist of its chair and two members at large with the Moderator Elect, the Transformation Vision Team Chair, and the District Executive serving ex officio without vote. The Gift Discernment Team would call persons to serve as chair of specific ministry areas within the Transformation Vision Team and as members of the Vision Fulfillment Teams. Persons would be called to the Vision Fulfillment Team for one year term of service. Terms are renewable annually by mutual agreement in consultation with the Transformation Vision Team area member serving as its chair. The call of these persons would be confirmed by the District Conference (and in the case of appointments made subsequent to the date of District Conference by the Transformation Vision Team.) Sub-teams needed under any of the Vision Fulfillment Teams would be named by the Gift Discernment Team and confirmed by the Transformation Vision Team.

In addition the Gift Discernment Team would call candidates for Moderator Elect, District Conference Planning Committee and other District Conference elected positions as needed subject to the confirmation of the District Conference.

7. *The Gift Discernment Team would develop systems to secure leadership.* The Gift Discernment Team process of calling persons to serve in a leadership role will be grounded in prayer with intent to faithfully place people in positions which reflect their spiritual gifts, passions, and experience. Sensitivity to gender, age, culture, geography and faith perspective will be considered. To aid them in their work, the Gifts Discernment Team will develop and maintain a confidential database of persons with particular spiritual gifts for District positions. They will also invite recommendations from District Conference delegates, past moderators, pastors, District leaders, and others in the District.
8. *The Gift Discernment Team would name a youth representative to each of the Vision Fulfillment Teams if possible.*
9. *The design would allow for focus ministries to be added or deleted to/from the leadership structure by the Transformation Vision Team as changing needs are discerned.*
10. *The Transformation Vision team would be small enough that it would eliminate the need for a separate Executive Committee.*

Recommendation to the 2010 District Conference:

The District Board recommends that District Conference approve the new structure design outlined. The new structure would be implemented by the date of the 2011 District Conference on a five-year trial basis.