

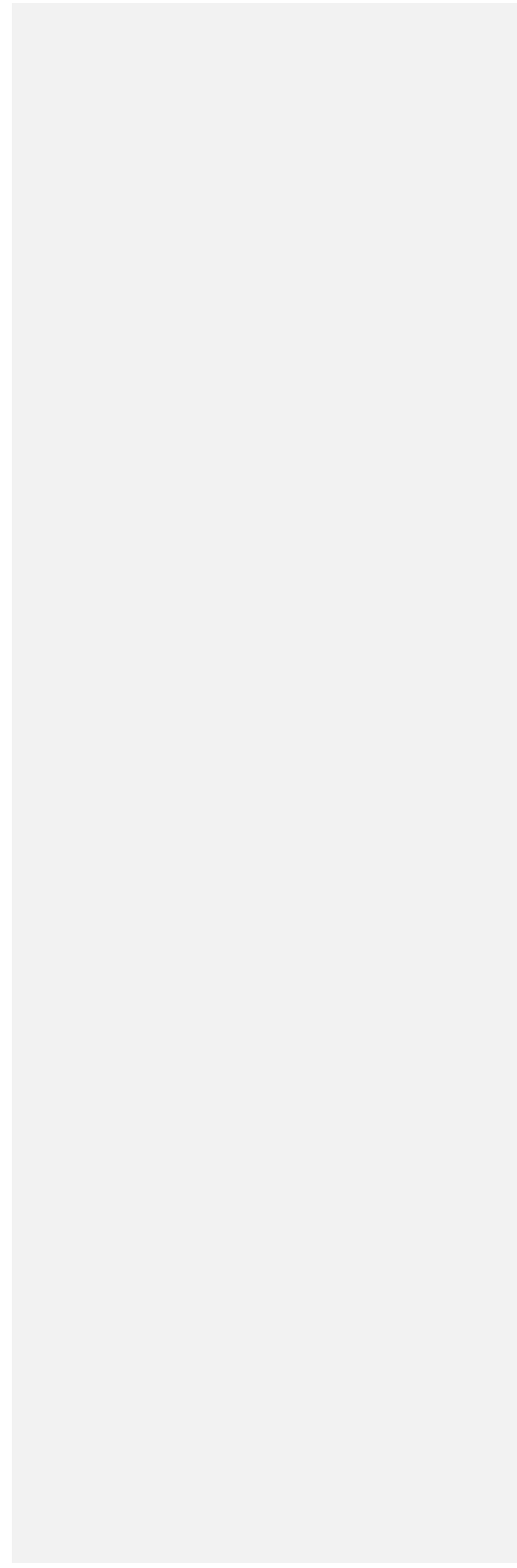
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(Re)membering The Connection
The Role of the District Superintendent
as Chief Missional Strategist

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Abstract

(Re)membering The Connection The Role of the District Superintendent as Chief Missional Strategist

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The District Superintendent is the connector between the local church and the District, Conference, Denomination, and the overall organization as a spiritual leader, supervisor, advocate, and missional strategist. A missional strategist is a person who is skilled in planning action or policy for the mission, in this case, for the church. With connectionalism being a vital part of the identity of United Methodists it is not just about an ecclesiastical structure but about creating a relationship as a Christian witness to the world. The role of the superintendency is meant to consider the entire conference and how decisions regarding ministry and mission can further the mission of the church. It is the responsibility of the DS, as an extension of the episcopal office, to go out and see what is needed in the community and local churches and share with the bishop to inform overall strategy development. As the chief missional strategist, it is your work to create a way within the district to meet the goals of the strategy set forth by the bishop, overseeing the ministry of clergy and churches in the communities of their assigned area.

(Re)membering The Connection
The Role of the District Superintendent
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(RE)MEMBERING THE CONNECTION

THE ROLE OF THE DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT

AS CHIEF MISSIONAL STRATEGIST

ELIZABETH C. ABEL

May 2024

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the teachers, Sunday School teachers, spiritual directors, pastors, clergy, and congregations that have nurtured my faith. The numerous lessons and instructions have given me food for thought and shaped the way I serve and lead as a District Superintendent.

To district superintendents current and in the future, this one is for you. You are the connector of the connection, and your task is to manage both sides as if you are double-sided tape. Your divine gift from God is what will see you through.

To my colleagues at the table, thank you for your grace, leadership, and support through these lessons.

To my Bishop, Thomas J. Bickerton, who has discerned for my time on his Cabinet and continues to nurture my leadership and gives me the opportunity to live into my calling as it evolves before us.

To Angie, for walking alongside me on this journey. Editing, offering a shoulder to cry and scream on, being that stronghold when it feels like all else is falling apart. And laughing late at night and venting through drafts, assignments, ministry plans, and life in ministry.

To my girls, Eva, Georgette and Paisley for your love and your future.

To my mother, Rev. Estella V. Abel, it all began with you. You made this possible by planting the seed for education, and by providing safe space for me to be me, even when you disagreed. You trusted God to keep me on the right path. I thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and making numerous sacrifices so I can be everything you prayed for. I love you.

To Aunt Betty, without you I would never be, because you are the one who brought me to church.

In honor of my father, Charles Abel.

In honor of my Grandfathers John Wesley Voner, a Pullman Porter; Hezekiah Abel, an educator.

ABSTRACT

As an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church the focus of ministry is word, sacrament, service, and order.¹ When an Elder becomes a District Superintendent, the focus of ministry narrows to service and order. Service to not just one church but to all churches in their assigned district and their annual conference. They must also take responsibility for bringing an order that fosters a connectional relationship with all the churches in the district and with the larger United Methodist body. Investing a significant amount of ministry time in ordering the district supports and resources local congregations for mission and ministry in their respective context and community. Prioritizing the order, also supports the strategic vision developed by the episcopal leader in the making of disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.²

“The task of superintending in the United Methodist Church resides in the office of bishop and extends to the district superintendent. The purpose of superintending is to equip the church in its disciple-making ministry. Also, it is their task to facilitate the initiation of structures and strategies for equipping Christian people for service in the Church and the world in the name of Jesus Christ and to help extend the service in mission.”³

When thinking about the role and responsibility of a district superintendent, think of double-sided tape. Double-sided tape holds and connects. It holds two things together simultaneously. The district superintendent holds both sides, the mission and ministry of the local congregation to the world together with the administrative role as a missional strategist for the annual conference. The connection is broken if one side of the tape fails to function.

The purpose of the research is to determine, how can the role of district superintendent, as Chief Missional Strategist, strengthen the connection of the local congregations to the denomination of the United Methodist Church.

¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), 227.

² *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 93.

³ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, n.d.), 323.

1. Introduction

The United Methodist Church (UMC) was birthed through the ministry and witness of brothers, John and Charles Wesley. It began as a movement to “reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread the scriptural holiness over the land.”⁴ Eventually a pattern of organization and discipline emerged creating a network of small groups that were connected by traveling lay preachers.⁵

In the travels of John Wesley, he often met with other preachers when visiting other towns and found value in the time spent with one another and the witness of ministry that was being shared.⁶ Wesley believed the world was his parish, and he knew he could not accomplish saving souls alone. Through these relationships, he established the foundational practice of connectionalism by meeting at least annually with a few of his most esteemed colleagues to discuss theology and share the accounts of their ministry in their specific locations.

Today, connectionalism remains a vital part of our identity as United Methodists. It is a vital web of interactive relationships including the agencies⁷ of the UMC that equips local churches and congregations for ministry and providing a connection to ministry throughout the world, all to the glory of God.⁸ Connection is not just about an ecclesiastical structure but about creating a relationship as a Christian witness to the world. The very foundation of the UMC is based on this theology.

