

# UNIFICATION PLAN

For the Central, North and Northwest  
Texas Annual Conferences



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# PART 1: OUR WHY

## Background

In response to new realities, the mission of The United Methodist Church (UMC), to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, has ignited a vision of unity among United Methodists of the Central Texas Conference (CTC), the North Texas Conference (NTC) and the Northwest Texas Conference (NWTC). The imperative to reconnect with local communities post-COVID-19, the loss of churches and church membership due to disaffiliations and shifting migration and population trends have prompted a collective recognition among these conferences that unification is necessary and strategic. This document outlines *why* and *how* the three conferences unify to become a new unified conference.

In January 2023, the CTC and NTC convened a joint clergy gathering with a shared understanding that the evolving landscape of The United Methodist connection necessitates a reevaluation of conference boundaries. Predicting significant boundary revisions (particularly in Texas) during the 2024 South Central Jurisdictional Conference, the cabinets initiated formal discussions.

Taking a proactive approach to these anticipated changes, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. announced a consultation process aimed at exploring the potential unification of the Central and North Texas Conferences. In June 2023, two consultancy teams — John Wimberly’s Congregational Consultants and Caitlin Congdon’s team from The UMC General Board of Finance and Administration — commenced assessments. This initiative sought to devise optimal strategies for reorganization, emphasizing effective discipleship of current members and outreach to new individuals, leveraging contemporary, adaptable and innovative methodologies.

In August 2023, with the approval of Bishop Saenz and Bishop Jimmy Nunn of the NWTC, the cabinets of the CTC, NTC and NWTC gathered for a vision retreat with a forward-looking perspective on the challenges and opportunities ahead. The combined cabinets unanimously adopted the following working vision: *“We are followers of Jesus, seeking the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people.”* The cabinets also set the following strategic priorities: Multiply Jesus Followers, Champion Children and Youth, Pursue and Embrace Diversity, Maximize Care and Healing and Tell Our Story. This vision and these priorities are designed to sharpen focus and inspire collaboration and innovation as we navigate the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Following the completion of consultancy assessments in September 2023, the joint cabinets of the CTC, NTC and NWTC received the reports in October. Subsequently, they determined that unifying all three conferences would best serve the missional objectives.

In December 2023, Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr., Rev. Don Boren, Rev. Dr. Clifton Howard and Rev. Andy Lewis, assembled a Unification Implementation Team to craft a comprehensive proposal for presentation and approval at the CTC, NTC and NWTC 2024 Annual Conference meetings in May and June, to be followed by submission to the Jurisdictional Boundaries Committee in 2024. Comprised of 13 sub-teams, this group dedicated its energy and expertise to developing the comprehensive Unification Plan.

## Rationale for Unification

Unification offers an opportunity to reset and refocus a unified conference on the church's mission and to create an adaptive missional structure with the agility, resourcefulness and resilience to empower local congregations and collaborate on a larger scale. Unification offers benefits such as multiplication of ministries, shared learnings, innovation, improved cost structures, leveraged financial expertise and resources, adaptive organizational structure and a consolidated budget to ensure enduring vitality and missional impact in a mission field experiencing remarkable demographic shifts and population growth.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason and experience serves as a guiding framework for unification. *Scripture* provides examples of unity amidst challenges, inspiring us to combine our diverse talents and resources to fulfill our mission. Unification honors the *tradition* of Methodists adapting ecclesial structures to changing ministry contexts. *Reason* underscores the need for efficiency and effectiveness in response to evolving church and societal dynamics. Christian *experience* energizes our hearts for a unified expansion of our witness and ministries, supported by the positive outcomes observed in the *experiences* of other conferences that have unified.

The preamble concludes by acknowledging the genuine struggles, adversities, uncertainties and hardships churches face. We recognize the importance of lamenting, along with the indispensable hope in the Lord's unfailing compassions. In this hope, the new unified conference finds not only resilience but also the transformative power to seek *the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people*. With hearts refined by adversity and energized by redemption through God's faithfulness, we, the United Methodists of the new unified conference, unite as one body, with one purpose under the guiding light of Jesus Christ, who makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

## The Preamble: Why Are We Uniting?

In this season, the *mission* of The United Methodist Church (UMC) of *making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world* is compelling the United Methodists of the Central Texas Conference (CTC), the North Texas Conference (NTC) and the Northwest Texas Conference (NWTC) to unify and become a new unified conference. The recent season of congregational disaffiliations from The UMC significantly reduced the cumulative resources of our three conferences. That season was – and still is – painful for many, yet our new reality and developments in our mission fields have beckoned us to a new way of being. While informal conversations about unifying the NTC and CTC have been ongoing for years, a *kairos* season has propelled a recognition among the *three* conferences that a new day has arrived.

Scripture *does* speak to human imagination as Paul prays for the church in Ephesus:

I pray that you may have the power to *comprehend*, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge

so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly *far more than all we can ask or imagine*, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:18-21, *NRSVUE, emphasis added*).

In seeking *comprehension* of God's imagination for the three conferences and our mission fields, we have discerned that the power of Christ's love at work *within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine* as the new unified conference than if the existing conferences continue to work separately.

### **Mission Focus**

At the August vision retreat, the three cabinets established strategic priorities to align with the priorities of local churches. The strategic priorities are:

- **Multiply Jesus Followers** – Equip existing Christ-followers to multiply themselves in a world where Christendom is collapsing and the landscape of the church has changed forever.
- **Champion Children and Youth** – Prioritize the spiritual, mental, physical, social, economic and relational welfare of children, youth and young people in our churches, communities, nation and the world.
- **Pursue and Embrace Diversity** – Intentionally become more diverse, equitable and inclusive, so that everyone of every ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or abilities is interconnected, valued, respected and included. Pursuing and embracing diversity promotes a sense of belonging and safety (spiritual and psychological) for all individuals.
- **Maximize Care and Healing** – Prioritize care and healing within congregations and with people in hurting communities. Sometimes, healing and care are offered through God's means of grace and acts of compassion, mercy and justice. At other times, collaboration with ecumenical, interfaith and community partners maximizes care and healing.
- **Tell Our Story** – Effectively communicate, both internally and externally, our vision, mission, values, priorities and commitments, by passionately and effectively sharing the Gospel, by inviting people into a life changing relationship with Jesus Christ and by delivering on promises and taking responsibility for mistakes and shortcomings that may have harmed others and our reputation.

These priorities are designed to sharpen the focus of the conference and congregations and members that make up the conference on the mission and purposes of the church.

Bishop Ruben Saenz Jr. shared at the 2022 South Central Jurisdictional Conference:

For too long, but particularly the past six years, we have been consumed by and focused on the present as a denomination. In fairness, we have had difficulty imagining a time other than the present, given all the *successive shocking events* we've been through as a

denomination, nation and global community. . . . We face one catastrophe after another with no respite. (*emphasis added*)

The *successive shocking events* of disaffiliations from The UMC, the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing secularization and polarization in U.S. society, have challenged United Methodists to stay mission-focused. Using a sports analogy, we have been forced to play defense when historically, Methodists have been at our best as an offensive team.

As a positive and proactive movement, United Methodists continue to play a pivotal role in shaping and positively influencing communities. In a world of growing polarization, isolation, resentment and ideological segregations that hinder *shalom*, United Methodists are countercultural people characterized by the open Communion Table. As cities, towns and communities develop, grow and redefine their identities, we are a unifying force, drawing guidance and inspiration from scripture and the inclusive teachings and ministries of John Wesley and the earliest Methodists. As individuals, as local congregations and as a connectional denomination, we actively address and respond to the evolving needs, gifts and opportunities to shape communities to reflect the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people.

*Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches* by Peter Greer and Chris Horst opens: “Slowly, silently, and with little fanfare, organizations routinely drift from their original purpose, and most will never return to their original intent. It has happened repeatedly throughout history.”<sup>1</sup> While managing the day-to-day and responding to present needs in the church are essential, viewing the landscape on the horizon to chart a successful path is *mission critical*.

By sharpening and maintaining focus on our vision, mission and strategic priorities, we view the horizon with greater clarity to equip disciples to shape a future that aligns with the love of Christ. While unification and restructuring alone are not sufficient to avoid the perils of mission drift, unification does provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reset and refocus. The new unified conference seeks to “run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:2, *NIV*) through a renewed focus on the vision, mission and strategic priorities offered in implementing this unification plan.

### **Adaptive Missional Structure**

Greer and Horst note, “Mission True organizations recognize that the local church is the anchor to a thriving mission.”<sup>2</sup> A genuine concern with any unification or consolidation, especially into a more extensive and geographically widespread annual conference such as the new unified conference, is the potential loss of focus on local, community-specific needs as well as unique and contextual opportunities and challenges of local churches. The new unified conference consolidates the resources of the three conferences into an adaptive missional structure to strengthen the local church’s mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Greer, Peter; Horst, Chris. *Mission Drift: The Unspoken Crisis Facing Leaders, Charities, and Churches*. Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2014], p15.

<sup>2</sup> p.167

*Financially*, the COVID-19 pandemic and internal and external events and trends have impacted all churches to varying degrees. Disaffiliations from The UMC have had a particularly detrimental financial effect on many United Methodist congregations and on annual conferences' budgets. The cumulative financial loss in the three conferences is \$7.9M (or 36% of combined apportionments in 2023). Despite these recent losses, all three conferences currently are overall financially strong due to careful stewardship of funds by conference staff and leaders during the past few years of uncertainty, but we recognize that we need a new financial approach.

Unifying the three conferences amplifies stewardship of conference resources by offering the following financial benefits:

- **Improved Cost Structures** – Unification facilitates the optimization of financial resources by increasing efficiencies and reducing redundancies.
- **Leveraged Financial Expertise** – As unique parts make up the body (Romans 12:4-8), unification leverages optimal practices and the financial expertise and acumen of laity and clergy from the three conferences.
- **Innovative Organizational Structure** – An innovative organizational structure aligns staff with conference vision and strategic priorities that is adaptive enough to navigate a rapidly changing mission field, ensuring agility and responsiveness to evolving needs and opportunities without repetition in three conferences.
- **Consolidated Budget** – A consolidated budget offers strong fiduciary stewardship that supports operational endeavors and an enduring vitality of the conference for future generations.

The listed financial benefits are not exhaustive. This limited list demonstrates the enhanced stewardship unification offers through consolidating, leveraging and optimizing financial resources to serve local churches and a quickly growing and diversifying mission field.

*Geographically*, the NWTC is much smaller than the larger conferences in the South Central Jurisdiction, and the CTC and the NTC are *the smallest* conferences in the jurisdiction. The three conferences unified as the new unified conference will have a similar geographical footprint to the other large conferences in our jurisdiction. While such a large geographic area presents challenges to those accustomed to a smaller geographic conference, a larger geographic area enables the new unified conference to have a more significant regional impact for Christ. However, leveraging technologies can and will increase connection, efficiency and multiplication in the new unified conference.

*Missionally*, the new unified conference celebrates and multiplies the existing impactful ministries already taking place in all three conferences and offers increasing opportunities to birth new ones. By learning from effective ministries and disseminating learnings, the Unified Conference forges multiplication and spiritual growth by sharing information, training, resources and connection.

Paragraph 120 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*, states, “Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.” The adaptive missional structure of the new unified conference aspires to empower the disciple-making arena that is the local church through mission alignment, increased responsiveness, strengthening unity, facilitating synergy and collaboration, enhancing diversity and inclusivity, increasing efficiencies, reducing redundancies and increasing resources for local churches while lightening the demands on local churches from conference structure.

### **Multiplication**

Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19 *NRSV*). Jesus’ directive is imminent for the new unified conference, as the nations are coming to our conference’s mission field. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, half of the top ten fastest-growing (by percentage) counties in the United States are in Texas, with three of these five located in the new unified conference: Kaufman, Rockwall and Parker. Moreover, Texas is also home to six of the 10 largest-gaining (number of persons) counties in the United States. Of these six, two counties are in our conference: Collin and Denton.<sup>3</sup> Other counties within our conference, such as Tarrant and Williamson, are consistently among the fastest growing in Texas. Fort Worth had the country’s highest number of new city residents in 2022, and the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex is the fastest-growing metroplex in the nation.<sup>4</sup>

This growth occurs in more than just urban areas. According to Texas Demographic Center figures, four of the five fastest-growing cities in Texas (by percentage) were small towns in the new unified conference: Liberty Hill, Weston, Caddo Mills and Josephine. Towns like Aledo, Georgetown, Leander and Alvarado have also seen big population jumps in the rural-suburban mix.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, many rural areas are experiencing growth as people look to escape the cities and suburbs, especially to retire or work remotely from home.

