

Frequently Asked Questions of the CLT Proposal to Reduce the Number of Districts in the Texas Annual Conference from Nine to Five AKA (9-5 FAQs)

Q1: Why are we moving from nine to five Districts?

A1: Moving from Nine Districts to Five Districts is the next best step for the Texas Annual Conference - missionally, functionally and financially.

- Missionally there is an optimal level of engagement by the District Superintendent and district leaders to identify mission fields of United Methodist deserts (places without a United Methodist witness), opportunities to cooperative and collaborative ministry in areas where one congregation alone cannot have the impact that several regional churches could, and creative ideas can be generated to serve as a catalyst in places where ministry has seemed to grow stale. New mission fields, collaboration, and creativity in districts with the capacity to address these missional needs. Five districts with a total of 280 congregations are capable of addressing these missional needs.
- Functionally, a district organization requires a pool of capable leaders to serve on teams such as the District Committee of Ordained Ministry, the District Leadership Team, the District Board of Church Locations and Buildings, and the District Board of Trustees. Each of these teams have critical functions in the United Methodist connexion from the identifying, recruiting, developing and equipping of pastoral leaders to casting the vision for the district and carrying out the vision of the Texas Annual Conference to the collaborative ministry with local churches as they expand or shift in focus.
- Financially, carrying out the responsibilities in each district has been accomplished through district connectional giving of district apportionments. There have also been seasons of deeper commitment toward churches facing critical thresholds of launching and revitalizing. Moving from nine districts to five districts makes financial sense with the resizing of the TAC in the last year. Maintaining the same number of districts with considerably fewer congregations will either cripple the ministry of the district or increase the financial commitment from the district churches at a time when many of those churches are already experiencing financial shortfalls from congregational tensions related to conversations and votes on disaffiliation.

Q2: What is the timeline for this happening?

A2: The hope is by the end of the calendar year of 2023, the Texas Annual Conference could move to five districts. This will require several steps:

- May 31, 2023 – The Texas Annual Conference would vote to approve moving from Nine Districts to Five Districts.

- June 1, 2023 – The Bishop and Cabinet would begin drafting the lines and alignments of the new districts keeping as many of the congregations together with the congregations that they currently partner with as a district, so that it resemble merger of districts more than a complete restructure.
- June 2023 – Hold District Conferences authorizing District Trustees/DLT to sell parsonages (where parsonage is vacant) and to merge districts where appropriate, establishing one Employer Identification Number (EIN) per district.
- August 20 – Bishop Harvey would host a webinar to announce the names of the Five Districts and publish the list of the churches for each district.
- September 2023 – Legal paperwork completed to reflect the new name of the districts of the Texas Annual Conference.

Q3: Structurally, will we have five districts July 1, or will we have nine districts by five District Superintendent's?

A3: If the vote affirms the Conference Leadership Team proposal to move from nine districts to five districts, we will structurally and technically have five districts in the Texas Annual Conference although the details as stated above will continue to be refined. If the vote does not affirm the CLT proposal the current nine districts of the TAC will be supervised by five district superintendents.

Q4: What is the 30K foot view of this decision? Why now?

A4: The significant shift in the size of the TAC requires right sizing as quickly as possible. Conference and district ministries quickly become top heavy if our conference does not adapt to the number of churches presently in our conference and the number of members in those churches. The 30,000 foot view enables us to step back and determine the essential functions of a conference and its districts. We will embrace our role of identifying, recruiting, developing, equipping, and deploying effective leaders. We will continue to coach congregations to minister effectively to the mission field where God has established them. We will continue to look for new places for new faces in the United Methodist Church.

Q5: What will happen to our District Administrators and District Administrative Assistants from the Districts that are “going away?”

A5: The Texas Annual Conference is blessed to have capable administrative assistants in the conference, districts, and local congregations. We will continue to make every effort to see that these capable team members are deployed well. We know that there will be some attrition of district staff through retirements and we will likely not fill those positions. District Leadership Teams and District Administrative Assistants will be active participants in the conversations.

Q6: What will happen to our District offices? Will they be sold? Where will those assets go?

A6: Most of our districts are renting space for district offices. Some district offices are on property that is no longer United Methodist. Many of our district offices will need to relocate, so the first use of the money from the sale of any assets would more than likely be used for the next district office. All of these situations are being addressed uniquely, but any significant shift would require the approval of a District Conference.

Q7: Where will the new districts be located?

A7: The final determination of district boundaries and district offices will be made after the Texas Annual Conference determines the number of districts through affirmation or rejection of the Conference Leadership Team proposal. However, the District Superintendents will be covering more square miles and therefore will be less centralized. That is, the DS will be utilizing hubs and virtual technology to lead effectively in districts. Meetings may be happening in churches throughout the district more than in the district office.