⁴ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 12.

⁵ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 12.

⁶ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, Second (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 119.

⁷ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 521.

⁸ Book of Discipline (§ 710.2 and 710.3)

The UMC is a global church serving over twelve million believers⁹ around the world, and it is organized into conferences to maintain the connection. The General Conference is the highest legislative body, followed by the Jurisdictional Conferences in the US and the Central Conference outside the US. The Annual Conference is the most basic unit of the body, which is organized regionally and populated by District Conferences and the Charge Conference, which is the local church.

The New York Annual Conference (NYAC) is in the Northeastern Jurisdiction, with more than 100,000 people belonging to about 415 UM congregations.¹⁰ Within the NYAC, there are six districts: Catskill-Hudson, Connecticut, Long Island East, Long Island West, New York-Connecticut, and Metropolitan. These District Conferences serve all of Long Island, New York City, Connecticut, west of the Connecticut River, and an area on both sides of the Hudson River as far west as Walton and as far north as Chatham and North Blenheim. It is diverse in theology, ethnicity, culture, language, and socio-economic status within the rural, suburban, and urban contexts.

Each district is appointed a superintendent to manage their assigned district. The Book of Discipline ¶ 419.4 states the responsibility of the District Superintendent as:

“The superintendent shall establish working relationships with staff/pastor-parish relations committees, clergy, district lay leaders, and other lay leadership, to develop faithful and effective systems of ministry within the district. Through the use of charge conferences (¶

⁹ Prior to the completion of disaffiliation ending in 2023.

¹⁰ “About the New York Annual Conference,” accessed January 22, 2024, <https://www.nyac.com/aboutthenyac>.

246.4-5), congregational studies (§ 213) and other gatherings, the superintendent shall seek to form creative and effective connections with the local congregations on his or her district.”¹¹

Because of the specific responsibility to develop faithful and effective systems of ministry within the district, it is critical that the district superintendent (DS) is knowledgeable of each congregation and their needs as well as the available resources at the district, conference, and denominational levels to support the local church. This knowledge is also necessary to successfully address when local congregations fall short of their responsibilities to the greater church. Constant communication and a sharing of knowledge is vital to enhance the kingdom of God and the connectional quality of the United Methodist Church.

The research will focus on the Long Island West (LIW) District in the New York Annual Conference (NYAC), which includes UM churches in Brooklyn, Queens, and western Nassau County. Geographically it is the smallest district in the conference. However, it has the largest population, with over five million residents representing just about every nation in the world, as cited in the 2019 US Census.¹² LIW has several ethnically specific congregations where new immigrants can feel comfortable with a worship experience in their first language.

In July 2022, when I was appointed to the LIW District, the bishop shared that he felt there was a major disconnection between the district and conference. In my research to identify the cause of the disconnection between the district and the conference, it became clear that it may have been the result of the prior DSs practice of no communication and/or miscommunication,

¹¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 343.

¹² Jacob Kaye, “Census Data Shows Big Growth in Queens,” *Queens Daily Eagle*, August 13, 2021, <https://queenseagle.com/all/2021/8/13/census-data-shows-big-growth-in-queens>.

creating a lack of trust in the relationship between the local congregations, appointed pastors, and the DS, thus breaking the connection to the conference.

1. The Problem and Analyses

Problem: Disconnection of local UM churches/pastors from the annual conference (and larger UMC connection) leads to diminished engagement with the connectional mission of the UMC.

Paragraph 120 of the Book of Discipline states,

“The Mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the church provide the most significant arenas through which the disciple making occurs.”¹³

Through the connection of the UMC this mission is reinforced and supported so that local churches can remain supported by the connection to meet the spiritual and temporal needs of the people they are making into disciples.

The Pew Research shows that Protestant and Catholic adults in the US are down 8% since 2009.¹⁴ This is reflected in our churches, with an approximately 50% membership decline in the last ten years (2014-2023) in the LIW District.¹⁵ As a result of fewer people attending church, the main source of income of tithes and offerings have decreased, and more importantly, fewer disciples are being made. With the lack of members, there are limited options for evangelism as well as limited people to lead and participate in small groups. With these shifts in the faith community, membership declines, and the ministry and mission no longer meeting the needs of

¹³ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016, 93.*

¹⁴ Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

¹⁵ New York Annual Conference 1999-2023 Statistical Data (2014-2023)

the vulnerable the church can no longer remain a vital resource to the residents or be a faithful member of the greater community.

Over time, churches no longer provided the same level of charity and support for new members to the community. Many of the urban communities were impacted by white flight, an influx of migrants, and the eventual reality of gentrification.¹⁶ The church struggled to keep up with its changing context and ability to respond to the needs of those living in the area.

According to the US Bureau of Census (2019) the area of the LIW district, with over five million residents, is still growing. Yet we continue to see the trend of churches no longer being able to sustain full-time pastoral leadership due to fewer members and, therefore, less financial income from the membership. Churches ultimately close or are limited to doing no more than offer a Sunday sermon.

With the community disconnection, local churches need the resources from the greater denomination to support and reset their ministry and mission. When there is a lack of trust and communication with the DS and the conference, the disconnection limits access to available resources, both financial and human. This disconnect may intensify the impending trend of decline leading to closure. When there is a lack of communication between the DS and the local congregation regarding conference events and trainings, district trainings and gatherings, denominational articles, events, and other educational opportunities, the local congregation misses out on a vital support network.

¹⁶ Jeremy F Pais, Scott South, and Kyle Crowder, "WHITE FLIGHT REVISITED: A MULTIETHNIC PERSPECTIVE ON NEIGHBORHOOD OUT-MIGRATION.," *Popul Res Policy Rev.*, no. 28(3) (June 1, 2009): 321-46.

The role of the DS as missional strategist represents the primary bridge that connects the church to the larger connection. The following examples/case studies illustrate how the lack of communication at the level of the DS can cause harm and disconnect.

Church Distrust. The DS receives a call from a local church Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) Chairperson¹⁷ about significant challenges that were occurring between the pastor, the pastor's family, and the congregation. They had been going through some difficult times for close to a year. The initial complaint from the SPRC was that no one from the conference helped. The DS replied with prayer, but the request for a new pastoral appointment was not honored or explained as to why it had not occurred. They felt that the bishop and the DS did not care about their needs. While they valued prayer, they knew they needed more than prayer to resolve their circumstance. After a meeting between the new DS, the SPRC, and the pastor separately it was determined and recommended that the pastor should take personal leave.¹⁸ This was a difficult decision but proved effective for the congregation and for the pastor and their family. During this ordeal, the church expressed their gratitude for the leadership provided. They reported that this was the type of support and guidance they needed to help them from enduring more harm as a congregation.

¹⁷ Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee has five pages in the Book of Discipline to explain its responsibility and function. However, it has three primary responsibilities related to administration: Pastoral and staff evaluations; maintaining a connection with the District superintendent; and communication among the pastor/staff, congregation, and DISTRICT SUPERINTENDENT.

¹⁸ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016, 296.*

Pastoral Distrust. Here is an example when the trust between the cabinet and a clergy member is broken and when there is a failure to acknowledge the harm caused because of actions taken by the cabinet.

A local pastor within the district that leads one of the largest congregations and known for its dynamic worship experience and regarded as one of the strongest black churches in the conference suffered harm at the hands of lack of communication from the cabinet. This church, under the leadership of the current pastor who has served the community for thirty years, has identified candidates for ministry, nurtured pastors, and developed strong ministries that has a significant impact on the local community.