The new unified conference is also home to many growing college towns, collegiate ministries and United Methodist institutions of higher learning. Higher education enrollments in Texas have now surpassed pre-pandemic levels and are projected to continue to grow.

Through collaborations and by leveraging resources in the unified conference, United Methodist collegiate ministries can make even more new disciples and deepen the discipleship of United Methodists during their college years. Moreover, disseminating learnings from collegiate ministries assists congregations in the new unified conference in engaging younger generations, specifically recent graduates and those who do not attend college.

In summary, the new unified conference is situated within the nation’s most rapidly multiplying mission field. The fastest-multiplying mission field in the nation should yield the fastest-multiplying congregations and fastest-multiplying annual conference in the nation.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2023/population-estimates-counties.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/18/texas-cities-census-growth/>

Seven <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/18/texas-cities-census-growth/>



## **Strength in Diversity**

From the Prairies and Lakes to the Panhandle Plains and through the Heart of Texas, the population of the new unified conference encompasses a rich tapestry of unique backgrounds and cultures. By leveraging our cultural distinctions, as well as our convergences and commonalities, we are poised to better serve our diverse mission fields.

We share faith and history. As United Methodists, we are bound by a steadfast commitment to Christ. Rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ and guided by Wesleyan theological heritage, our faith is characterized by grace, embracing individuals from all cultures and walks of life and fostering a deep sense of belonging within our congregations. We embody a rich tradition of spiritual devotion, communal worship and service with others.

We share culture as Texans with numerous cultural overlaps within our diversity. Distinct ethnicities in the three conferences share practices and relationships that culturally strengthen the connection. Urban centers have commonalities. Rural areas and small towns throughout the new unified conference also share cultural connections. The western areas of the CTC and NTC share affinities with NWTC. The eastern regions of the CTC and the NTC share cultural commonalities. The suburbs, developments and master-planned communities north of Austin, up the I-35 corridor and surrounding the DFW metroplex and the larger cities throughout the new unified conference, share many cultural affinities and practices.

Texas is growing – including in its diversity. The U.S. Census Bureau announced in 2023 that Texas became only the second state in the U.S. to exceed 30 million in population. People of color accounted for 95% of the state’s growth between 2010 and 2023, with Latinos accounting for almost half of this growth.<sup>6</sup> Nearly every area of the new unified conference is growing in ethnic, racial

Jesus said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Matthew 9:37-38, *NRSV*). The laborers with the cultural and language skills to reach the growing diversity of the mission field are indeed few. Through unification, the new unified conference can take advantage of the learnings and resources of each of the three conferences “to equip the saints for ministry” (Ephesians 4:12).

For example, the NWTC’s Hispanic/Latino Movement has been a national leader in pioneering training programs. By pairing the gifts and graces of non-Hispanic/Latino congregations with those who have experience and cultural skills, our Hispanic/Latino ministry has grown. The CTC has led in learning from multi-ethnic mergers, and the NTC has planted some of the largest Spanish-language congregations in our denomination. However, with God’s help, we can do more to reach this and other diverse and growing populations.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/18/texas-cities-census-growth/>

At the 2022 South Central Jurisdictional Conference, Bishop Saenz also proclaimed:

[Paul's letter to the Ephesians] illuminates the beauty and the mystery of God's love and will to create a radical, countercultural, peaceful and reconciled new humanity from different cultures, races and ethnicities made possible through Christ's death on the cross that broke down the dividing wall and hostilities (Ephesians 2:14-16). Their togetherness and love for God and one another are rooted in Christ. Their unity centers in one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:1-6). This new state of relating with one another is a gift of God, imagined and dreamed by God before the foundations of the world.

After a divisive season in The UMC, we enter a new way of relating to one another and the world. Where polarization and ideological segregation are the *patterns of the world* (Romans 12:2, *NIV*), we chorus with the power of the Holy Spirit a countercultural anthem of the loving, just and free world God imagines for *all people* with a diverse ensemble of languages, cultures and voices (Acts 2).

### **A Quadrilateral Assessment**

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, reason and experience offers a methodology for decision-making and assessments. Each component offers insight as to why the three conferences are uniting. This section utilizes the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to assess unification.

First, *scripture* is “the primary source and standard for Christian doctrine.”<sup>7</sup> In John 17:20-23, Jesus prays that *all people* who believe in him through the message of his disciples will be united with God and with one another, without geographical, cultural, or chronological limits. This unification plan is a response to Jesus' prayer.

Scripture also shares many examples of God's people emerging out of hardships to find redemption and purpose. In Exodus 35, the people of God brought the talents and material gifts they had as an offering to construct the Tabernacle. Nehemiah 3 describes distinct families working on different areas of the temple walls. Ezra 3 describes the different gifts of those contributing to the construction of the Temple. Likewise, the United Methodists of the new unified conference have passed through adversities to emerge with renewed and unified purpose.

Second, adapting ecclesial structure for missional purposes is in the *tradition* of United Methodists. From the emergence of class meetings and societies in the 18th century to the deployment of 19th-century circuit riders, and from the establishment of local pastors and lay servants to recent innovations in digital ministries, this unification plan participates in the Wesleyan tradition of nurturing connectionalism over and against institutionalism to missionally adapt for the gospel. In the pivotal 1968 merger of The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church that established The UMC, the body did not dismiss theological, doctrinal and political diversity, but rather, celebrated and maintained them in *The Discipline* and *The United Methodist Hymnal*. The

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.umc.org/en/content/glossary-wesleyan-quadrilateral-the>

three unifying conferences also have diversity in those spectrums, yet we remain united by one Spirit and purpose.

Third, *reason* guides the three conferences towards unification. Given the recent changes in the church and in society and with further changes ahead, operating in *status quo* is *unreasonable*. The CTC, NTC and NWTC are not the first annual conferences to *reasonably* conclude that unifying with other conferences maximizes missional effectiveness. Consolidating administrative processes and optimizing resource allocation offers a more efficient and effective conference structure. As local and global initiatives are connected in a vigorous conference, the new unified conference can *reasonably* expect the impact of initiatives and activities to be more consequential and further multiplied.

Fourth, the distinctive role of Christian *experience* in the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is “to energize the heart so as to enable the believer to speak and do the truth in love.”<sup>8</sup> As a unified conference, we broaden and deepen the impact of our witness and ministries. Moreover, the *experiences* of other conferences that have gone through this process have demonstrated positive results. Therefore, unification aligns with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral by adhering to *scriptural* principles, by honoring *tradition*, by applying *reasonable* considerations and by drawing on *experience*.

## Conclusion

Churches have and continue to face difficulties, pain and challenges, and lamenting has its place. In Jeremiah’s lamentations, he notes, “I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord’s great love *we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail*. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:21-23, *NIV emphasis added*). Because of God’s great love for United Methodists, these conferences are not consumed, for God’s compassions *never fail*.

In a national webinar on church planting after disaffiliation, Rev. Jennifer Pick (who planted CTC’s Revive UMC in Azle with her husband Rev. Todd Pick),<sup>9</sup> Rev. Dr. Vic Casad (who planted NTC’s Market Street UMC in Mabank)<sup>10</sup> and Rev. Margie McNeir (who planted NWTC’s Amarillo UMC in Amarillo)<sup>11</sup> shared the stories of their congregations that were formed by United Methodists whose former congregations disaffiliated. To form these new United Methodist congregations, people came from various disaffiliated congregations, some from no congregation, and many from different towns or communities. They came with kindred hearts for Jesus and a shared hope that because of the Lord’s great love, better days are ahead for The UMC.

Scripture shares many examples of God’s people, like those of Revive UMC, Amarillo UMC and Market Street UMC, coming out of hardships and pain to find redemption in God’s faithfulness. The

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<sup>8</sup> Outler, Albert Cook. *The Wesleyan Theological Heritage: Essays of Albert C. Outler*. United Kingdom: Zondervan, 1991, p25.

<sup>9</sup> Read about and listen to the podcast about Revive UMC: <https://www.ctcumc.org/revive-2023>

<sup>10</sup> Read about the planting of Market Street UMC: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/trying-to-heal-after-church-disaffiliation-votes>

<sup>11</sup> Read about the planting of Amarillo UMC: <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/united-methodism-lives-on-in-amarillo>

fires of disaffiliation in their previous congregations refined and energized them in forming new congregations. We find that same refinement and energy throughout the new unified conference.

The people of the Central Texas Conference, North Texas Conference and the Northwest Texas Conference honor the rich history and contributions of these three conferences as the new unified conference with a clear vision, mission and strategic priorities. In our shared faith, love and purpose in Jesus Christ, the Redeemer who makes all things new (Revelation 21:5), we unify as a cord of three strands not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:12), knowing that God works in all things for good for those who love God and have been called according to God's purpose (Romans 8:28).

# **PART 2: OUR NEW IDENTITY**

## **A New Name for the New Unified Conference**

Unifying as a new conference, rather than merely merging, calls for a new name! Much like naming a child, the name for our new conference should work in these early days, as well as 50 or 100 years from now. The Naming Sub-Team agreed that a good name should establish an aspiration for our unified conference, as well as provide clarity about who we are and where we are located in a long list of Annual Conference names. For the team, it was essential that when named by UMNews or other entities, people know exactly where this conference is located. So, from the start, the team agreed that keeping “Texas” in the name was crucial and in keeping with the other two Texas Conferences in our jurisdiction.

We started our work with a “good, bad and zany” name list from which to narrow down. Lay and clergy members of all three conferences were generous and free flowing with their ideas. We discussed the names we loved and made cases for strong contenders, but also ruthlessly whittled the list by eliminating names that felt arrogant, did not broadly reflect our churches or could be confused with other non-profits, corporations or religious groups with similar names. Availability of domains and social media handles also eliminated several options from the list. Team members shared leading names with pastors and lay members of each conference, engaging a diverse group. Students at the UTA Wesley were particularly constructive in sound-boarding a name that we knew needed to be clear, directive and timeless.

Through prayer and deep conversation about how audiences perceive and receive words, the Naming Sub-Team pared down 50+ names to a dozen with strong appeal, to four with space in the market, to two with sound theological rationales, to one with unanimous team support. We invite you to join us as a new unified conference: The Horizon Texas Conference of the South Central Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church.

### **Aspirations and Rationale**

The horizon is the boundary separating the sky from the land and sea. Sometimes, we view the horizon as a limiting factor - either physically or in our human understanding. It can be easy to focus on what is right in front of us, rather than looking beyond. But as believers, our faith carries us past the horizon, seeking something more than what our eyes can see.

Expanding our horizon opens new opportunities for ministry and for creating disciples of Jesus Christ. Stepping past what we can see today offers limitless possibilities to find hope, unity and spiritual growth as a new, unified body of believers. This enables us to live into the call of the Great Commission. “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded. And surely, I am with you to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Our region of Texas defies simple labels. We see the horizon over rolling hills and farmlands, and we glimpse it between the buildings of urban skylines. This region is home to people from different



corners of the world with varying traditions and cultures, and to industries ranging from agriculture to tech. The horizons we are called to cross are plentiful!

The horizon also marks the separation of days. Each evening, as the sun sets, we are promised new mercies and blessings to come in the morning. And with each sunrise, God's promise to us lives on through another day. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23). God has been faithful in bringing us to where we are today despite challenges and difficulties, and God's grace, love and compassion will continue to bring new mercies every morning.

So, what could our ministry look like if we start moving toward the horizon and expanding our current reach? What new mercies are waiting for us beyond the horizon?

Together, as three unified areas becoming one, we are extending our horizon and, therefore, sharing and empowering the gospel of Jesus Christ beyond our horizon to the ends of the earth.

While we work toward expanding our horizon here on earth, may we remember the kingdom work of our heavenly city as described in Revelation. Our unified conference seeks the grace and transformation that comes from God – that we are formed into witnesses in the horizon spaces and beyond. As we continue to press on and pursue building God's kingdom here on earth, may we also look toward the heavenly horizon.

### **District Naming Conventions**

As we unify to become one conference, our districts will increase to 10, with some – like the East District – sharing the same name. The Naming Sub-Team spent time discerning what renaming districts could look like. We explored creative names like Hill Country District or Red River Ridges District, or naming districts after hub cities like Lubbock District or Fort Worth District.

As we discussed creative names, we noted that they might not help people learn or understand where an area is, especially as our geography dramatically expands. Who is in the Big Country District or the Panhandle Peaks District? In the future, if the conference and cabinet changed district lines, then a church's new district may not be named in a way that accurately represents them.