Q8: How much money will this proposal save the Texas Annual Conference?

A8: It's not so much of a savings as it is living within our means in a way that is faithful to the mission The Texas Annual Conference and its districts want to provide effective ministry without increasing the financial burden on the churches who remain United Methodist. Bishop Harvey has already taken a big step in this direction by appointing 5 District Superintendents. The reduction of districts will not show up so much in the conference budget as it will in the district budgets that fund the ministries of the district. Some districts budgets are less than 50% of what they were one year ago. To ask the remaining churches to fund that district's ministries through district apportionments would create a great financial burden upon those churches through increased district apportionments. This plan seeks to mitigate those shock waves, by continuing to lead proportionally (the five District Superintendents will oversee a similar number of churches and supervise a similar number of clergy per DS, that the nine District Superintendents supervised ~~were~~ in 2022). The aim of moving from nine districts to five districts is to do effective ministry as a conference and districts without increasing the cost for the congregation.

Q9: How much money did we spend for our districts in 2022, what is our budget for 2023?

A9: Each district sets its own budget and not all districts have the same financial capacity. Each district is working to minimize expenses so as not to increase district apportionments. However, some districts are having to utilize reserves and such a model is unsustainable and not viewed as the best use of kingdom resources.

Q10: How will the boundary lines be drawn for the new districts and who will draw them?

A10: Per ¶ 415.4 of the current Book of Discipline, the bishop and cabinet draw the district lines. They will begin the work of alignment after the Texas Annual Conference determines the number of districts through affirmation or rejection of the Conference Leadership Team proposal. One idea on the table is to consider the merger of districts (reflected in Q2 above) as served by the District Superintendents and then discuss the missional alignment of churches. That is, are there churches that identify with the culture of another district more than the one assigned through a merger.

Q11: How will this affect apportionments?

A11: Remaining nimble without compromising leadership will be of primary importance. To that end, the collaboration of the cabinet, bishop and CFA, trustees and conference financial staff and the Annual Conference will be critical as we continue to work on avoiding apportionment increases during this time of transition. We do believe that sustaining a nine-district model with the current number of churches making up the Texas Annual Conference will drive apportionments up, at least at the district level. The intent of the Conference Leadership Team is seeking to avoid this through the proposal to reduce the number of districts to five.

Q12: Will there be equity and resources for the new districts?

A12: Districts have always had a unique makeup and ministry focus. Some districts will have 70 churches that make up 8% of the financial strength of the conference, while others will have 50 churches that make up 25% of the financial strength of the conference. This is simply related to the location of the districts and the churches within their districts. Ministry initiatives in those districts are also different. However, as a conference there is intentionality in resourcing ministries as needed cooperatively with districts and conference resources.

Q13: How will this change representation for each district?

A13: District Superintendents and the District Leadership Team are intentional to see that the entire district is represented when determining the ministry and decisions of the annual conference. This will continue to be an intentional action of our leaders.

Q14: How will this decision impact the District Superintendent's ability to serve as a Missional Strategist? And can you define what a Missional Strategist is please? (See ¶419 of 2016 Book of Discipline)

A14: The biggest change in reducing the number of districts in the Texas Annual Conference from nine to five will be the number of square miles in most of the districts. The five District Superintendents will oversee a similar number of churches and supervise a similar number of clergy per DS, that the nine District Superintendents supervised in 2022. As a missional strategist the District Superintendent is paying close attention to demographic

and population shifts and asking the question, “Are we ministering effectively in this mission field?” The District Superintendent looks for opportunities for new ministries in new places, revitalized ministries in stagnant places, and essential ministries in neglected places. The DS does this in cooperation with lay and clergy leaders throughout the district. This kind of leadership will still be the role of the DS, but it will require adapting to a new, less centralized way of doing ministry, where hubs or sub-districts will be formed to make the large geographic spaces more visible.

Q15: How will this decision impact the District Superintendent’s ability to maintain connection with each church given the huge area of some of the Districts?

A15: The five District Superintendents will oversee a similar number of churches and supervise a similar number of clergy per DS, that the nine District Superintendents supervised in 2022 (see table at the end of this document). There will be some geographical challenges, but a more decentralized approach and effective use of technology will be significant factors.

Q16: When will we know who our District Superintendent will be?

A16: The expectation is that on August 20 Bishop Harvey will announce the names of each district and the alignment of churches in each district, along with identifying the District Superintendent. Until then, churches and pastors will relate to their current district and the appointed DS to that District.

Q17: When will we know where our District will be?

A17: The expectation is that on August 20 Bishop Harvey will announce the names of each district and the alignment of churches in each district, along with identifying the District Superintendent. Until then, churches and pastors will relate to their current district and the appointed DS to that District.

Q18: Can we “name” our own District or is this decision going to be made again by the Texas Annual Conference?