In the past, a formal complaint was made against the pastor that led to an investigation by the bishop. This process calls for the bishop to go into a neutral position and “investigate” the allegations made. Like with secular investigations, there is not supposed to be any discussion about the investigation while it is ongoing. This is a difficult position for all involved, especially the pastor whose role is to lead the congregation in making the connection of the lay members of the church through their leadership and participation to the connection in district and conference participation.

In an interview with the pastor and former members of the congregation, I quickly surmised that the pastor was not made fully aware of the process. The lack of communication to make the pastor aware of the process caused the pastor to retreat further from participation in district and conference events. Eventually, the bishop determined there was no basis for the complaint and it was dismissed. However, if the bishop did send a written communication, it seems the DS did not make any effort to follow up by talking with this pastor, thus breaking down the relationship

between clergy and DS. He ultimately no longer felt under the care of the bishop while his reputation lay in the balance of respected prominence and alleged administrative infraction. This significant miscommunication became a major infraction to this prominent pastor in the conference. Without some official communication from the bishop and a presence and communication from the cabinet through the DS being shared with church, the feelings of the alleged infraction remained and caused many relationships to diminish and eventually end.

These examples are just a few that can evidence how the role of the DS can impact the connection within the denomination. Preserving relationships means being accountable to those who are served even when they may disagree. The reality of communication and care are essential to the work of the DS.

While conducting church visits and interviews it was discovered that many laypersons expressed not being aware of the conference and denomination resources offered to support the ministry and mission of the local church. For example, Conference Parish Development¹⁹ grants are available for new ministry initiatives. Training opportunities are offered by the conference or in the district to educate and train laypersons to be leaders or gain new skills sets for ministry. Every year the district hosts lay leadership training and offers courses in lay servant ministries to develop the laity. A lack of awareness from the lack of access to information clearly contributes to the sense of disconnection of the local congregations to the district and conference. It has a larger impact on the local church because it hinders the possibilities for learning best practices,

¹⁹ The NY Annual Conference Parish Development committee serves the churches of the Annual Conference by making loans and grants throughout the year. We do this to assist churches with facility improvements, along with empowering them to begin new ministries and for continuation of fruitful existing ministries, as they seek to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

applying for grants, becoming knowledgeable of the opportunities and ministries happening domestically and globally, as well as leadership development opportunities for the laity.

The local church also has a responsibility to the annual conference as members of the connection. There is a responsibility to pay apportionments and contribute to the healthcare and pensions package of the annual conference for the clergy that serve them. These responsibilities support care for the clergy, operation, and administration of the annual conference, as well as the mission, ministry, and administration of the global church including the general agencies. The Chief Financial Officer and Director of Administrative Services for the NYAC stated,

“The provision of health and pension benefits is central to our ability to support clergy in their service to the local church. Whenever a local church fails to contribute towards the costs of health and pension benefits, they are paid by other local churches in the New York Annual Conference. In many cases clergy have their share of the pension obligation deducted from their paychecks. These funds must be paid for the pension program. The connection depends upon everyone working together for the benefit of the whole.”

It is the DS that must hold the local church accountable for fulfilling their commitment to these systems.

Like Ben Carson said, “Knowledge is key that unlocks all the doors.”²⁰ Effective communication is vital in all relationships. When it is effective, it is positive and shares information for understanding and clarity even when the information is not favorable. Peter Drucker, known as the father of management states that, “communication is the key to effective leadership, but it is the recipient that communicates. The receiver of the information gains knowledge upon which they act. When management does not share

²⁰ Ben Carson, *Think Big: Unleashing Your Potential for Excellence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 223.

information or offer knowledge to the people impacted, it results in there being no communication.”²¹

The confidential nature of the role of the DS can be a reason for the lack of trust from the local church and clergy in the DS. Cabinet meetings are closed meetings because of the sensitive nature of the information that is being shared in that space. According to the Book of Discipline, ¶722. Restrictions on Closed Meetings:

Great restraint should be used in closing meetings; closed sessions should be used as seldom as possible. Subjects that may be considered in closed session are limited to real estate matters; negotiations, when general knowledge could be harmful to the negotiation process; personnel matters; issues related to the accreditation or approval of institutions; discussions relating to pending or potential litigation or collective bargaining; communications with attorneys or accountants; deployment of security personnel or devices; and negotiations involving confidential third-party information.

These items are the very topics of discussion within cabinet meetings. And because of this level of information, the knowledge of the cabinet is extensive and sensitive as it relates to the members of the conference overall. Therefore, when clergy and laity want to know the details of how the cabinet came to a decision, it is rare that details be shared. But that does not mean there should not be any communication at all. Which has been historically the practice in the NYAC.

2. Research shows - What did I learn.

a. District superintendent as connector

The DS is the connector or bridge between the local church and the District/Conference/Denomination - overall organization as a spiritual leader, supervisor,

²¹ “The 7 Secrets of Peter Drucker, Master Business Communicator | The Better Blog,” accessed March 3, 2024, <https://mediashower.com/blog/secrets-of-peter-drucker-master-business-communicator/>.

advocate, and missional strategist. As stated previously the DS is an extension of the episcopal office who is the lead spiritual director and missional strategist for the appointed episcopal area.

First, the DS should approach their role as a conference superintendent serving in a leadership capacity to the entire conference and secondary in service to the district they are appointed. This responsibility makes you a member of the Cabinet,²² which includes the bishop, DSs, and any other conference leadership positions the bishop deems necessary to lead and manage the spiritual and secular needs of the conference.²³

To best serve the conference, it is imperative when sitting at the table (Cabinet) to recognize that as conference superintendents there are several conference responsibilities that are required outside of the ministry of the district assigned. The relationship of care and leadership that is displayed in these additional settings is necessary in building and deepening the connections of the conference and the ability to share information and resources at the district level. When superintendents are not present on conference committees, commissions and boards, leadership is lost. The understanding of resources is diminished creating a knowledge gap that interrupts the ability to support the local congregations in the district. The connection is lost. Sharing

²² ¶ 424. *Cabinet*—1. District superintendents, although appointed to the cabinet and assigned to districts, are also to be given conference-wide responsibilities. As all ordained ministers are first elected into membership of an annual conference and subsequently appointed to pastoral charges, so district superintendents become through their selection members first of a cabinet before they are subsequently assigned by the bishop to service in districts.

2. The cabinet under the leadership of the bishop is the expression of superintending leadership in and through the annual conference. It is expected to speak to the conference and for the conference to the spiritual and temporal issues that exist within the region encompassed by the conference.

3. The cabinet is thus also the body in which the individual district superintendents are held accountable for their work, both for conference and district responsibilities.

4. To exercise meaningful leadership, the cabinet is to meet at stated intervals. The cabinet is charged with the oversight of the spiritual and temporal affairs of a conference, to be executed in regularized consultation and cooperation with other councils and service agencies of the conference.

²³ In The New York Annual Conference, the Cabinet includes the bishop, Assistant to the Bishop, District Superintendents, Director of Connectional Ministries, Director of Communications, and the Chief Financial Officer/Director of Administrative Services.

information from the conference with local congregations as well as ordering the administration of district committees to best serve the missional focus of the conference through the local church strengthens the church universal.

b. Ministry of Leadership

In the book *The Necessary Nine*, Bob Farr and Kay Kotan share their research on the nine things effective pastors do differently in order to lead vital congregations. They say, “Leadership behavior: Is a practice, not a gift.”²⁴ Yes, leaders are born but also can be taught. The number of pastors who have natural abilities to lead is small in number. However, good pastors/leaders are those who continue to learn and put what they have learned into practice.