Similarly, naming districts after hub city locations might only represent part of a district's area, and without district offices in every hub city, these names could still lead to confusion.

Two of the three legacy conferences currently use directional naming. In the new conference's geography, "central" may not be a clear definition any longer, so a realigning of names would be necessary. However, this challenge is not insurmountable, and this naming structure would help members of the new conference to learn where churches are located in the broader geography.

Therefore, the Naming Sub-Team recommends adopting directional names for districts within the Horizon Texas Conference. The proposed district names will be submitted to the Bishop and Cabinets for review and further action.

# PART 3: OUR STRUCTURE

## Teams, Boards and Committees

The Horizon Texas Conference will see streamlined conference boards, commissions and committees, retitled generally to be known as “teams,” and will create a team structure to align with the five strategic priorities of the conference. At the conference level, the primary teams shall be: the Multiply Jesus Followers Team, the Champion Children and Youth Team, the Maximize Care and Healing Team, the Pursue and Embrace Diversity Team and the Tell Our Story Team. There shall also be various connectional boards, commissions and committees that fulfill other roles as required by *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*, and that provide administrative support for the annual conference. In addition to accomplishing the strategic priority tasks, each of these teams will also be responsible for accomplishing the tasks required by *The Discipline* (¶610). Some teams will have specific, assigned committees, boards, commissions or agencies. Each team may also create short- or long-term sub-teams as needed to accomplish tasks and key objectives. District structure will be guided by the *Book of Discipline*.

### 2024 Nominations Process

In 2024, in light of conference unification, the Conference Committee on Nominations will do its work under a different timeline. After the structure of conference agencies for the Horizon Texas Conference is developed and approved by the Central, North and Northwest Texas annual conferences in May and June 2024, a transitional nominating committee consisting of members of the three legacy Conference Committees on Nominations will nominate members and chairs for that new structure. The transitional nominating committee will bring this slate of nominees to the unifying conference in September 2024 for election.

The newly elected leaders for the Horizon Texas Conference will begin their terms on January 1, 2025. For the interim period from the May and June annual conferences until December 31, 2024, the leaders elected previously by the Central and North Texas annual conferences in 2023 will extend their terms by six months and continue to serve in their roles, while the Northwest Texas annual conference will elect a slate of leaders in May 2024 who will serve only until December 31, 2024.

### Transitional Nominating Committee

The Transitional Nominating Committee is a team of 15 members, evenly divided among the three legacy annual conferences (Central, North, and Northwest Texas), plus the assistant to the bishop. The legacy conferences will elect those representing their respective conferences at each of the gatherings of the legacy conferences in May and June 2024. The assistant to the bishop will serve as chairperson of this team. The Transitional Nominating Committee will be responsible for populating all positions created by the unification plan of the Horizon Texas Conference, including the Conference Committee on Nominations that will begin their work January 1, 2025. This team shall pay close attention to nominating people who represent the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference with regards to a balance between clergy and laity, geographical location, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and abilities.

### **Conference Committee on Nominations**

The Conference Committee on Nominations is responsible for developing and implementing a plan to identify persons who are willing, qualified and able to serve as members of the agencies of the annual conference, with attention given to representing the rich diversity of conference membership in terms of ethnicity, age, gender, geography and church size. The Conference Committee on Nominations nominates members and chairs of agencies for election by the annual conference in June except where otherwise provided in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*, or the Standing Rules. The assistant to the bishop will be the chairperson of the Conference Committee on Nominations, which shall consist of no more than 16 people. This committee will nominate people to fill all teams, boards or committees identified by this plan of unification and any subsequent teams, boards or committees created by the Horizon Texas Conference.

See Table 1 on page 17 for membership counts for each team to be nominated.

### **Lead Team**

The Lead Team will oversee the implementation of the decisions of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference working through the following teams: the Multiply Jesus Followers Team, the Champion Children and Youth Team, the Maximize Care and Healing Team, the Pursue and Embrace Diversity Team, the Tell Our Story Team and the Connectional Resources Teams. The priorities of the Core Leadership Team will be accountability, advocacy, goal setting, planning, coordination, communications and decision-making between annual conference sessions, as permitted by the *Book of Discipline*.

The Lead Team shall be made up of:

- Resident Bishop (no vote)
- Assistant to the Bishop (Lead Team Chairperson)
- Cabinet Representative (who may be the Dean of the Cabinet)
- Director of Multiplication
- Director of Diversity and Cultural Engagement
- Director of Care and Healing
- Director of Children and Youth Empowerment
- Director of Communications
- Director of Operations
- Chief Financial Officer
- Conference Lay Leader(s)
- Chair of Multiply Jesus Followers Team
- Chair of Champion Children and Youth Team
- Chair of Maximize Care and Healing Team
- Chair of Pursue and Embrace Diversity Team
- Chair of Tell our Story Team
- Three At-Large Lay Members nominated and elected by the annual conference

**TABLE 1: Annual Conference Team Membership Counts**

<b>Team</b>	<b>Membership Count</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Nominating Team	16	
Lead Team	21	With the exception of At-Large Lay members, the Lead Team is comprised of staff and/or other Team Leaders serving ex-officio, so the number 21 is not factored into the total below.
<b>Multiply Jesus Followers</b>	9	
Board of Laity	18	
Committee on Conference Lay Servant Ministries	14	
Board of Ordained Ministry	51	
UMW/UMM	Variable	Leaders of UMW/UWF and UMM are not a matter for Conference Nominations
<b>Championing Children and Youth</b>	9	
Council on Youth Ministries/Youth Leadership Program (adult members)	6	Conference nominates adults to serve
<b>Maximize Care and Healing</b>	9	
<b>Pursue and Embrace Diversity</b>	9	
<b>Tell Our Story</b>	9	
<b>Connectional Resources</b>	-	
Council on Finance and Administration	12	
Investment Management Committee	12	
Personnel Committee	10	
Committee on Administrative Review	3	
Committee on Investigation	18	
Committee on Episcopacy	12	
Episcopal Residence Committee	5	
Board of Pension and Health Benefits	16	
Board of Trustees	12	
Commission on Equitable Compensation	8	
Standing Rules	8	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>266</b>	

### **Multiply Jesus Followers Team**

The goal of this team is to equip existing Christ-followers to multiply themselves in a world where Christendom is collapsing and the landscape of the church has changed. The focus of this team is congregational and leadership development. Congregational development includes the revitalization of existing churches and the creation of new churches, campus ministries and other faith communities. Leadership development includes strengthening ministries of laity and recruiting, equipping and supporting clergy.

The Multiply Jesus Followers team shall be made up of nine persons that reflect the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference. The chairperson of this team shall be nominated and elected by the annual conference.

This team will oversee and coordinate the following functions and relationships required by the *Book of Discipline*: The team itself will carry out the functions mandated by the *Book of Discipline* for the following areas: Board of Discipleship (§630); Committee on Ethnic Local Church Concerns (§632); Higher Education and Campus Ministry (§634); Commission on Small Membership Church (§645); Young Adult Ministry (§650); Older Adult Ministries (§651).

Additional task forces, sub-teams or other bodies may be established by this team for long- or short-term goals of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference, the Lead Team or the Multiply Jesus Followers Team.

The following separately constituted bodies shall be accountable to the Multiply Jesus Followers Teams as they carry out their work: Board of Laity (§631); Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries (§631.6); Board of Ordained Ministry (§635); United Methodist Women (United Women in Faith) (§647); United Methodist Men (§648).

#### ***Board of Laity (§631)***

The Board of Laity shall be constituted and function in accordance with the *Book of Discipline* and will initially consist of a total of 18 members.

During the first quadrennium, beginning January 1, 2025, there will be three Co-Lay Leaders, with one person representing each of the three legacy conferences (CTC, NTC and NWTC). These Co-Lay Leaders will collaboratively lead the Board of Laity. Those currently serving as Lay Leaders of the existing legacy conferences shall continue until their term expires or until the Board of Laity may elect to reorganize itself.

**Duties:** In addition to the duties and responsibilities as determined by the *Book of Discipline* and other sections of the Annual Conference Rules, the Conference Lay Leader(s) shall be part of the appointive cabinet and represent the laity during the Ordination Service of the Annual Conference.

Additional members of the Board of Laity are: the District Lay Leaders; the Conference Associate Lay Leader (who is the same as the Lay Leader Elect); the President of United Methodist Women (United Women in Faith); the President of United Methodist Men; the



President of the Council on Youth Ministries, or equivalent leadership representative; and the Chair of the Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries.

*Selection of Annual Conference Lay Leader going forward* – The Board of Laity shall nominate a Lay Leader Elect who will serve as the Associate Lay Leader for a four-year term. The Associate Lay Leader will help with the duties of the Lay Leader(s) as set forth in the guidelines established by the Board of Laity. On the expiration of the term of the incumbent Lay Leaders, the Lay Leader Elect will become Lay Leader and will serve a four-year term.

***Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries (§631.6)***

The Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries Committee will develop and administer the Certified Lay Servant Program, including recruiting, training, certifying and re-certifying lay servants and lay speakers. The Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries Committee will also work to promote the use of lay speakers to fulfill the purposes and functions described in the *Book of Discipline*.

The committee shall consist of a chairperson, who serves as the Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries, plus the following members: the Director of Lay Servant Ministries from each district and three clergy (initially one each representing the three legacy conferences comprising the Horizon Texas Conference). The Conference Director of Lay Servant Ministries and the District Directors of Lay Servant Ministries must be currently Certified Lay Servants. The committee may create ad hoc teams or groups as necessary to carry out the tasks of the committee.

The Conference Committee on Lay Servant Ministries shall recommend a qualified and willing candidate for the Conference Director Lay Servant Ministries to the Conference Committee on Nominations for election at the following Annual Conference.

***Board of Ordained Ministry (§635)***

The Board of Ordained Ministry shall fulfill the functions described in the *Book of Discipline*. It shall study and interpret the ministerial resources and needs of the annual conference in consultation with the bishop and the cabinet. Duties shall be those assigned to it in the *Book of Discipline*. The Board of Ordained Ministry will discuss and take action as it deems appropriate regarding proposals from its divisions and committees.

The Board of Ordained Ministry shall consist of 51 members, divided into three classes by quadrennium with 17 in each class. “Members shall be nominated by the presiding bishop after consultation with the chairperson of the board, the executive committee, or a committee elected by the board of the previous quadrennium, and with the cabinet. To ensure adequate board membership, consultation shall include an evaluation of the workload of the board in meeting disciplinary and annual conference responsibilities. Vacancies shall be filled by the bishop after consultation with the chairperson of the board. An elected board member may serve a maximum of three consecutive four-year terms. The chair of the Order of Deacons, the chair of the Order of Elders, and the chair of the

Fellowship of Local Pastors and Associate members shall be members of the Board of Ordained Ministry and its executive committee.” (§635.1(a))

The Board of Ordained Ministry shall organize itself into divisions and committees so as to carry out its responsibilities effectively and to fulfill the requirements of the *Book of Discipline*. The Board of Ordained Ministry may assign additional duties to each division. Persons shall not be added to the Board of Ordained Ministry or its divisions during the quadrennium except to fill vacancies or new divisions.

“The Board of Ordained Ministry shall select from among its own membership an official representative to serve as a member of each district committee on ordained ministry, which shall function as subcommittees of the board.” (§635.1(g))

More about the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry is detailed on page 32.

***United Methodist Women (United Women in Faith) (§647)***

The Annual Conference United Methodist Women (United Women in Faith) shall be constituted and function according to the *Book of Discipline*. Representatives from United Methodist Women shall also be designated to other agencies of the annual conference as recommended by the *Book of Discipline* or as provided by the standing rules of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference.

***United Methodist Men (§648)***

The Annual Conference United Methodist Men shall be constituted and function according to the *Book of Discipline*. Representatives from United Methodist Men shall also be designated to other agencies of the annual conference or as provided by the standing rules of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference.

**Champion Children and Youth Team**

The goal of this team is to prioritize the spiritual, mental, physical, social, economic and relational welfare of children and youth in our churches, communities, nation and world. The focus of this team is to grow children and youth into disciples of Jesus Christ and to advocate for vulnerable children and youth in our communities. This team will provide opportunities for children and youth to grow through faith formation training and camping and retreat ministries. Outwardly, the conference will look for opportunities to advocate and serve the most vulnerable of children and youth in our conference and beyond.