A18: There are several scenarios being considered at this time and having each district vote for several options is one of those scenarios. Another scenario is to stay with the geographic terms in relation to the boundaries of the Conference (NE, NW, SE, SW, Metro)

Q19: Where do district apportionments go?

A19: District apportionments go to staffing expenses of administrative assistants, meeting expenses for district functions, continuing education and leadership training, cooperative missional ministries within the district, DS housing, office expenses, and DLT generated ministries.

Q20: How will this help us lean into our connectional structure?

A20: The Connection is the hallmark of the United Methodist Church. Moving to five districts will return us to a similar size of churches/districts and clergy/DS. It will not diminish our connectional structure. Leaning into our connectional structure will require more intentionality of being connected with one another as congregations, hubs/sub-districts, districts, conference and the general church. You will hear more exciting news of leaning into our connection at the 2023 Session of the Texas Annual Conference.

Q21: What will happen to our institutions?

A21: Much like our connectional structure, our connection with institutions who relate to the Texas Annual Conference will require intentionality of support and accountability. The number of districts may have little impact on our institutions, but our intentionality as a conference will have significant impact.

Q22: How will this affect nominations?

A22: The nominating committee is tasked with looking at diversity and broad representation as it applies to race, gender, age, geography, church size, and district. These will continue to be values held by the Conference Committee on Nominations as it seeks the best people in the best places of ministry.

Parsonages – (See ¶ 2518 and ¶ 2524 of 2016 Book of Discipline)

Q23: I understand the housing allowance will be changed – can you explain why this is happening? What does this have to do with this proposal?

A23: Each district has the responsibility for providing housing for the District Superintendent. Generally, this is done through the provision of a parsonage along with the upkeep and improvements of that parsonage. One of our districts moved to a housing allowance for the District Superintendent over a decade ago. Reducing the number of districts to five would essentially place three houses on the market. One proposal being considered is to sell the district parsonages that are being vacated through this resizing and placing the proceeds of the sale of those parsonages into an account, the earnings of which would provide a housing allowance for the District Superintendents. This would protect the principal should the conference and its districts return to providing parsonages and would eliminate unexpected expenses for districts of improvements and upkeep.

Q24: Since there will be four District Superintendent's retiring, what will happen to their parsonages, will they be sold?

A24: One proposal being considered is to sell the district parsonages that are being vacated through this resizing and placing the proceeds of the sale of those parsonages into an account, the earnings of which would provide a housing allowance for the District Superintendents. This would protect the principal should the conference and its districts

return to providing parsonages and would eliminate unexpected expenses for districts of improvements and upkeep.

Q25: If the District Superintendent's parsonages are sold, where will that money go?

A25: The current thinking is to place the money from the sale of parsonages into an interest earning account where the interest could provide a housing allowance for the current District Superintendent.

Q26: If the District Superintendent's parsonages are sold, where will they live and where will their housing allowance budget come from?

A26: District Superintendents would be responsible for leasing or buying a house within the district. The money from the sale of parsonages would go into an interest earning account where the interest could provide a housing allowance for the current District Superintendent.

Q27: Will the District assets from the sale of the parsonages be put into the Conference budget or the District budget?

A27: The current thought is to protect the investment. Every sale will be noted in the minutes where a specific amount was generated. The money from the sale of parsonages would go into an interest earning account where the interest could provide housing allowances for the District Superintendents opting for a housing allowance.

Q28: Will the sale of these houses generate enough money for the District Superintendent's housing allowances or will other cost saving measures be taken into account?

A28: Conservative figures of the values of parsonages being vacated this June indicate that the earnings from those assets will be adequate to provide housing allowances for the District Superintendents opting for a housing allowance.

Q29: Does the Book of Discipline say anything about "money generated from real estate sales is only allowed to be used for a capital expenditure," like with the local church?

A29: The Book of Discipline does not limit such a sale in the same way as it does for the local church. However, the Texas Annual Conference has a best practice value to honor the expressed intent when a designated reserve fund is established. The expressed intent of the district housing fund is to provide housing for the district superintendents of the Texas Annual Conference.

Comparing District Superintendent Responsibilities from 7/1/2022 and 7/1/2023

District Superintendent Responsibilities				
	Number of Pastors under local church appointment	Number of churches in the district	Number of Pastors under local church appointment	Number of churches in the district
	7/1/22	7/1/22	7/1/23	7/1/23
Central South	82	49	73	42
East	66	93	30	36
North	79	90	39	40
North + East	145	183	69	76
South	102	51	72	37
Southeast	43	49	17	18
South + Southeast	145	100	89	55
Central North	99	49	24	17
Southwest	74	50	40	30
Central North + Southwest	173	99	64	47
Northwest	76	91	27	34
West	66	75	31	31
Northwest + West	142	166	58	65
	687	597	353	285