Our Methodist roots teach us to honor the practice of ministry as patterns, habits, attitudes, and tactics that become a way of life.²⁵ Similarly, leadership practices follow patterns, habits, and tactics making DSs in the best vantage point to lead for the conference and in the appointed district. Gil Rendle and Alice Mann in their book, *Holy Conversations*, state “a primary responsibility of leaders is to help congregations understand where it is going, why such a direction is necessary and how to get there.”²⁶

In surveying DSs, there are many varying patterns and practices that are implemented that work to create relationships, alignment, and strengthen the skills and access points to support local pastors. One of the DSs that I interviewed has created a pastors’ college for new pastors

²⁴ Kotan Farr, Bob Kay, *The Necessary Nine: Things Effective Pastors Do Differently* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), xiv.

²⁵ Kotan Farr, Bob Kay, *The Necessary Nine: Things Effective Pastors Do Differently* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), xiv.

²⁶ Gil Rendle and Alice Mann, *Holy Conversations: Strategic Planning as a Spiritual Practice for Congregations*: (The Alban Institute, n.d.), xi, accessed February 7, 2023.

who have been in ministry under five years. Using this time with pastors to strengthen the relationship of colleagues in the district. It offers moral and professional support and broadens perspectives through the sharing of information and best practices. It is an excellent example of the connection at work. Another DS, has regular check-ins and one-on-ones with their pastors outside of the required annual one-on-one conversation. This builds trust by fostering relationships with their pastors.

Both state that because of this time invested, when they find themselves in difficult situations that need to be addressed, they can enter the space as a “channel of grace” rather than with a spirit for battle. This disarms dissenting voices and gives space for effective communication and fruitful interaction.

Using the work of Anthony B. Robinson in *Leadership for Vital Congregations* and that of Lovett H. Weems, Jr. in *Church Leadership*, as a guide for ministry innovation I created a District Committee for Strategic Visioning. Both works spell out specific strategies of leadership practices that create vital congregations and fruitful ministry. Applying the following strategies of these books, if practiced, will strengthen the connection, and foster authentic space that will allow the district superintendent to be the missional strategist required for the work of the conference and greater mission of the church in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

c. The District Superintendent as Missional Strategist

Being a missional strategist is the primary focus of the DS as per the Book of Discipline²⁷, but not often has it been highlighted as the primary work. A missional strategist is a person who is skilled in planning action or policy for the mission, in this case, for the church.²⁸ The role of the superintendency is meant to consider the entire conference and how decisions regarding ministry and mission can further the mission of the church. Since the DS is an extension of the episcopal office, it is the responsibility of the DS to go out and see what is needed in the community and local churches and share with the bishop to inform strategy development. The strategy developed by the bishop with the help of the cabinet is then implemented in the conference through the DS and district committees for the service, support, and resources of the local church.

Peter Danilchick, in *Strategic Leadership, Planning, and Management for Christians*, defines strategic as an adjective for leaders, “The adjective ‘strategic’ implies that the ‘leading’ in question is directed towards defining and realizing a strategy to accomplish a vision or mission, systematically planned and carefully developed.”²⁹ As the chief missional strategist, the work is to create a way within the district to meet the goals of the strategy set forth by the bishop, overseeing the ministry of clergy and churches in the communities of their assigned area.³⁰

²⁷ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 2016, 343.

²⁸ I adapted the definition of strategist from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/strategist> and applied it to the mission of the church.

²⁹ Peter M. Danilchick, *Thy Will Be Done: Strategic Leadership, Planning and Management for Christians* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2016), 59.

³⁰ “GBHEM - Training for District Superintendents and Directors of Connectional Ministries,” *General Board of Higher Education and Ministry* (blog), accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.gbhem.org/clergy/training-for-district-superintendents/>.

The discernment process of the bishop for a person who can be a missional strategist and has gifts and skills related to pastoral leadership, personnel leadership, administration, and program³¹ for the specific context of appointment can make all the difference in sustaining the connection of the local church the district, conference, and greater denomination.³² Each bishop uses a different process of appointing a DS. The appointment is a sacrifice of the local church and should be an asset to the conference. The vision each bishop holds for their service/episcopal area, as well as the gifts that are needed at the Cabinet to ensure the development of the strategy and implementation, are a part of the discerning. Personality type, leadership abilities, and spiritual gifts are assessed so they can be considered as a part of the overall existing cabinet (team), and the development of strategy needs to be aware of and responsive to the needs of each congregation and clergy. There should be an intentional focus on fostering relationships at each level while considering the district's needs to be appointed.

Being a DS is not just about the work in the appointed district but about what is for the good of the entire conference. This requires alignment and strategy to determine what is best for the conference and how each district lives into that strategy. In Acts of the Apostles, Paul makes it a point to call and meet with the elders from Ephesus to provide them with the leadership and direction to those who were selected leaders for those to whom they were

³¹ As defined in The United Methodist Book of Discipline, which is really the only printed resource for defining the expectation and role of the District Superintendent. The resources that are available for the work for District Superintendents are very limited. With my gleaning information from attending the school hosted by the Global Board on Higher Education and Ministry and Global Board Ministries, conversations with assigned mentors, conversations with several Bishops (current resident Bishop of NY and others while attending school for DSs) as well as other leadership resources used while working in this context. The General Council on Finance and Administration also host quarterly zoom meetings for District Superintendents and Administrators to share information that can be used in the work and role.

³² *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016, 343.*

called to serve by God's direction. He tells them to "Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son." (20:28).³³ Like a shepherd knows to move the herd for food during specific seasons to ensure their survival and understands the weather patterns and moves the herd to ensure their safety, DSs need to know and understand those in the district and the lay of the land to best move the mission of the church.

The role of superintendency is no different. There are times when ministry and mission ought to shift to serve the changing demographic context. They are filled by appointed elders ordained to service, word, sacrament, and order. The leadership of the district superintendent can provide the insight, resources, and even training needed by the clergy and congregation to nurture their sights on the community where each church is located. When congregations are unaware of greater resources available to assist in their development, they can become stagnant and pigeonholed to their limited knowledge. By providing the resources, training, and information to the local congregations it can reveal realities that might not have been initially visible.

Gleaning from the research collected and experience of being in the field, to be a Missional Strategist, you should follow these five principles in order to effectively do your primary task of superintending.

1. *Learn the context.*

³³ Harold W. Alteridge, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, Student Edition (San Francisco, United States, n.d.), 1894.

Within the first six months and throughout the remainder of the term, the district superintendent should learn the district by visiting churches and communities within the district, observing worship styles and ministries of local congregations, and spending time in fellowship settings to develop and nurture the relationships within the entire district. Learning the churches, history, ministry context, and location, as well as understanding the theological stance and missional focus, is critical to developing insight into who the churches are as a ministry location. The district superintendent should walk the community observing and learning this about the surrounding community where the church is located; this way understanding the needs and strengths of the community. Conducting a site visit to each local church gave me a first-hand understanding of the building (Renovations and upgrades, facility problems, facility opportunities, building usage flow, etc.), the lay leaders (how they speak of the space, ministry, history, and community), the community where the building is located, and a sense of what the appointed clergy envisioned and felt connected to in their appointed location and ministry. Walking the ground of each community, including the church building and the parsonage, if possible, gives the district superintendent the knowledge necessary to support and nurture the ministry and mission of the local church.