The Champion Children and Youth Team shall be made up of nine persons that reflect the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference. The chairperson of this team shall be nominated and elected by the annual conference.

This team will oversee and coordinate the following functions and relationships required by the *Book of Discipline*: Youth Ministry (§649). The team will be responsible for the MinistrySafe or equivalent program for the Horizon Texas Conference. Project Transformation will relate to the conference through this team and will develop a plan following unification.

Additional task forces, sub-teams or other bodies may be established by this team for long- or short-term goals of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference, the Lead Team or the Champion Children and Youth Team.

The following separately constituted body will be accountable to the Champion Children and Youth Team:

***Council on Youth Ministries (¶649)***

The Council on Youth Ministries or equivalent body shall be constituted and function according to the *Book of Discipline*. Representatives from the Council on Youth Ministries shall also be designated to other agencies of the annual conference when the standing rules of the annual conference so provide.

**Maximize Care and Healing Team**

The goal of this team is to prioritize care and healing within congregations and hurting communities. Sometimes, healing and care come through God’s means of grace and acts of compassion, mercy and justice. At other times, collaboration with ecumenical, interfaith and community partners that maximize care and healing.

Inwardly, this team will focus on training and equipping laity to partner with clergy to provide systems of care, support groups and mental health resources. Additionally, this team will support clergy with crisis support and health and wellness initiatives. Outwardly, this team will focus on justice, compassion and disaster response.

The Maximize Care and Healing team shall be made up of nine persons that reflect the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference. The chairperson of this team shall be nominated and elected by the annual conference.

This team will oversee and coordinate the following functions required by the *Book of Discipline*: Board of Church and Society (¶629); General Board of Global Ministries (¶633); Disability Concerns (¶653).

Additional task forces, sub-teams or other bodies may be established by this team for long- or short-term goals of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference, the Lead Team of the Maximize Care and Healing Team.

**Pursue and Embrace Diversity Team**

The goal of this team is to help the annual conference and its churches intentionally become more diverse, equitable and inclusive, so that everyone feels interconnected, valued, respected and included, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or abilities. Pursuing and embracing diversity promotes a sense of belonging and safety (spiritual and psychological) for all individuals. This team’s purpose is to establish and maintain diversity, equity and inclusion policies of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference in regard to human resources practices, the work of the Committee on Nominations and the work of the Board of Ordained Ministry. They will also resource

clergy, laity and congregations on implicit bias, cultural competence and create environments of belonging.

The Pursue and Embrace Diversity team shall be made up of nine persons that reflect the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference.

This team will oversee and coordinate the following functions and relationships: Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships (§642); Committee on Religion and Race (§643); Commission on Status and Role of Women (§644); Native American Ministry (§654); Latino/Hispanic Ministries (§655).

Additional task forces or sub-teams may be set up by this team for long- or short-term goals of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference, the Lead Team or the Pursue and Embrace Diversity Team.

### **Tell Our Story Team**

The goal of this team is to effectively communicate, both internally and externally, the Horizon Texas Conference's vision, mission, values, priorities and commitments, by delivering on promises and by taking responsibility for mistakes and shortcomings that may have harmed others and our reputation.

The Tell Our Story team shall be made up of nine persons that reflect the diversity of the Horizon Texas Conference. The chairperson of this team shall be nominated and elected by the annual conference.

This team will oversee and provide the following functions and relationships required by the *Book of Discipline*: Commission on Communication (§646); Commission on Archives and History (§641).

Additional task forces or sub-teams may be set up by this team for long- or short-term goals of the Horizon Texas Annual Conference, the Lead Team or the Tell our Story Team.

### **Connectional Resources Teams (Stewardship and Operations)**

The Connectional Resources Teams will sustain the United Methodist connection within the Horizon Texas Conference by providing ongoing administrative support as provided for in the *Book of Discipline*. These teams will provide for the following functions and relationships required by the *Book of Discipline*: Conference Council on Finance and Administration (§611); Administrative Review (§636); Episcopacy Committee (§637); Pensions and Health Benefits (§639); Board of Trustees (§640); Equitable Compensation (§625); Commission on Archives and History (§641).

The following bodies make up the Connectional Resources Teams:

#### ***Conference Council on Finance and Administration (§611)***

The Council on Finance and Administration shall be constituted and shall function in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*. The Council on Finance and Administration will consist of 12 members. The Chief Financial Officer shall be an ex-officio member of the council without vote. The Chief Financial Officer shall have responsibilities and rights

afforded by the *Book of Discipline* to the conference treasurer and shall be accountable to the Annual Conference through the council. No member of the Council on Finance and Administration shall be a member of any other agency, or a trustee or member of the board of directors of a conference institution that derives support, either partially or totally, from the Council on Finance and Administration.

***Investment Management Committee***

The Investment Team will manage the invested funds currently held by the Central, North and Northwest Texas conferences. The committee shall be composed of two representatives each from the Horizon Texas Conference Council on Finance and Administration, Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits and the Board of Trustees, along with two members representing each of the legacy conferences.

***Personnel Committee***

The Personnel Committee shall be responsible for hiring (non-appointed staff), setting salaries (in collaboration with the Council on Finance and Administration), setting policy and providing support for all conference and district staff members. This will be a team of 10 people that will include an equal number of clergy and laity, representative of the diversity within the annual conference. The Assistant to the Bishop will be an ex-officio member with voice and vote.

***Committee on Administrative Review (¶636)***

The Committee on Administrative Review shall be comprised of three clergy in full connection and three alternates (who are not members of the cabinet, the Board of Ordained Ministry or immediate family members of the above) and nominated by the bishop. It shall be constituted and function in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*.

***Committee on Investigation (Clergy and Diaconal) (¶2703.2(a) and (¶2703.2(b))***

The Committee on Investigation (Clergy and Diaconal Ministers) shall be constituted and function in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*. The team shall consist of four clergy members in full connection, three professing lay members, three alternate clergy members in full connection, and six alternate professing lay members.

***Committee on Episcopacy (¶637)***

The Committee on Episcopacy will function as provided in the *Book of Discipline*. It shall meet at least annually. The resident bishop shall convene the Committee on Episcopacy at the beginning of the new quadrennium and the Committee shall elect a chair, a vice-chair, and a secretary. The bishop and the chair are authorized to call additional meetings when desired.

The Committee on Episcopacy shall be nominated and elected at the Annual Conference session following the regularly scheduled session of the General Conference. The Committee on Episcopacy shall consist of 12 members. "One-fifth of the committee's membership shall be appointed by the bishop. In addition to the lay and clergy members of the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy, who shall be ex officio members with vote, it is



recommended that the committee consist of the following: one-third laywomen, one-third laymen, and one-third clergypersons, provided that one layperson shall be the conference lay leader. All lay members shall be professing members of local churches. Special attention shall be given to the inclusion of racial and ethnic persons, youth (§256.3), young adults, older adults, and people with disabilities. No member of the staff of the annual conference or any of its agencies, nor an immediate family member of such staff, shall serve as a member of the committee, except that a member of the jurisdictional committee on episcopacy or the conference lay leader shall not be disqualified from membership as a result of this provision.” (§637.1)

***Episcopal Residence Committee (§638)***

The Episcopal Residence Committee will function as provided in the *Book of Discipline*. It will consist of the chair of the Committee on Episcopacy, the chair of the Board of Trustees, and the chair of the Council on Finance and Administration.

***Board of Pension and Health Benefits (§639)***

The Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall be constituted and function in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*. It will provide for and contribute to the support, relief, assistance and pensioning of clergy and their families, other church workers and lay employees, except as otherwise provided by the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits. It will also provide to all clergy who qualify, and other persons who qualify, access to the best life, hospital, accident and disability insurance coverage possible with the funds available. The Board of Pension and Health Benefits shall discuss and take action as it deems appropriate regarding proposals under its jurisdiction.

The Board of Pension and Health Benefits should consist of 16 members: one-third laywomen, one-third laymen and one-third clergy. They will be elected for terms of eight years and arranged in two classes. With the inauguration of the new conference, the Transitional Committee on Nominations will nominate one class for four years and one class for eight years. The Board may fill a vacancy in the membership for the remainder of the conference year in which the vacancy occurs. At its next session, the annual conference shall fill the vacancy for the remainder of the unexpired term.

The Director of Connectional Resources/Treasurer/Benefits Officer, a representative of the cabinet, and a representative of the Council on Finance and Administration also serve as ex-officio members.

More about the work of the Board of Pension and Health Benefits is detailed on page 29.

***Board of Trustees (§640 and §2512.1-.8)***

The Board of Trustees shall function and be constituted in accordance with the *Book of Discipline*. The Board of Trustees shall organize itself according to §2512.1-.8.

“The board shall consist of 12 persons, and it is recommended that one-third be clergy, one third laywomen, and one-third laymen, in accordance with the provisions of §610.5. Said

persons must be of legal age as determined by law, and lay members shall be members in good standing of local churches within the bounds of the annual conference. Such persons shall be the directors of the corporation. They shall be elected by the conference staggered terms of four years, except for the first board, one-fourth for a term of one year, one fourth for a term of two years, one-fourth for a term on three years, and one-fourth for a term of four years, and shall serve until their successors have been elected; provided, however, that existing incorporated trustees of any annual conference may continue unaffected while the charter or articles of incorporation are amended to bring them into conformity with (§2512.1)." (§2512.1)

*Conference Office Location* – The Office Location Team will serve under the direction of the newly formed conference’s Board of Trustees. Upon the finalization of conference unification, the conference Board of Trustees may either (1) choose to make final decisions about office location on their own, or (2) designate the existing transitional Office Location Team to complete the work of determining the location of the conference offices.

***Commission on Equitable Compensation (§625)***

The Commission on Equitable Compensation shall function as prescribed by the *Book of Discipline* and shall be composed of eight members equally distributed between clergy and laity. At least one layperson and one clergyperson shall be from churches of less than 200 members.

***Standing Rules Committee***

The Standing Rules Committee oversees and recommends structural changes in the standing rules of the annual conference. The Standing Rules Committee consists of a chair and seven members. The committee shall be divided evenly between clergy and laity.

## **Finance**

### **Current Annual Conferences**

Presently, the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences are Texas nonprofit corporations.

### **Successor Conference**

A new conference, named the Horizon Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church, will be established, either by renaming one of the existing corporate entities or by creating a new corporate entity. The Central Texas Conference (CTC), the North Texas Conference (NTC) and the Northwest Texas Conference (NWTC) will become a part of that newly named or newly formed corporation. The Horizon Texas Conference will be a Texas nonprofit corporation and will continue under new bylaws, in accordance with the BOD, and a revised charter, with the intended effective date of January 1, 2025.

### ***Trustees***

The Board of Trustees shall be elected at the organizational session of the Horizon Texas Conference to be held in September 2024. The trustees shall be elected to initial staggered

terms as outlined in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*, and shall serve until their successors have been elected.

### ***Transition Matters***

The elected trustees will become the directors of the Horizon Texas Conference for purposes of conducting corporate affairs. Such actions include, but are not limited to, completing any transfer of assets to the Horizon Texas Conference, dissolving corporate affairs of the former Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences, consolidating existing corporate entities with the Horizon Texas Conference corporate entity and changing the corporate name, as noted above.

### ***Officers***

The officers of the Horizon Texas Conference shall be determined in accordance with the corporate documents and the 2016 *Book of Discipline*. The conference treasurer/director of administrative services shall be nominated by a joint session of the Councils on Finance and Administration (CF&A) for the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences, and shall be elected at the unifying conference of the Horizon Texas Conference.

### ***Districts and Administration***

The Horizon Texas Conference will retain the current district boundaries from the Central and North Texas Conferences. The current Northwest Texas Conference will become a single district. All districts will start fresh with no carryover of designated funds, except as discussed below. To maximize efficiency and manage costs across the conference, district funding and budgets will be managed and administered by the Horizon Texas Conference office.

### ***Assignment of Assets***

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences will assign all of their assets to the Horizon Texas Conference, effective January 1, 2025, or as soon thereafter as practical to allow for 2024 transactions to be finalized, accounts to be reconciled and the work of the Joint Distributing Committee to be completed. Accordingly, pursuant to the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶1509, the permanent funds and all other pension assets of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences, shall remain with each respective conference pending completion of the work of the Joint Distributing Committee as described by ¶1509 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.

### ***Assumption of Liabilities***

The Horizon Texas Conference will assume all liabilities, debts, contractual rights and obligations, restrictions and duties, respectively, of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences, effective January 1, 2025, or as soon thereafter as practical to allow for 2024 transactions to be finalized and accounts to be reconciled; except that, pension responsibilities of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences shall remain with each respective conference pending completion of the work of the Joint Distributing Committee as described by ¶1509 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*.

### **Litigation and Contingent Liabilities**

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences have reported any ongoing litigation or contingent liabilities in their most recent audited financial statements.

### **Consolidation, Dissolution or Other Action**

Following completion of the work of the Joint Distributing Committee, and any necessary assignment or assumption of permanent funds, pension assets and pension responsibilities related to that work, the trustees of the Horizon Texas Conference may take any necessary or advisable action to complete the consolidation and/or dissolution of any predecessor corporate organizations.

### **Unrestricted, Restricted and Designated Net Assets and Endowed Funds**

The Horizon Texas Conference shall own or take custody of restricted, designated and endowed assets subject to their respective restrictions, designations and other limitations on use or disposition. Unrestricted funds shall be used for the debts, expenses and obligations of the Horizon Texas Conference.

### ***Ongoing Ministry Commitments and Grants***

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences are committed to the unifying vision of being followers of Jesus seeking the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people. Each conference has historically fostered ministry to multiply Jesus followers, champion children and youth, pursue and embrace diversity, maximize care and healing and tell our stories in similar, yet unique, ways. We have and we will continue to look for where God is already at work and join God there.

Each conference has multi-year grants or other financial commitments that must be considered. In the Horizon Texas Conference, there will be new ways and places for joining in God's work. However, there are fruitful, ongoing, God-inspired ministries from each conference that will transition into the new conference.

It is our intention that these ongoing ministries and any related financial commitments will continue through 2025, provided original ministry intention, goals or mutual commitments are met. Thereafter, we anticipate these ministries will be periodically reviewed by the bishop and the conference leadership for further investment, adaptation or sunseting. Each of the unifying conferences will provide designated funding or proper financial identification to Horizon Texas Conference for these ministry commitments and grants through at least calendar year 2025.

### **Investment Management**

There will be an Investment Committee to manage the invested funds currently held by the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences. The committee will be proposed and voted upon at the unifying conference in September 2024. The committee shall be composed of two representatives each from the Horizon Texas Conference Council on Finance and Administration, Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits and the Board of Trustees, along with two representatives each from the legacy conferences.

### **Treasury/Cash Management**

The Horizon Texas Conference will merge and centrally manage the bank accounts of the current Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences. Unique funds of each of the legacy conferences will remain with each respective conference pending completion of the work of the Joint Distributing Committee as described by ¶1509 of the 2016 *Book of Discipline*. The Joint Distributing Committee, in collaboration with the Horizon Texas Conference Council on Finance and Administration and the Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits, will review similar funds and consider future consolidation.

### **Accounting/Billing Systems**

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences all use the Shelby financial platform; however, each conference utilizes a different chart of accounts, basis of accounting, accounts payable and accounts receivable. There are also numerous differences in the policies and procedures each conference employs. The Horizon Texas Conference will have a unified system encompassing all of these areas. The accounting methodology, policies, procedures, accounting and finance platform, reporting and other financial details are planned to be developed before year-end as Horizon Texas Conference financial staff is established, along with the appropriate Horizon Texas Conference CF&A task force and board members.

### **Property and Liability Insurance - Conference Level**

The Horizon Texas Conference will keep or appropriately amend its property and liability insurance coverages as presently in place for the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences.

### **Calculation of Apportionments**

Apportionments for 2025 will be calculated by applying a percentage to the 2023 local operating revenue for each member church. The apportionment percentage for 2025 is currently expected to be within a range of 7% to 9% of the Apportionment Revenue Base. The specific percentage will be calculated and communicated once the Horizon Texas Conference budget for 2025 is completed.

For 2025, the Apportionment Revenue Base is defined to include revenue items from the 2023 Local Church Report to their respective Annual Conferences (line numbers refer to data terms provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church):

- 52.a – Amount received through pledges;
- 52.b – Amounts received from non-pledging, but identified givers; and
- 52.c – Amount received from unidentified givers.

The Apportionment Revenue Base above excludes other revenues reported on the statistical reports that reflect one-time activities and revenues not intended to support ongoing church operations. The Unification Implementation Finance Sub-team will review these exceptions and further refine methodology for approval at the unifying annual conference in September 2024.

### ***Rationale for Calculation of Apportionments***

Historically, all three legacy conferences of the Horizon Texas Conference have calculated apportionments (sometimes called Shared Ministries or Connectional Mission Giving)

largely based on individual church expenditures as reported to the conference, with different combinations of expenditure categories and timeframes. The challenging events of the past several years have had a negative impact on both church attendance and revenues, whereas the expenses of operating the individual churches may have held flat, at best, or increased. An apportionment methodology based on expenditures becomes punitive in this environment. On the other hand, the methodology based upon recent operating revenue envisioned for the Horizon Texas Conference is cognizant of current trends in both attendance and giving.

The goal in calculating apportionments is to present a sustainable method of calculation that is understandable and consistent in its financial impact on the local churches of the Horizon Texas Conference. We recognize the successful implementation of the five Strategic Priorities of the Horizon Texas Conference to multiply Jesus followers, champion children and youth, maximize care and healing, pursue and embrace diversity and tell our story will occur primarily at the local church level. Local church vitality is accordingly a major goal of the new conference. It is the intent of the Horizon Texas Conference that the apportionment method chosen provide a reduction in apportionments to many local churches from the most recent apportioned amount. The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences will continue efforts to analyze and refine this methodology. Maximum increase and decrease percentages from the most recent apportioned amounts may be incorporated into the proposed methodology to enable a gradual transition to the new methodology. Any method chosen can result in an increase or decrease in a specific church's apportionments.

### **2025 Budgeting and the Amount of the 2025 Apportionment**

The Annual Conferences held in May and June, as well as the unifying conference itself, will address multiple issues that will impact the budget for 2025. These issues include staffing, organizational structure, benefit plans (policies, procedures, billing/collections) and other budgetary considerations to develop a complete annual conference budget. The Horizon Texas Conference is committed to optimizing a developed budget resulting in a lower aggregate amount apportioned than what the combined three conferences apportioned in recent years.

### **Audits**

Audited financial statements for 2023 will be the basis for unification and consolidation. The final 2024 financial statements for the three separate, liquidating conferences will be reviewed by independent CPAs.

## **Pension and Health Benefits**

The creation of the new Horizon Texas Conference will require changes to clergy pension and health benefit plans. The legacy conference treasurers, in consultation with the bishop, created a Board of Pension and Health Benefits Joint Task Force in September 2023. The team consists of the treasurers, key staff and three Board of Pension and Health Benefits (BOPHB) or Council on Finance and Administration (CF&A) board members from each annual conference. In January, this team became the Unification Board of Pensions and Health Benefits Sub-Team. In March, the team

met for two days in person at the Central Texas Conference's offices to determine alignment on the areas listed below. For the next phase, a Joint Distributing Committee, whose members will be elected pursuant to ¶1509 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*, will be established. The intent is for members of the Sub-Team to serve on the Joint Distributing Committee to help provide a seamless transition. The committee will work in conjunction with Wespath Benefits and Investments to perform a scope of work as outlined in ¶1509.

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences all offer the same pension and health benefit plans, but with variations in the details among the conferences. Until the effective date of any change in this report, the benefits of all three conferences will remain unchanged and will continue to be administered separately until January 1, 2025.

A brief summary of each benefit and the recommendations for alignment within the next one to two years are listed below.

### **Pre-82 Coverage**

The Pre-82 Pension Plan, the oldest of the currently operating pension plans, applies to those with service within the three conferences prior to January 1, 1982. It provides a lifetime monthly benefit payment, which is defined by the greater of pre-1982 years of service times the Past Service Rate (PSR), or the Defined Benefit Service Money (DBSM) account balance. The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences each have separate PSRs that each conference's Board of Pension and Health Benefits determines annually.

After working closely with the actuaries from Wespath, we recommend that the PSRs for the three conferences be equalized at \$875, effective January 1, 2026. The rates for 2024 have already been set. During the transition period from 2025 to 2026, participants will see an increase in their PSR of 2% (NTC), 14% (NWTC) or 17% (CTC). In addition, the Contingent Annuitant percentage for the NTC will increase from 70% to 75%, which will then match the rate for both CTC and NWTC participants. After equalization, an annual increase in the PSR of 1% is recommended, subject to the discretion of the Horizon Texas Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits and ratification by the Horizon Texas Annual Conference each year.

### **Ministerial Pension Plan (MPP)**

From 1982 through December 31, 2006, clergy were subject to the denominational Ministerial Pension Plan (MPP), a defined contribution plan. When a participant retires with service under MPP, that clergy person's account balance is annuitized and, therefore, guaranteed for life. If the plan assets drop below the annuitized liability, the Horizon Texas Conference would be responsible for its share of the denominational unfunded liability. Changes are not necessary for MPP due to its structure. However, the Horizon Texas Conference will assume any liabilities that arise if plan assets drop below the annuitized liability.

### **Clergy Retirement Security Program (CRSP)**

The CRSP pension program provides retirement benefits to two service cohorts: service from January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2013, and service from January 1, 2014, to current date. All three conferences currently cover eligible clergy serving at least ½ time. Clergy with ½ and ¾ time

appointments can opt out of the CRSP plan; however, clergy with full-time appointments cannot opt out.

### **Comprehensive Protection Plan (CPP) Eligibility**

The Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences all offer CPP, with variations in the coverage for  $\frac{3}{4}$  time-appointed ordained and local pastors and those on voluntary leave (personal, family or transitional). Coverage cannot be waived. There are currently variations in how the premium is covered, with conferences either charging churches directly at the rate of 3% of compensation (housing, plus cash salary) or including the premium in the conference expenditures apportioned to the churches.

We recommend the following regarding CPP:

- Coverage be extended to all individuals at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  time-appointed to a conference responsible appointment. Premiums for active participants to be billed directly to the respective churches.
- Voluntary leave, including for personal, family or transitional reasons, should be covered. Premiums for participants on voluntary leave are to be covered by the Horizon Texas Conference and included in the amount apportioned to churches.
- Medical leave should be covered. Premiums for participants on medical leave to be covered by the Horizon Texas Conference and included in the amount apportioned to churches.

### **Post-Retirement Medical Benefits**

Wespath, through Willis Tower Watson (Via Benefits), coordinates the Post-Retirement Medical Benefit for the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences. Each conference currently has differences in the amount of the subsidy, eligibility requirements and assumed increases. There will not be any changes in the post-retirement medical benefits for retirees who retire on or before December 31, 2024, and their surviving spouses. All changes will be prospective and only apply to those who retire from the Horizon Texas Conference after January 1, 2025.

We make the following recommendations regarding post-retirement medical benefits to simplify the process going forward:

- Subsidy should be set at \$50 per year of denominational service, up to a maximum of 30 years (\$1,500 maximum).
- Eligible clergy who retire before reaching age 65 and their spouses will not receive the supplement until enrolling in Medicare. Those who have already retired before age 65 will continue to be covered under their existing arrangements.

### **Health Benefit Plan (HealthFlex)**

The HealthFlex plan managed by Wespath provides uniform, high-quality health coverage for participants from all three conferences. However, HealthFlex premiums, premium credits charged to churches, coverage of various sub-categories of staff and other aspects of coverage vary greatly



among the three conferences. Wespeth has calculated and provided the 2025 HealthFlex rates for a unified Horizon Texas Conference. We recommend the following:

- All clergy serving full-time in a local church or conference-office appointment will continue to be required to participate in HealthFlex. Part-time clergy currently enrolled in HealthFlex will no longer be eligible, except for 18 months of continuation coverage. Clergy actively working over the age of 65 will remain on HealthFlex and not be required to enroll in Medicare until they retire (no Small Employer Exception).
- Clergy and lay conference staff will be allowed to opt out of HealthFlex coverage through an annual waiver under predefined Wespeth-approved circumstances (e.g., coverage provided through military health benefits, spouse's health plan or enrolled in Medicare/Medicaid). Churches and the conference will be required to pay the monthly billing rate attributable for those who opt out.
- The monthly premium credit for 2025 of \$1,075 per eligible clergy should be billed to each individual church. Based on individual plan and health account selections, there may be additional charges billed to the local church that are the responsibility of the lay or clergy participant.
- Clergy on CPP under 65 years old should remain in HealthFlex.
- Churches should continue to be allowed to include lay staff in HealthFlex through a sub-adoption agreement that all three conferences currently allow.
- The default health plan selected for 2025 is the Employee Only H2500 with HSA (Health Savings Account), which will apply to all participants who do not make an initial selection upon new enrollment. Plan participants continue to have the ability to choose whichever plan is best for them.