2. Build trust.

The best missional strategist has a specific pattern of behavior that can be relied on by those in their district and across the conference. They are accessible, responsive to the needs of the people they encounter, transparent in communication, and authentic in sharing real-life experiences.

Bob Farr and Kay Kotan, in their book, *The Necessary Nine*, highlight behaviors of pastors that make a difference in people's lives and impact change. They state that it is through our behaviors and relationships that the people we work with will begin to follow us, “We must first invest in people before they know and trust us.”³⁴

The trust gained from the people is the foundation of leadership. Developing and nurturing relationships, caring and responding to ministry needs, or even just being available to answer questions can be critical to leading the district. In my first year, I quickly assessed there was a lack of trust in my office. As I shared my story and experience in meeting with the clergy and laity of the district, they began to share more openly about their concerns and dreams. Many were surprised and grateful that when they had questions, I shared answers. It seems like a small thing, yet it has a large impact. Alicia Gaza in her book, *The Purpose of Power*, shared that “[o]rganizing has been a part of who I am for as long as I can remember...organizing is as much about human connection and building relationships as it is about achieving a political goal. Humans are social creatures; connection is at the core of who we are. And organizing is connecting with a purpose. When we connect with others, we learn about them and about ourselves.”³⁵

In order to, build trust, we must be willing to share the result of the interaction. Gaza states a lesson she learned from her mother was that “what happens between us is half yours and half

³⁴ Farr, Bob, 85.

³⁵ Alicia Garza, *The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart* (New York: One World, 2020), 47–48.

mine.”³⁶ This means being vulnerable and authentic in the conversation and sharing allows all involved to be responsible for the outcome.

In building relationships by openly sharing my story and intentions, I gained the trust of the clergy and laity, and eventually began to hear hope for their future and new ideas for ministry. They began to share concerns about past harm, and I worked to validate their feelings. Their response was an expressed feeling that I was listening to them.

3. *Set the vision.*

The work of the Superintendent is primarily as the missional strategist for building the kingdom of God through the district. Jürgen Moltmann, in his book, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, highlights the role of Christianity in relationship with the world at large, addressing that being a Christian is based on the relationship of what individuals believe and know how they are to interact with others.³⁷ Christianity, by virtue and the principle of who Jesus is, is meant to work in tandem with all humans in the world to create a world that is reconciled to God. Without these relationships, Christianity is dead. This is why we have a church, why we are the church, and what we are to work towards as the community of faith. The ministry and purpose of the church can get lost when the congregation begins to attend church out of habit rather than to fulfill their purpose for ministry. Setting a vision in writing at the district level is critical to motivate the local churches to remain focused on their ministry and mission as a church.

³⁶ Garza, *The Purpose of Power*. xix

³⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (Fortress Press; 1st edition, n.d.), 162–96.

Creating a vision for the district that is aligned with the vision, mission, and core values of the Annual Conference fosters our connection with one another within the district.

Weems identifies the function of vision in relation to who we are as God's people. He states that vision unites, energizes, focuses priorities, sets the ultimate standard, raises the sights and expectations, invites and draws others.³⁸ Without creating and writing a vision and making it plain³⁹ it becomes easy to lose sight of how we can work as a connection to serve the community and the conference. Setting the vision for the district can shift the entire dynamic of ministry for the local congregations if there is intentional sharing of it through several media vehicles, such as at every district event, weekly district communication, and any time the DS or the Lay Leaders are visiting local congregations. The messaging begins to take root, and the ministry in the local church begins to weave that vision into their ministry context, eventually shifting the way they do their mission in the community.

4. *Call the team.*

“Visions that only the leaders see are insufficient to create an organized movement. Leaders inspire others to see the exciting future possibilities of a new vision and enlist many others in the cause of the vision.”⁴⁰ Many ministries in local congregations are pastor driven. When an appointment change happens, the entire ministry fails. All leaders must share the vision and recruit others to carry it out.

³⁸ Lovette H. Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership: Visioning Team, Culture, and Integrity*, Revised Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 44–48.

³⁹ Habakkuk 2:2-23, Harold W. Alteridge, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, 1256.

⁴⁰ Weems, Jr., *Church Leadership*, 58.

During the initial meetings, while I was out in the district, it became clear that there needed to be individuals who could work with me to serve the district. A committee that was not already in place that would provide the space for creatively envisioning the future of the church in the LIW district. I immediately began to identify and gather intel on key persons who would be the best fit for this purposeful committee. I looked for individuals whose gifts were obvious, those who expressed hope for the future, and who could see beyond what is visible. The committee would work with the DS by hearing the concerns and hopes from the DS about the district and they would ask questions, dream aloud, and think critically about the future and current situation of the district and church universal.

As a DS, building a team or several teams may be your most important task. I have learned that having a team of people who will pray for you, envision with you, and move the vision forward is necessary. Without them, the vision that is set by the Visioning team for the district will not come to life. These individuals may not be a part of the same group or committee, there is success with having some of these individuals in separate groups or committees, creating cross-pollination of across other committees. The key members of that team are:

The Prayer Warriors. They are the ones who intercede on your behalf. They know my prayer concerns, both personal and professional, without violating confidentiality. They know and share in my joys and victories. I trust them to take care of my soul at work.

The Visionaries. These are the ones who provide the space for dreaming. A neutral cohort of clergy and laity involved in the local churches, as well as at the district and conference level. Their wide engagement indicated they had access to what was happening

on a larger scale in the district/conference. They were hand-selected groups of individuals who could ask questions about the status of the church and could have the ability to see outside of the box. This think tank was willing to try innovative ministry ideas that will shift the current ministry mode.

The Movers and Shakers. These are the ones who are working in the church and have a special gift or passion for a particular part of the ministry. This is the body of Christ we learn about in First Corinthians 12.⁴¹ These are the ones who will invest in the vision and move it into the local church. They are influencers, vision bearers, implementors, and innovators. They make the dream come true.

5. *Lead the way.*

¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh, he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Ephesians 2:14-16⁴²

As the chief missional strategist, the passage from Ephesians can be our primary mission and vision, to walk and work in a way that gives God honor and to be humble and gentle by working with patience and showing love for those you are appointed to work with and alongside, to create peace in the world together⁴³. It is the district superintendent's work to connect the local church and the district and conference structures.

⁴¹ Harold W. Alteridge, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*.

⁴² Harold W. Alteridge.

⁴³ The resources for this field are not present and thus it has been critical to have conversations with what resources could be used to direct the work, role and focus for District Superintendents. The Bible is a primary resource for all Christians and could absolutely be a resource for the elders and leaders of the church.

Robinson defines a leader as one who shows the way by going in advance.⁴⁴ By learning the context, building trust, setting the vision, and building the team, the DS should have a wealth of knowledge of the who and what in the district. They can share their wisdom in making the vision a reality. However, because the district superintendent does not have a natural position in the local church, their role is not linked to one congregation but to all the local churches in the district. They live into their work by organizing the district committees where the leadership, ministry and work can be realized.

The district committees are like the small groups of the church. They are in place to build relationships and nurture Christian unity to eventually provide resources in leadership, ministry support, and sometimes financial support throughout the district. As I surveyed and learned the ministry context of the district, I quickly realized there were specific committees that were missing for this district that could better serve the members and communities represented. With the intentional creation of two new district committees, strategic visioning committees, and a committee for ethnic local church concerns, I created new spaces for visioning and for those who were underrepresented. This was one way to further reconcile the connection between local churches and the district. This type of organization and visioning supports the district in creating unity among the local congregations and a deeper connection with the broader church.