We strongly encourage the new Horizon Texas Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits (BOPHB) to create a task force to explore providing additional health-benefits funding to families, expanding beyond the historical focus on individual coverage. We further encourage the future BOPHB to consider expanding health insurance coverage to ¾-time appointed ordained and local Pastors.

## **Board of Ordained Ministry**

The Board of Ordained Ministry of the Horizon Texas Conference will bear duties as set forth in ¶1635 of *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*. Through its work, the unified Board of Ordained Ministry will empower all who have experienced God's call on their lives to lead followers of Jesus to pursue the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people. Additionally, the unified Board of Ordained Ministry will meet challenges related to unifying the work and culture of three distinct Boards of Ordained Ministry into one. The unified board should craft its initial work

by anticipating and adapting to the challenges arising from unification. Therefore, the unified board must make the following considerations from the outset:

### **Shared Values**

The Board of Ordained Ministry Unification Taskforce has identified the following shared values between the conferences and seeks to instill these values in the establishment of the Board of Ordained Ministry of the Horizon Texas Conference:

- To celebrate that all Christians are called to ministry and that some are set apart for certified, licensed or ordained ministry.
- To discern faithfully with every candidate their fitness, readiness and effectiveness for certified, licensed or ordained ministry through a variety of evaluative means and by speaking the truth in love. It would be a disservice to any candidate and to the Church to send leaders to congregations who are not prepared for the rigors of the vocation.
- To maintain a collegial, supportive attitude toward all candidates and aspire to assist all candidates in answering God's call on their lives, even when that call does not include certified, licensed or ordained ministry.

### **Inclusivity and the Celebration of God's Call**

The work of each board developed to meet specific ministry needs across remarkably diverse communities. The unified board, district committees and local churches must establish a consistent process to ensure effective leadership across all ministry contexts in the Horizon Texas Conference. This process must prioritize diversity, inclusivity and accessibility to accommodate the varied calls and gifts for ministry instilled in those called to ministerial leadership:

- Bi-vocational, co-vocational and subsequent career callings
- Certified Lay Minister or Missioner
- Licensed Local Pastor
- Ordination as Deacon or Elder

The process should also:

- Anticipate and seek to abolish barriers to ministry, including but not limited to, language, culture and distance.
- Create space to discern with every willing candidate whether God's call on their lives includes lay, licensed or ordained ministry.
- Create a culture of heeding and answering God's call across the entire conference to raise up the future leaders who will one day lead God's church.

### **Geographic Access**

The northernmost community of the new conference is over 500 miles by road from the southernmost community. Meetings with and of the unified board should be reasonably accessible (with regard to time and money) to persons from all corners of the conference, and the unified board should explore creative solutions to meet its needs, prioritizing in person meetings.

### **Financial Assistance**

The unified board will establish a program of financial assistance for ministerial education which coordinates pre-existing scholarships, honors the donors' original intentions, provides the greatest amount of scholarship monies possible for seminary students, and solicits future gifts to sustain and grow the scholarship program.

Furthermore, the unified board will establish a policy for the appropriate use and disbursement of Ministerial Education Fund monies to support continuing education opportunities for the conference's ministerial leaders.

### **Appropriate Funding and Staffing**

The unified board will request from the annual conference Council on Finance and Administration a budget amount appropriate for the administrative and staff expenses necessary to carry out its work. Specifically, this budget should:

- Prioritize recruiting, credentialing, supporting and equipping spiritually, mentally and physically healthy clergy.
- Allocate funds to be used toward training local churches and college ministries to recruit and prepare Christians for certified, licensed or ordained ministry.
- Allocate funds to adequately train both district committees of ordained ministry and board of ordained ministry members on consistent, replicable and uniform processes for credentialing certified, licensed or ordained clergy.
- Allocate funds to allow the Board of Ministry to meet with candidates without requiring those candidates to spend their own funds for extensive travel. This may involve assisting candidates with the cost or providing for the board to meet in multiple locations.

# **PART 4: OUR MISSIONAL RESOURCING**

## **Conference Staff and Personnel**

### **Purpose**

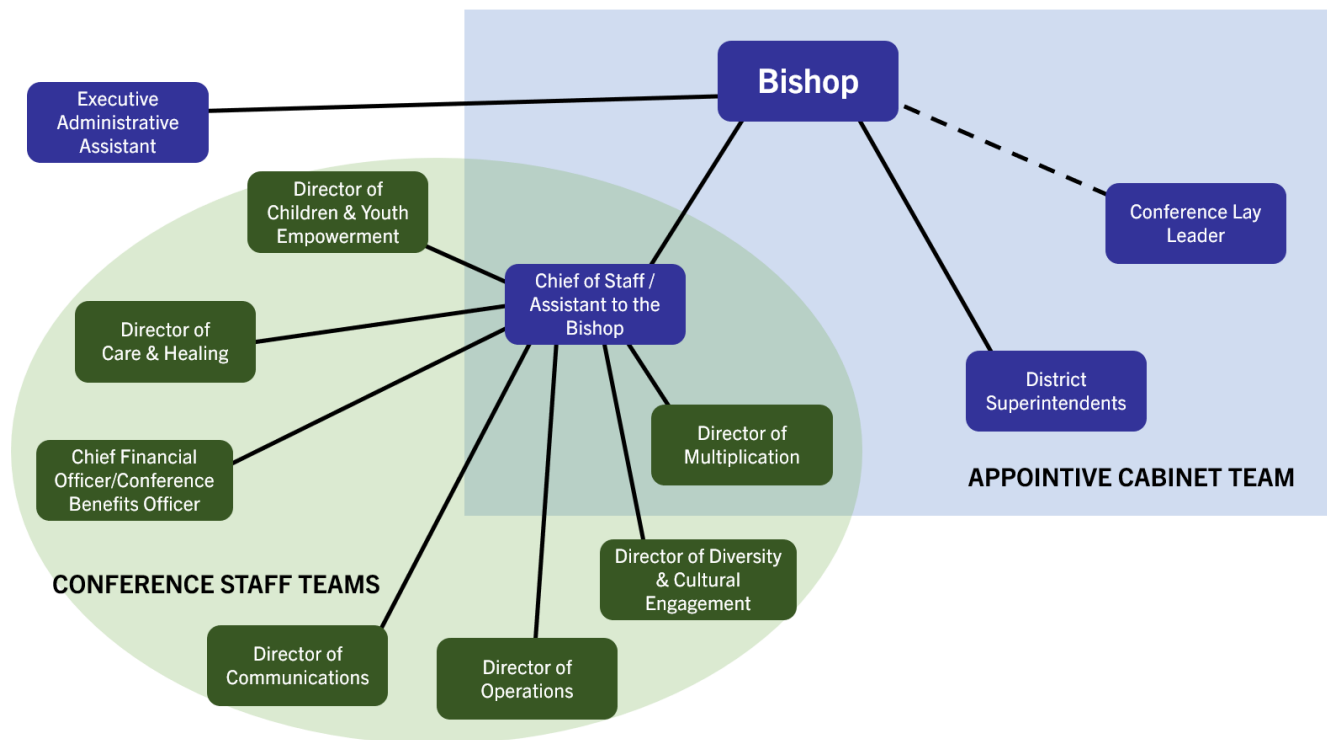
The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It is the local church that “provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs” (§201, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016*). In keeping with our United Methodist heritage and polity, the local church is a “connectional society,” bound together with other local churches within the Horizon Texas Conference and The United Methodist Church for shared ministry and mutual support (§203).

The purpose of the annual conference is to pursue our shared mission “by equipping its local churches for ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church, all to the glory of God” (§601). Conference staff is appointed and hired to enhance the capacity of the annual conference and fulfill this purpose. In other words, the role of conference staff is to equip local churches with valuable tools and resources for making disciples and to enhance the connection among local churches to maximize mutual support and collective impact.

### **Structure**

In the Horizon Texas Conference, the conference staff will be organized around and focused on the five missional priorities: Multiply Jesus Followers, Champion Children and Youth, Pursue and Embrace Diversity, Maximize Care and Healing and Tell our Story. In addition, there will be Connectional Resources (Stewardship and Operation) departments to attend to the temporal needs of the conference as well as those of local churches as needed/requested. The assistant to the bishop will function as chief of staff and ensure alignment, effectiveness and collaboration among the departments.

District superintendents serve as extensions of the office of bishop and are the “chief missional strategists” for their districts (§419.1). The bishop’s appointive cabinet will consist of the district superintendents, conference lay leader(s), assistant to the bishop and director of multiplication. The extended cabinet will add the directors of children and youth empowerment, care and healing, diversity and cultural engagement, communications, operations, and the chief financial officer/chief benefits officer.



## Departments

Departments in the Horizon Texas Conference will include:

### ***Multiply Jesus Followers***

In the Gospel of Matthew, the Resurrected Christ appeared among his disciples on a mountain in Galilee and commissioned them to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:16-20). In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus shared that the seeds of the kingdom of God that fell on good soil would multiply and produce grain thirty, sixty or even one hundredfold (Mark 4:1-20). On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed the good news, and three thousand persons were cut to the heart and baptized (Acts 2:14-41). Likewise, in the Horizon Texas Conference we will strive to not merely add but multiply Jesus followers.

To that end, the Multiplication department will:

- Lead with prayer and dependence on the Holy Spirit, recognizing that we will multiply Jesus followers only by the grace and power of God;
- Equip clergy and laity to preach and teach the Word of God in compelling ways that inspire people to follow Jesus and deepen their faith;
- Invest in discipleship programs that will help believers grow in their relationship with Jesus and in mentoring programs that will provide guidance, support and accountability for spiritual growth;

- Nurture a welcoming and inclusive spirit in our faith communities where people feel loved, accepted and valued, which will, in turn, attract and retain new followers of Jesus;
- Equip laity to share their faith with others;
- Provide resources for small groups and Bible studies to facilitate deeper connections, encourage spiritual growth and foster discipleship;
- Empower believers to use their gifts and talents for God, providing training and resources for ministry so they can become effective witnesses for Jesus;
- Cultivate a culture of call and develop systems for identifying, training, vetting and supporting diverse clergy leadership; and,
- Support the planting and flourishing of new faith communities, worship services, campus ministries and fresh expressions to reach our growing and diversifying mission field.

### ***Champion Children and Youth***

Jesus prioritized spending time with children. Despite the disciples' concerns, Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me. . . . And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16). The wisdom of Proverbs states, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (22:6). Following in Jesus' footsteps, in the Horizon Texas Conference we will champion children and youth.

The Children and Youth Empowerment department will:

- Provide resources, training and support to parents and families, equipping them to be the primary spiritual influencers in their children's lives;
- Invest in training and development for leaders and volunteers who work with children and youth;
- Sponsor events, trips and retreats where children and youth can learn about and experience a personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- Equip clergy and laity with teaching methods and resources that resonate with young people's learning styles to help them understand the Word of God and make learning enjoyable and impactful;
- Develop mentoring programs through which mature believers can guide children in their faith journey and equip them to participate in the church's life;
- Nurture vibrant and inclusive youth groups that provide a safe and supportive environment for young people to connect, grow and serve together;

- Encourage youth to engage in outreach and initiatives that serve the marginalized, advocate for justice and address social issues; and,
- Inspire and equip local churches to champion children and youth by seeking to understand and advocating for the needs of vulnerable young people in their contexts.

### ***Pursue and Embrace Diversity***

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his disciples to reach “all nations” or, in the original Greek, “all ethne”. Jesus modeled this expansive vision of the kingdom of God when he offered living water to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:1-15). The church in Acts followed Jesus’ lead, breaking down social barriers, sharing the Gospel with Gentiles and proclaiming the radical message that “all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28). The mission field within the bounds of the conference is rapidly diversifying; the “nations” no longer live overseas but in every one of our counties. In the Horizon Texas Conference, we will actively pursue diversity and develop a culture of belonging where we welcome and embrace every person just as they are.

The Pursue and Embrace Diversity department will:

- Equip clergy and laity to understand and value the importance of diversity in all aspects of church life, including leadership positions, worship styles, language and cultural expressions;
- Identify, develop and support diverse leaders to serve in leadership roles at all levels of the conference;
- Include individuals from diverse backgrounds in decision-making at all levels of the conference;
- Create space for different cultural traditions and practices to be honored and shared;
- Invest in cultural education, workshops and seminars that encourage mutual learning, promote diversity and bridge cultural divides;
- Develop policies and practices that will strive for equity in the conference; and,
- Provide leadership for local churches to advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in their contexts.