7. Possible solutions - Ministry innovation

1. Discernment of the district superintendent

⁴⁴ Anthony B. Robinson, *Leadership for Vital Congregations* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, n.d.), 23.

As stated previously, each bishop discerns these appointments using different processes to assess personality and congeniality to the cabinet. They must be able to be an asset to the current sitting cabinet and transition into the existing culture. They must be able to work alongside the bishop and full cabinet in sharing their gifts and abilities for the greater good to the entire conference. Their role is to be an asset to the overall mission of the universal church from our local context while recognizing that not all appointed to the role will share the same gift for ministry.

DSs should take the time to discern what role the cultural nuances of prior DS(s) may play in how the district will interact with them. They should also be aware of their filters. In the context of the LIW, for a total of twenty-four years before my appointment as the first African American and African American woman and the youngest DS appointed to this district, a culture of paternalism and patriarchy was in place. Being aware of culture, ethnicity, and age has proven to provide a way to overcome some cultural traditions in their sexist, racist, and agism practices. Leadership is contextual and growing up in the inner city of New York City produced a leader who understands the demographic challenge of NYC and sees it as an opportunity. Being unafraid to walk the streets, meet people, ride the subway, and navigate other public transportation systems adds to contextual learning. It is a way to learn while being among the people.

As a US Air Force veteran, I have a world perspective from traveling internationally and working with and serving people worldwide. I am also trained as a social worker, which has allowed me to listen with my heart. These experiences are helpful when language or culture can be a barrier. I am comfortable meeting people where they are, listening to what they are

saying, and hearing what is not being said. My life experience has provided me with the tools to step into this position for the LIW District.

During the pandemic, I was appointed to Cornerstone Community Church, a United Methodist Congregation (Norwalk, CT); I learned that the church is still needed. In partnering with the municipality and other service providers, we were able to bring community resources together and work alongside one another to serve the community best, especially the most vulnerable. Through building relationships and trust from the community, the church became the central location of support and resources for our community.

2. More communications throughout the district from the Conference and denomination.

Implementation of a district newsletter from the office of the district superintendent is an excellent way to showcase the ministries of the local congregations and share the events happening in the district. Inviting each congregation to share their activities with the district office can open an opportunity for the district administrator as well as other local congregations to learn about the many gifts in the district churches. Through these communications, the local churches begin to feel the connection to the greater church through the sharing of other churches in their district. This also opened the door for local churches to partner with one another in building cooperative ministry.

3. Create a missional strategy visioning committee that changes every three years, utilizing the Methodist class system.

One of the essential tasks implemented to foster connection in the district was the creation of a district Committee for Strategic Visioning. In the first year of the appointment, I recognized that the level of meetings and the busyness of the administrative tasks of the district and conference made it very difficult to envision and plan for the district's mission. There was no space to do so.

There were more meetings and more spaces that I found myself in for everything but district missional planning. Even the District Council of Ministries leaned too heavily on individual committee work and reports to provide space for visioning. What was more startling was that the Council did not represent the district well. The council, which is made up of the chairpersons of district committees, was operating in a historic way that was not serving the district.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline charges the responsibility of Chief Missional Strategist to the District Superintendent and to:

be committed to living out the values of the Church, including a mandate of inclusiveness, modeling, teaching, and promoting generous Christian giving, cooperating to develop Christian unity, and ecumenical, multicultural, multiracial, and cooperative ministries; and working with persons across the Church to develop programs of ministry and mission that extend the witness of Christ into the world.

Yet there is no defined place to develop and implement this work. Other DSs that are on the cabinet have set up other ways to live into this responsibility, such as a "Clergy College: for clergy appointed to their district that are still in process or have been ordained under 5 years. Another DS has small groups of clergies that meet to hear the concerns of ministry and mission and help them discern the best way forward. In the LIW District, the creation of the Committee for Strategic Visioning was a place where the DS, as a missional strategist, can ask questions, share hopes and fears, and share what is happening across the district. This committee helps

discern what the future can look like. Together they develop a mission and vision for the district. Because this is done in collaboration, the committee owns it with the DS and are also instrumental in helping to identify others who will help move the vision to reality by living into the mission of the district.

The committee meets monthly to discern the current missional position of the district. Discussing the changing needs of the people not in our churches as well as the needs of those who are and exploring the gap between each and how the church/congregation can respond. The committee identified that leadership development is needed in the laity as well as the clergy, and the resources needed for additional support of each. This committee also identified the role of the district superintendent in creating a strategy that responds to these needs to lead the district in a way that will grow new disciples and strengthen the ones sitting in the pews, in an effort for clarity of the committee.

With this committee, the district's vision was created (Appendix 1). After collecting, analyzing, and putting together the themes from the conversations, the committee reviewed the high points and key takeaways, which became the bones for the development of a district strategic plan. Working together to form a mission and vision statement it was then previewed to those present at our Fall District gathering (2023) for an initial assessment. The committee took leadership in sharing the strategic vision.

The response was positive and filled with curiosity. Many shared that this was the first time a DS led an initiative like this in their experience, and they expressed a need for this type of strategic planning in the district. Others expressed this offered strategy about how to be the church and grow as disciples and missionaries in their ministry context. A lay

leader from a local church stated this was a good way to help members in the district understand what direction we are moving and explained some of the decisions of the DS so far.

This was evidence that the district was open to leadership and that communication was key to knowledge and transparency. When the information was shared, the initial response was hard to understand. What was later realized and learned through this time of sharing was that this was one of the few times the district was included in new information regarding the future of the district. One of the local pastors shared that there was some trepidation from some of their members who were worried this was going to be an imposition on the local churches.

There was a willingness from those present to see what, how, and where they could get involved and, even more so, how their churches could benefit from these opportunities.

4. Create missional/ministry opportunities for the district and cooperative parishes⁴⁵.

The goals of the Strategic Vision are threefold. They speak to the development of individuals, clergy, and laity with regular learning days, the development of spiritual maturity with a district endorsing a bible study to foster making disciples, and work for the development of the Cooperative Parishes. Cooperative Parishes are two or more local congregations working mutually to serve one another and the world. They may be referred to in another contexts as a circuit, a cluster, or multiple-point charge. This could be expressed in one or more forms

⁴⁵ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 148-151. The Cooperative Parish is two or more local congregations working mutually to serve one another and the world.

identified in the Book of Discipline, 1) Multipoint Charge, 2) Larger Parish, or 3) Blended Ministry.⁴⁶

Clergy/Laity Learning Days. Since the pandemic, many training and education sessions have attended as well, but many training and education sessions have not been attended. We hope to reinforce Methodist small groups in short learning sessions throughout the year. The clergy will meet within their cooperative parish structures since those are already intended to be monthly meetings. These groups will share best practices and new information. Laity sessions will take on the form of a monthly chat and chew where clergy will open with devotion, but the laity will lead the discussion on specific topics so that the people of the church learn about the structure, denomination, general agencies, and better prepare them for the annual conference and charge conferencing.