### ***Maximize Care and Healing***

Jesus punctuated his proclamation of the Good News with countless acts of healing. In the first chapter of Mark alone, Jesus healed a man in a synagogue with an unclean spirit, Simon Peter’s mother-in-law of a fever, a leper of his skin disease, and “many who were sick with various diseases” (Mark 1:34). Jesus also embodied compassionate care for people who were sick, struggling, downtrodden and cast aside by their communities. John Wesley described Jesus as the Great Physician who brings salvation and holistic well-being to believers. In the Horizon Texas Conference, we will continue Jesus’ ministry of care and

healing in our congregations and work toward creating communities of shalom where all people can flourish.

The Care and Healing department will:

- Foster a culture of prayer teams that focus on interceding for families and individuals needing healing, salvation and deliverance;
- Provide models for robust lay pastoral care ministries that provide compassionate and empathic care to persons facing physical, emotional and spiritual challenges;
- Equip local churches to develop support groups that help persons facing challenges such as grief, addiction, mental health issues and relational difficulties;
- Inspire local churches to offer opportunities for prayer and laying on of hands for physical, emotional and spiritual restoration;
- Promote health and wellness initiatives to educate and empower persons to care for their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being;
- Provide care and healing resources and support for clergy;
- Create referral networks to connect individuals and families with community resources, support services and professional assistance when needed;
- Equip clergy and laity to be in ministry with their neighbors, extending Christ's love and compassion and seeking God's justice;
- Coordinate faithful responses to natural disasters within and beyond the bounds of the conference;
- Come alongside congregations experiencing a crisis, providing expertise and support to aid in their healing journey; and
- Invest in ongoing training and education for clergy and laity on topics related to care and healing, equipping them with knowledge and skills in areas such as counseling, trauma-informed care, grief support and mental health awareness.

### ***Tell Our Story***

Jesus traveled from town to town, unabashedly proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, and in Luke 10:1, Jesus appointed seventy disciples to go ahead of him and do the same. Paul underscores the urgency of sharing the good news of what God has done for all people in Jesus Christ by asking, "And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" (Romans 10:14). In the Horizon Texas Conference, we recognize that we are the stewards of this good news as well as our distinctive Wesleyan witness. God continues to do amazing things in and through the local churches and connection of the Horizon Texas Conference. We have an inspiring story to tell that the world needs to hear!



The Tell Our Story department will:

- Communicate within and beyond the conference our core United Methodist values and beliefs: God's grace; the imago Dei; the primacy of scripture informed by tradition, experience and reason; service with an emphasis on social justice; generosity; a spirit of inclusiveness; connectionalism; worship; and the sacraments;
- Emphasize stories of personal transformation and how faith has positively impacted people's lives;
- Leverage digital platforms such as websites, social media, podcasts, and online forums to share our mission, values and activities that appeal to those seeking a spiritual community;
- Invest in visually appealing, professional design and branding that reflect our values and mission;
- Provide resources and best practices to local church communicators to enhance their efforts to tell our story;
- Encourage clergy and laity to be ambassadors for our local churches and conference, empowering them to share their positive experiences and invite others to become a part of God's mission of seeking a loving, just and free world for all people; and,
- Highlight the positive contributions and transformational work of The United Methodist Church, such as our commitment to education; involvement in addressing social justice issues like poverty, inequality, racism and discrimination; support for initiatives that combat hunger, improve healthcare, promote access to clean water and address global challenges such as climate change, immigration and human rights violations; UMCOR and our long-term response to disasters; strong presence in the healthcare system, running hospitals, clinics and medical missions; commitment to interfaith dialogue to build bridges of understanding and promote peace among different religious traditions; and advocacy for women's empowerment and gender equality.

***Connectional Resources (Stewardship and Operations)***

Our Triune God is the source of "all things in heaven and on earth" and the giver of every good gift (Colossians 1:16). As Jesus followers, we are called to be wise and faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us so that God may be glorified in all things (1 Peter 4:10-11). In the Horizon Texas Conference, we will align our financial resources and assets to support the vision and missional priorities of the conference and will be committed to sound management of resources, transparency and accountability.

The Stewardship department will:

- Design and implement effective and streamlined administrative and financial systems;

- Analyze financial information and provide strategic direction and leadership to support the conference's goals, objectives and initiatives;
- Communicate financial information to our stakeholders to promote financial transparency and ensure the fiscal health of the conference;
- Oversee conference benefits such as pension, health, disability and life insurance; and,
- Provide counsel and guidance to local church treasurers, financial secretaries and committees on finance.

The Operations department will:

- Manage critical operational initiatives of the conference, ensuring they remain on track, within budget, and aligned with the conference's vision, goals and missional priorities;
- Develop effective and efficient processes, policies and procedures;
- Design and implement pioneering and effective systems for Information Technology (IT) and physical infrastructure to enhance the effectiveness of the entire conference;
- Coordinate property and liability insurance coverage for the annual conference and its directly related entities;
- Support the board of trustees in property activities;
- Oversee processes for church closures and renovations of properties held by the conference;
- Manage conference ministry centers and satellite facilities; and,
- Administer conference archives and maintain accessible conference records.

## **Information Technology Systems**

The Information Technology (IT) systems in the unified conference will provide robust technological solutions that will enable us to live into our vision and strategic priorities. With our conference expansion across a large geographic region, we will use technology to bridge the distance to support meaningful collaboration and connectional ministry opportunities that are efficient and easy to use. These solutions will give the conference and district offices the necessary tools to equip the local church to serve our diverse and ever-evolving mission field creatively and effectively. We will streamline our data collection systems to receive relevant and useful data that can be shared with conference and district leadership to help drive and grow effective ministries that connect to our strategic priorities.

We have identified the following shared values moving forward:

- IT Systems should support our vision and strategic priorities.
- Systems should be accessible and easy to use.
- Integrated technology solutions should be scalable and nimble so we can easily adapt to changes in our environment.
- Systems should be durable and reliable.
- Data collection should be streamlined and relevant.
- Systems should create efficiency and make the best use of resources.

We have identified the following challenges to address as unification happens related to church/pastors and to conference/district staff:

#### ***Churches/Pastor Challenges***

- Numerous requests for forms and information throughout the year that are often for the same information previously submitted.
- Some churches lack suitable technology and internet access to submit required forms.
- Some church leaders lack appropriate training and skills to use the technology effectively.

#### ***Conference/District Staff Challenges***

- Large number of systems to use and master.
- Staff need more training on how to use systems that are currently in place.
- There is a need for tools specifically designed for hybrid/remote work.

#### **Proposed Process**

The IT Systems Sub-Team of the Unification Implementation Team will engage with key stakeholders in all three conferences to determine key organizational functions and how they are currently managed, as well as assess how each of these supports the conference vision and strategic priorities, while considering current challenges. The team will then review the existing processes for bottlenecks and inefficiencies that can be resolved through automation and technology. We will define “must-have” and “nice-to-have” features and functions in the assessment.

The team will then evaluate solutions based on the following criteria: organizational alignment, functionality, pricing, security, workflow, integration and support.

We will calculate the total cost of ownership to ensure we are being the best steward of our resources. We will determine the return on investment by comparing the total cost of ownership to the organizational impact of use.

Following the above assessments, we will create an information technology implementation plan that will outline our goals and objectives, assign responsibilities, determine a timeline, allocate resources, determine hardware needed, define success metrics and develop contingency plans for any challenges that might occur.

The implementation of unified, integrated technology will enable our conference to best live into our vision: We are followers of Jesus, seeking the loving, just and free world God imagines for all people. Enabling our conference and district staff and local church leaders to efficiently and effectively utilize technology to support the work of local churches will equip our connection to carry out our strategic priorities as God has called us to do.

## **Office Location**

The Conference Office Location Sub-Team was tasked with identifying the critical issues surrounding the provision for vital workspace needs for the Horizon Texas Conference. After identifying these critical issues, the team offered a recommended solution for these needs that would enable the Horizon Texas Conference to live into our mission, vision and strategic priorities. It is necessary to understand the breadth and scope of this endeavor, which is predicated by several forthcoming decisions. As these conferencewide decisions are made, the final recommendation will emerge in the next 18-36 months, while being vigorously guided by an agreed upon set of shared core values.

### **Shared Core Values**

The following shared core values will dictate the recommendation of the Horizon Texas Conference workspace solution. The recommendation will ensure equitable and just access to conference resources. These resources will be available to all as we build connections around our identity as United Methodists. Our shared core values shall provide:

- Transparency throughout the process;
- Good stewardship of all Horizon Texas Conference resources;
- Mobility and agility for the bishop and conference staff to effectively work across the conference's large geographic area;
- Establishment of a paradigm that Horizon Texas Conference staff will travel to local churches more than local churches will travel to the conference workspace(s);
- The leveraging of digital real estate with physical assets;
- Acknowledgement that the ministry of the church in the future must have a prominent digital/electronic presence, along with its traditional physical presence; and
- The resourcing of the Horizon Texas Conference staff to effectively serve the local church.

The Conference Office Location Sub-Team recommends that we leverage existing properties for the Horizon Texas Annual Conference through December 31, 2025. The Northwest Texas Conference plans to continue moving forward with the plan approved by the Annual Conference for the sale of the NWTC conference office building.

Once all new staff positions have been determined, the Office Location Sub-Team will conduct an evaluation of all existing CTC, NTC and NWTC facilities. An interim recommendation will be made regarding our current conference facilities no later than Annual Conference 2025. The final Horizon Texas Conference workspace recommendation(s) will be voted on no later than Annual Conference 2026. District offices will not be addressed at this time.

## International Mission Partner

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.<sup>12</sup> As United Methodists, we follow the teaching of Jesus to love God and to love our neighbors, even to the ends of the earth. Historically, we have shown this love by saving persons, healing relationships, transforming social structures and spreading scriptural holiness.<sup>13</sup> All of this is to strengthen, develop and renew Christian congregations and communities, alleviating human suffering and seeking justice, freedom and peace.

Because we believe that the church's role is to affirm the worth of all humanity and the value of interrelationship in all of God's creation, we as a unified conference join God's mission to reclaim, restore and redeem the life of all creation to its divine intention.<sup>14</sup>

We recognize that a major pressing reality is global migration, or the movement of people across international borders. The story of God's people cannot be told apart from migration: Abram and Sarai setting out for the land that God would show them (Genesis 12:1-5); Jacob's children traveling to Egypt for food (Genesis 42); the liberated Israelites departing Egypt for the Promised Land (Exodus 14); God's people experiencing repeated times of exile from and return to the land; Jesus' family seeking refuge in Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15); Paul crossing borders in his missionary journeys.

As with our forebears in the faith, people today migrate to attain different ends: the prospect of a better life, a safer and more prosperous life for their children, or protection from conflicts, persecution, or the effects of natural disasters. For various complex reasons, migration is now a global phenomenon. Currently, there are 281 million migrants worldwide, accounting for 3.6% of the global population, a number increasing three times during the past 50 years.

Owing to the current political climate, it may be helpful to distinguish between migration and immigration. Generally, migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one location to another, whether within national boundaries or across international borders. Immigration, a subset of migration, involves the movement of individuals into a new country with the intent to settle, either temporarily or permanently.<sup>15</sup> Because of the diverse root causes associated with this issue, global migration offers immense opportunities for United Methodist participation with ultimate flexibility for our churches to find their place in this joint ministry.

The International Mission Partner team gleaned information from local churches through surveys, conversations and the General Board of Global Ministries (GBGM) giving records. In November 2023, the team convened and met regularly together, as well as with GBGM staff, to discern potential options for the unified conference.

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<sup>12</sup> United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), ¶120.

<sup>13</sup> ¶121 of *The Book of Discipline* 2016.

<sup>14</sup> ¶1301 of *The Book of Discipline* 2016.

<sup>15</sup> See "Migration vs. Immigration: Unraveling the Key Differences," March 5, 2024 at <https://www.tomedes.com/translator-hub/migration-vs-immigration>, retrieved April 28, 2024.

The criteria for selecting a partner included:

- Commitment to remaining UMC.
- A partner not experiencing strong financial support broadly.
- Robust support from GBGM.
- Numerous mission opportunities aligned with the conference's strategic priorities.
- Enhancement to work already present within the unifying conferences.
- The ability for local church focus to connect to overall partnership opportunities.