District Bible Study. We recognized that the local church has specific bible studies that usually attract the church's members. We are offering an opportunity to expand that learning through sharing in the study Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study.⁴⁷ This is a four-year

⁴⁶ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2016*, 150. Structured Forms: 1. *Multiple Charge Parishes*—intentionally organized group of two or more pastoral charges in which each church continues to relate to its charge conference on the organizational level and also participates in a parish-wide council. The pastors are appointed or assigned to the charges and also to the parish, and a director or coordinator is appointed or assigned by the bishop. 2. *Larger Parish*—a number of congregations working together using a parish-wide council and other committees and work groups, as the parish may determine which provides representation on boards and committees from all churches; guided by a constitution or covenant and served by a staff appointed or assigned by the bishop and involving a director. 3. *Blended Ministry*—the merging of the organizations and memberships of churches spread throughout a defined geographical area into one congregation that intentionally develops two or more worship/program centers, and for which there is one charge conference and one set of committees and other groups, guided by a covenant and served by a staff and a director appointed or assigned to the parish by the bishop.

⁴⁷ DISCIPLE is a program of disciplined Bible study aimed at developing strong Christian leaders. The study gives the Old and New Testaments equal time, emphasizing the wholeness of the Bible as a revelation of God. DISCIPLE draws upon the work of scholars, the personal Bible reading and study of the participant, and dynamic group discussion to aid understanding of the Bible. }

program and is known to transform lives and help people best understand the bible and their calling. To create the connection to the district we would host a district-wide celebration to acknowledge the new disciples. This idea has evolved into a Lay Learning Academy with Lay Servant ministry courses being offered as well as topical bible studies that can happen throughout the district, once approved by the committee on Strategic Visioning.

Development of Cooperative Parishes. In 2022, during appointment season the cabinet needed to shift how we made appointments. We had run out of available clergy to appoint to local congregations and needed to move to a Cooperative Parish model for the entire conference. This shift resulted from a clergy shortfall before we were ready strategically. Therefore, the support and resources needed to sustain this ministry were not given the appropriate time of development or the appropriate space for ministry settings or pastors to process and understand why this change was happening. Even though the strategy was in response to the void of pastoral leadership, DSs were expected to provide the required policies and plan for financial support. However, developing the cooperative parishes did not happen due to the timing of this realization and implementation. The Long Island West Strategic Visioning Committee recommends that time and resources be put in place to provide development days for the development of cooperative parishes. This includes an assessment of the congregations and community ministries and a ministry plan created and put in place.

5. Fellowship opportunities at the district and conference level.

Attending worship is not the only place where fellowship occurs and as a district superintendent, it is impossible to worship in every church on Sunday. Therefore, creating fellowship opportunities where the entire district can come together to worship, and fellowship is critical to developing and strengthening the district and denomination. This will be accomplished

with Clergy Days, District Mission Projects, social events, and the celebration of our district ministries as the newly formed District Committee on Ethnic Local Church Concerns. This welcomes all to one space to share, celebrate, and build relationships with one another and the DS.

8. Evaluation

At the conclusion of the year, I surveyed the Committee on Strategic Visioning, the Cooperative Parish Coordinators, and a few of the SPRC chairs in the district about the role of the district superintendent as a connector and missional strategist (Appendix 2). The results indicated that when the district superintendent takes the time to learn the context, builds trust, sets the vision, calls the team, and leads the way through open communication, people are willing to follow. There is a feeling of accessibility from the members of the district and a sense that concerns have been heard. There is an understanding of opportunities for learning and growing and a willingness to do more.

There have been additional responses from laity in district training who feel like a shift is taking place for building the church through the district. More clergy are showing up at district and conference events, and more laity. Laity wants to be present. They are hearing the language of willingness to build new ministries and developing new mission projects to meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

9. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has shown me the role of the District Superintendent as a missional strategist is critical to re-membering the church. Throughout this research, I learned

that the DS is the glue, the connector of the connectional church, and is essential to the church's future. With the lack of available resources to guide and direct the work of the DS, every conference and bishop defines how this role is filled and thus accomplished in each conference. The places for resources and onboarding is fragmented and even optional for the availability and access for the DS.

Further, the ordering of the district to meet the vision and mission of the annual conference is dependent on the DS. If the gifts of the DS do not include the ability to envision the possibilities of the future of the church; or lack the administrative ability to create the structures needed to move the district to support the mission and ministry of the local church; or lacks the ability to connect with the people in the district appointed the result is disconnection.

With the decrease of membership in the denomination and because of the disaffiliation, the missional strategy to meet the mission and vision of the conference and the denomination as a whole is at a critical state. If the annual conference and denominational agencies provide the resources needed by the DS to become the connector of the denomination it would strengthen the connectionalism of the United Methodist Church.

It seems the local church has lost its focus and purpose for being the church. Many of the UM churches in the LIW District only function on Sundays for worship. There is no mission happening to serve the vulnerable. There are no bible studies that are making disciples and maturing the faith of Christians. There are no Sunday school programs or afterschool programs nurturing the faith of young people. Very few churches even have live music and what is even more significant is the membership is so low that there is not enough income to fund a full-time pastor. Pastoral appointments are increasingly one quarter time ranging in salary of \$12,000-

\$18,000 requiring a shared clergy for multiple charges where many of the members do not want to understand how to work together in a mission.

The primary task of the DS as a missional strategist is to see the big picture and create a path forward to grow the ministry or at least impact change for the community. Increasingly local churches are making the decision to go from full-time pastoral leadership to less than full time impacting the ground-level mission and ministry strategy and did not make any shifts of ministry planning. Thus, resulting that many have not and will not be able to return to full-time ministry. As a missional strategist it is essential to shift this tide in the other direction if the church of Jesus Christ will survive. Providing new ministry models and inspiring motivational ministry plans is needed desperately.

As the main source of the connection between the local church and the district conference, annual conference and the greater denomination the DS can connect these local churches to the necessary resources, such as coaching, community demographic studies, ministry incubators and missional strategies as well as other innovative opportunities, to shift the trend upward to meet the needs and fulfill the mission of the church in making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world. When the DS works to be the missional strategists, the church can be made stronger, the connection will be strengthened, and the ministry becomes focused.

Appendix

1. LIW Strategic Vision

Long Island West District
Rev. Elizabeth C. Abel, District Superintendent

District Strategic Vision Plan

Our mission is to build unity in the Long Island West District by strengthening the United Methodist connection, to become a stronger community of faith through cooperative ministry; through celebration and fellowship; and through leadership development.

Our vision is to be united in our belief in Jesus Christ who strengthens us to make disciples of Christ for the transformation of the world...

Motto: Unity Makes Strength

- A. Diversity of our district/ Celebrating diversity
 - a. Create opportunities throughout the district to bring us together
 - i. Ethnic Local Church Concerns Committee
 - 1. Worship service to celebrate and learn about our ethnic ministries and congregation
 - 2. Creating Multilingual Lay training
 - a. Lay Servant Ministry for Chinese lay members
 - b. Lay Leadership training materials available in different languages to support lay development.
 - 3. Missional opportunities to support the communities of the ethnic people represented.
 - 4. Educational Awareness of the Ethnic groups in our district
- B. Cooperative Parish Development
 - a. Create opportunities for learning in how to build Cooperative parishes
 - i. Development days with the DS
 - 1. Start with defining current status
 - 2. Celebrate history of each local church
 - 3. Begin futurecasting - finding out niche for the future
 - ii. Asset Based Community Development

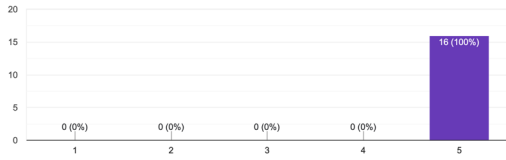
1. What resources are already present?
 - a. In our churches
 - b. In our communities
2. Map them out/categorize what is working.
3. Determine how we can partner together & build on the assets.

C. Leadership Development

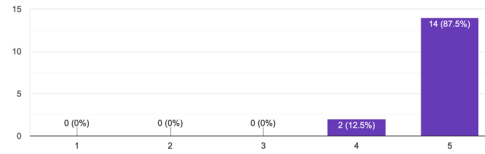
- a. Lay Leadership Academy
 - i. Build Methodist Understanding
 1. BeADisciple.org
 2. History and Archives at Drew
 3. District events for learning about who we are as a district/conference.
 - ii. Deepen Spiritual maturity.
 1. District Bible College
 - iii. Lay Servant ministries - more than the usual opportunities more times a year.
 - iv. Laity Learning Days -
- b. Clergy Learning

2. Survey Results

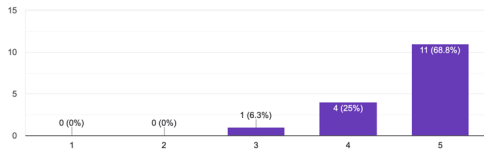
The DS conducted a church meeting
16 responses



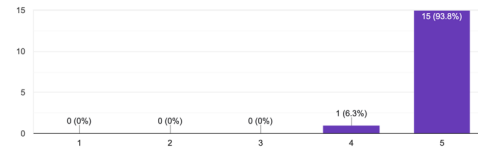
The DS has a grasp of the issues
16 responses



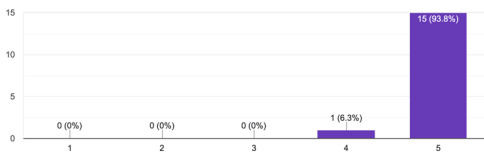
The DS is familiar with the (my) church community
16 responses



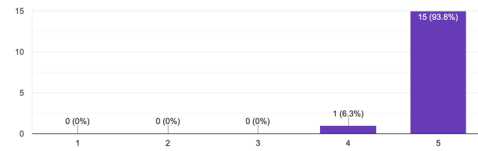
The DS is receptive to various opinions
16 responses



The DS is able to handle conflict
16 responses

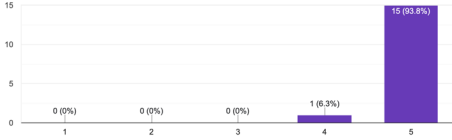


The DS has provided you with access to district/conference resources.
16 responses



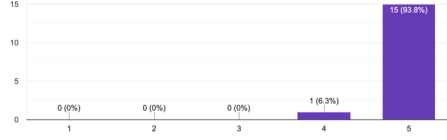
The DS is congenial.

16 responses



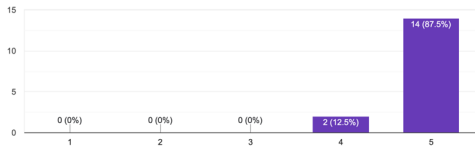
The DS seems to relate to the individual

16 responses



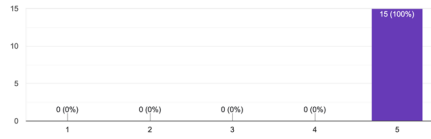
District Superintendent is accessible.

16 responses



The DS is attentive.

15 responses



Notes**Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee Meetings**

Date 2023	Cooperative Parish: Church
9/18, 6pm	Brooklyn Central: Newman Memorial
9/18, 7pm	Brooklyn Central: Bethany
9/18, 8pm	Brooklyn Central: Ghana Wesley
9/20, 6pm	Brooklyn Central: Bethel
9/20, 7pm	Brooklyn Central: Bushwick Parish
9/20, 8pm	Bklyn Central: Janes
9/22, 6pm	Brooklyn Central: Union
9/22, 7pm	Brooklyn Central: John Wesley
9/29, 6pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Tian Fu
9/29, 7pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Christ
9/29, 8pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Bethelship Norwegian
10/3, 6pm	Brooklyn Downtown: New Jerusalem
10/3, 7pm	Brooklyn Downtown: Grace-Hanson
10/3, 8pm	Brooklyn Downtown: Park slope
10/4, 6pm	Fresh Meadows: New Life
10/4, 7pm	Fresh Meadows: Middle Village: Community
10/4, 8pm	Fresh Meadows: Glendale - Maspeth
10/6, 6pm	Brooklyn Downtown: Premier Eglise
10/6, 7pm	Brooklyn Downtown South: Vanderveer Park
10/6, 8pm	Brooklyn Downtown South: Fenimore Street
10/7, 1pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Bay Ridge
10/7, 2pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Sheepshead Bay
10/7, 3pm	Brooklyn Southwest: Sheepshead Bay Korean
10/7, 5pm	Fresh Meadows: Flushing: Chinese
10/7, 6pm	Fresh Meadows: Bayside
10/7, 7pm	Fresh Meadows: Bayside: Korean
10/12, 6pm	Brooklyn Downtown South: St. Marks
10/13, 6pm	Queens West: Community - English
10/13, 7pm	Queens West: Community - Chinese
10/13, 8pm	Queens West: Community - Spanish

10/16, 7:30p	Brooklyn Downtown South: St. Paul's
10/17, 7pm	Brooklyn: Immanuel-First
10/17, 8pm	Brooklyn: Kings Highway
10/18, 6pm	Queens West: Astoria: Korean
10/18, 7pm	Queens West: San Pablo
10/18, 8pm	Queens West: People's
10/23, 6pm	Queens West: Queens Hispanic
10/23, 7pm	Queens West: Corona
10/23, 8pm	Queens West: Fourth Avenue
10/24, 6pm	Nassau: Floral Park
10/24, 7pm	Nassau: South Floral Park
10/24, 8pm	Nassau: St. Marks
10/25, 6pm	Nassau: Grace
10/25, 7pm	Nassau: Oceanside: First
10/25, 8pm	Nassau: Island Park
10/26, 6pm	Nassau: St. James
10/26, 7pm	Nassau: St. John's
10/26, 8pm	Nassau: Inwood: St. Paul's
10/27, 6pm	Queens South: Hollis
10/27, 7pm	Queens South: St. Albans: Grace
11/1, 6pm	Queens South: Brooks Memorial
11/1, 7pm	Queens South: St. Paul's
11/1, 8pm	Queens South: Jamaica: First
11/2, 6pm	Queens South: Springfield Gardens
11/2, 7pm	Queens South: Richmond Hill: United
11/2, 8pm	Queens South: Richmond Hill: Trinity
11/3, 6pm	Queens North: Great Neck: Korean
11/3, 7pm	Queens North: Flushing: First
11/3, 8pm	Queens North: Central Queens

District Superintendent Interviews

Kolvik-Campbell. District Superintendent Interview, August 1, 2023.

Law, Simeon. District Superintendent Interview, September 8, 2024.

Monk, Karen. District Superintendent Interview, September 5, 2023.

Slyvester, Alpher. District Superintendent Interview, n.d.

Pastor Interviews

Mitchell, Mary. Pastor Interview, August 16, 2023.
Stone, Cecil. Pastor Interview, August 28, 2023.

Long Island West District Committee on Strategic Visioning

Committee Members: C. Alison Babb, George Brown, Gail Douglas-Boykin, Melissa Hinnen, Romin Hong, Jeffrey Hooker, Matthew Schaeffer

Meeting Dates: July 11, 2023; August 24, 2023; September 15, 2023; October 20, 2023, November 15, 2023; December 14, 2024; January 9, 2024; February 5, 2024

Day on the District November 21, 2023

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