UMCOR Global Migration defends and promotes the idea that all migrants have the right to stay, the right to safe passage, the right to welcome and the right to return with dignity.<sup>16</sup> As we seek ways to live out the strategic priorities we profess missionally, opportunities are extensive. Our conferences already support 11 Advance Projects impacting global migration. Of the missionary support we collectively send, 60% of funds go to missionaries with ministry connected to global migration. While we can't fully know what we can do together in God's mission, we hope churches can find a place or ministry to collaborate. Two examples follow below.

In Mexico and Central America, The UMC, through GBGM, provides numerous grants supporting the UMCOR Global Migration Advance Collaboration is desired where current partnerships exist with IMMAR (Methodist Church of Mexico) in their local migrant ministries, such as shelters and feeding programs in Tijuana, Ciudad Juarez and Apaxco. This only enhances what the three annual conferences already do with ministries such as Lydia Patterson Institute and the Methodist Border Ministry.

The region of East Africa is experiencing shifts in conference boundaries and celebrating the renewed vision God has in store. Many refugees in this region need care, so there is great potential for collaboration in various areas. The Bishop Alfred Ndoricimpa Memorial Hospital in Kayero, Burundi, is being rehabilitated to maximize care and healing. In Kenya-Ethiopia, we might explore partnering with ministries to champion children and youth through meaningful apprenticeships to learn employable skills. Churches could become involved in the areas that align with how God calls each local church to collaborate with what God is doing at home and abroad.

By partnering with global migration missionaries and ministries, opportunities abound to champion children and youth, maximize care and healing, pursue and embrace diversity, and multiply Jesus followers.

During the late spring and summer months, our team will provide opportunities for each district to offer feedback, ask questions and explore what this looks like in their respective contexts.

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<sup>16</sup> This language comes from resolutions in the past around global migration from General Conference. The United Methodist Publishing House (2016). *Book of Resolutions: Global Migration and the Quest for Justice*. UMC. Retrieved March 12, 2024, from <https://www.umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-global-migration-and-the-quest-for-justice>

# CONCLUSION

## Acknowledgements

With great appreciation and admiration, the Unification Implementation Team would like to thank the following individuals for their contribution to the Unification Plan for our new unified conference.

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We would also like to thank the hundreds of individuals not listed who have participated in discussion groups, surveys and other feedback loops to contribute their voices to creating a new unified conference.

## Next Steps

As we transition from garnering support at our Annual Conferences to securing ratification within the Jurisdiction, culminating in the final approval for the plan for unification at the unifying conference in September 2024, we will undertake transitional measures to execute necessary actions and propel our progress toward the formation of the Horizon Texas Conference. This section describes the ongoing activities integral to this transition phase.

### Unification Implementation Team

The Unification Implementation Team will remain in place, serving as the oversight and coordinating function of the transitional phase until the new staff is in place and all unification activities have been transferred to new department positions.

### Boards/Committee Structure

The Unification Boards/Committee New Structure Team will work with the Nominations Task Force to ensure that all new unified boards and committees and their associated memberships are understood so that the Nominations Task Force may do their work. Once they have completed the transition, this team will have completed its work.

### Board of Ministry Team

The Unification Board of Ministry Team will continue to work together, ensuring that candidates continue to progress within each conference's process while working to develop a unified process and providing input to the 2025 budgeting process until the new unified Conference Board of Ordained Ministry committee is in place.

### Board of Pension and Health Benefits Team

Members of the Unification Board of Pension and Health Benefits will be nominated for election by their respective annual conferences to the Joint Distributing Committee as defined by the *Book of Discipline*. As part of their transitional work, they will focus on determining the governance structure of the new Conference Board of Pension and Health Benefits, determining the use of existing reserves from each conference after a thorough review of the restricted and designated status of each existing reserve amount, developing policy, procedure and funding strategy for special grants, developing policy for retiree health care benefits and developing policy for health insurance benefits in addition to the duties and responsibilities specified in the BOD. As the New Board of Pension and Health Benefits Committee is put in place as part of the September 2024 nominations, they will take over these tasks along with possibly creating a task force to explore providing additional health benefits funding to families, expanding beyond the historical focus on individual coverage, and to consider the expansion of health care funding to  $\frac{3}{4}$  time appointed Ordained and Local Pastors.

### Communications and Writing Team

The Unification Communications and Writing Team will remain in place to create any unification communications required for the unifying conference in September 2024 until the work is transitioned to the new Conference staff structure's Telling Our Story department.

### **Conference Staff/Personnel Team**

The Unification Conference Staff and Personnel Team's work will transition to the new Conference Cabinet as well as the Personnel Committee. The Bishop and the Cabinet will be responsible for making appointments and supervising appointed staff in particular. The Personnel Committee will hire non-appointed staff and be responsible for providing support and supervision for the entire team.

### **Finance Team**

The Unification Finance Team will remain in place to complete several items needed for our unifying conference in September 2024 in collaboration with the Chief Financial Officer.

The following topics are items to be determined or solidified prior to the unifying conference in September 2024.

- **Minimum Salaries** – The initial plan is for each legacy conference to retain its own minimum salary levels through the appointment year from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2025. Prior to the end of the appointment year, the Horizon Texas Conference Commission on Equitable Compensation, in collaboration with the Cabinet and CF&A, will determine minimum salaries levels for the unified conference.
- **Reimbursement Policies** – Prior to the unifying conference in September 2024, the nominated members of the Horizon Texas Conference CF&A will meet to recommend reimbursement policies, including:
  - Volunteer meeting expense reimbursement policy
  - Accountable reimbursement policy for employees of Horizon Texas Conference
- **Other Policies** – To the extent these and other policies have budgetary implications, the nominated members of the Horizon Texas Conference CF&A will collaborate with the responsible teams on the following policies:
  - Vacation policy and other Human Resource policies
  - Arrearage policies
  - Housing standards
  - Moving expense policy
- The Unification Implementation Finance Sub-Team, in collaboration with the Chief Financial Officer and their team, will choose the method of accounting – accrual or modified cash basis – for the Conference.
- As noted previously, the Unification Implementation Finance Sub-Team will compile the 2025 budget and finalize the related 2025 apportionment methodology for presentation to the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences' Councils on Finance and Administration and each conference's respective leadership teams prior to the unifying conference in September 2024.

- The Unification Implementation Sub-team will identify the specific amounts of designated net assets from the three unifying conferences to be 2025 grants and commitments from the three unifying conferences. The Horizon Texas Conference CFO and their team will review the legal formation of the new Horizon Texas Conference, final accounting and transfer of assets and liabilities from the legacy conferences and liquidation, as appropriate, of those conferences.
- The Horizon Texas Conference CFO and their team will choose the Information Technology Platforms and data from the unifying conferences ported over as appropriate prior to December 31, 2024. The platforms and datasets include:
  - Financial and accounting systems
  - Payroll
  - Accounts payable
  - Receipts/remittances/receivables
  - Benefits billing
  - Clergy and leadership database
  - Fixed assets/depreciation

#### **International Mission Partner Team**

The Unification International Mission Partner Team will continue its operations, serving as a platform for every district to share feedback, pose inquiries, converse with local churches and delve into the possibilities of collaborating with global migration missionaries and ministries. Together, they will champion initiatives for children and youth, facilitate care and healing, advocate for diversity, all while fostering the expansion of Jesus followers within their unique contexts. This team will continue their work until the establishment of the new Board of Global Ministries.

#### **IT Systems Team**

The Unification Information Technology Systems Team will stay in place as it becomes an advisory board to the new conference operations staff as they engage with key stakeholders in all three conferences to determine key organizational functions and how they are currently managed, as well as assess how each of these supports the conference vision and strategic priorities. The team will then review the existing processes for bottlenecks and inefficiencies that can be resolved through automation and technology. We will define “must-have” and “nice-to-have” features and functions in the assessment. As we move to a unified conference, information technology platforms need to be chosen, and data from the unifying conferences will be ported over as appropriate before December 31, 2024.

#### **Legal Team**

The Unification Legal Team will remain in place to assist with legal reviews of all transitional work that is being completed as we move to a unified conference.

#### **Mission/Vision Team**

The Mission/Vision Team has completed its work.

### **Naming Team**

The Unification Naming team has completed its work. The team also worked through suggestions for renaming the districts to eliminate confusion and redundancy. This work will be submitted to the Bishop and the Cabinet(s) for review and further action.

### **Nominations Task Force Team**

The Unification Nominations Task Force Team will transition to the Joint Nominations Committee, which will identify and nominate clergy and laity to fill the new unified conference boards and committee positions. The nominations will be submitted as part of the unifying conference in September 2024.

### **Office Location Team**

The Unification Office Location Team will remain in place to conduct an evaluation of all existing CTC, NTC and NWTC facilities. In collaboration with the new Board of Trustees, an interim recommendation will be made regarding our current conference facilities no later than Annual Conference 2025, and the final unified conference workspace recommendation(s) will be voted on no later than the Annual Conference 2026.

### **New Teams**

In addition to our existing unification teams, a few other teams will be put in place to complete the required transitional work as we continue to move toward a unified conference. These teams are as follows:

#### ***MinistrySafe Team***

A new Transitional MinistrySafe Team has recently been created utilizing a team that came out of CTC. This team will work together with representatives from all three conferences to develop a unified policy, recommending how the new unified conference will conduct and manage our MinistrySafe program. This team's work will move from the Unification Implementation Team to the new department of Champion Children and Youth as the new Conference staff is put in place.

#### ***Equitable Compensation Team***

A new Transitional Equitable Compensation Team will be put in place to work in collaboration with the Cabinet and CF&A to determine minimum salary levels for the conference to be submitted as part of the unifying conference in September 2024.

#### ***Joint Distributing Committee***

A new Joint Distributing Committee shall be elected as defined by the *Book of Discipline* (§1509). See the Board of Pension and Health Benefits Team section above for a list of some of the items this team will focus on.

#### ***Joint Standing Rules Committee***

A new Joint Standing Rules Committee will be put in place to develop standing rules to guide the proceedings at the unifying conference in September 2024.

# RESOLUTION

## North Texas Annual Conference Resolution Regarding Approval of the Plan of Union for the Horizon Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church

The North Texas Conference (the “Conference”) hereby takes the following actions and adopts the following resolutions:

- Whereas: the Central and North Texas Conferences have a history of shared episcopal supervision; and
- Whereas: the Fort Worth Episcopal Area and the Dallas Episcopal Area now, once again, share episcopal supervision; and
- Whereas: the cabinets of the Central and North Texas Conferences convened in 2023 with a shared understanding that the evolving landscape of the United Methodist connection necessitated a re-evaluation of conference boundaries; and
- Whereas: the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences have a shared history as a single conference as Methodism was established in and spread across Texas; and
- Whereas: we are committed to more than our geographical boundaries, and, in fact, we are committed to the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world; and
- Whereas: the cabinets of Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences met in August 2023 and collectively deliberated the prospect of consolidating into a single entity, sharing unified vision, mission and key strategic missional priorities; and
- Whereas: the South Central Jurisdiction Episcopacy Committee notified the delegates of the South Central Jurisdiction (“SCJ”) on February 12, 2024, that it intends to recommend to the 2024 SCJ Conference that one bishop be assigned to the Dallas-Fort Worth Episcopal Area, which will encompass the Central, North and Northwest Texas Annual Conferences or their successor; and
- Whereas: it is both necessary and appropriate for all three conferences to approve the Unification Plan that will govern the fully unified Horizon Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church;

Now, therefore, be it resolved, that the Unification Plan attached to this resolution is hereby adopted by the North Texas Annual Conference with the intention that the Unification Plan shall govern the creation and structure of the new Horizon Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church; and

Be it further resolved, in accordance with the actions taken at the respective 2024 annual conference sessions of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences, that the SCJ Conference is entreated to take the following actions during the 2024 SCJ Conference:



- (1) to approve the realignment of the boundaries of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences to form one new conference to be known as the “Horizon Texas Conference of The United Methodist Church” with boundaries coextensive with the current Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences;
- (2) to authorize the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences to conduct a joint organizational conference known as the Unifying Conference, prior to the formation of the new Horizon Texas Conference, consisting of the voting membership (lay and clergy) of the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences; and
- (3) to authorize the Horizon Texas Conference to commence operations as a fully unified conference of The United Methodist Church after the completion of the joint organizational conference, in accordance with the Unification Plan adopted by the Central, North and Northwest Texas Conferences during their respective 2024 annual conference sessions.