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THE ROAD FROM PRESIDING ELDER TO SUPERINTENDENT TO STRATEGIST:
WHAT LIES AHEAD?

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The Road from Presiding Elder to Superintendent to Strategist: What Lies Ahead?

Beginning with the era of the presiding elders in 1784 to the year 1960 to the moment the words above were penned (2017), the role of superintendent has been evolving and changing. As Murray H. Leiffier states in his text on Superintendency

In our secular society, where conformity is a dominant note and individualism is played down, the charter of the leader and the effectiveness of his influence on rank-and-file members assumes ever greater significance. This is surely true in the church, where mounting responsibility has inevitably fallen on the bishops, secretaries of the general boards, and the district superintendents especially in their planning and administrative capacities.[\[1\]](#)

The role moved from one of spiritual concern and development where the Presiding Elder's hope was "to seek the Lord of the harvest to send the spiritual showers"[\[2\]](#) upon his preachers to one where the greatest attention was placed upon the completion of administrative tasks, such as clergy evaluation for effectiveness. In the years that followed, the attention to administration became a way of life for those

serving as superintendents, and *The Book of Discipline* saw only minimal changes in the role. In 2008 the General Conference began reconsidering the role of superintendent and used a new term to describe the office and ministry of the superintendent. The term, “Chief Missional Strategist,” has been the topic of much discussion and debate among United Methodist clergy and many lay people ever since. The 2012 *Book of Discipline* has created a language that incorporates the role of superintendent with that of Chief Missional Strategist,

The purpose of superintending is to equip the Church in its disciple-making ministry. Those who superintend carry primary responsibility for ordering the life of the Church. It is their task to enable the gathered Church to worship and to evangelize faithfully.

It is also their task to facilitate the initiation of structures and strategies for the equipping of Christian people for service in the Church and in the world in the name of Jesus Christ and to help extend the service in mission. It is their task, as well, to see that all matters, temporal and spiritual, are administered in a manner that acknowledges the ways and the insights of the world critically and with understanding while remaining cognizant for and faithful to the mandate of the Church. The formal leadership in The United Methodist Church, located in the superintending office, is an integral part of the system of an itinerant ministry.[\[3\]](#)

These words begin the section on Superintendency in the *2012 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* and lay forth the structure for the work of both a bishop and a district superintendent. The office of a district superintendent is an extension of the office of the bishop and oversees the entire ministry of all the clergy and churches within the communities of the district.[\[4\]](#)

In conversation with Bishop Ken Carter, the term “Chief Missional Strategist” was created to give priority and direction to the position. “As an extension of the office of the bishop, the district superintendent shall oversee the total ministry of the clergy ... using the gifts God has imparted to them to empower the clergy in all ways of their personal ministry and life as well as to empower their congregations in service to Christ and their community.”[\[5\]](#) This is an exhaustive list found in paragraph 419 of *The Book of Discipline*.

It was the hope of the originators of the concept of Chief Missional Strategist that this change would renew a sense of ministry for the District Superintendent. Since 2008 along with the debates previously mentioned, articles and essays have been written to offer insight into the implementation of the meaning and work of a missional strategist. These writings vary widely with many different interpretations. Bishops of the Church also have differing views of what a Chief Missional Strategist is and thereby create a complex view of the meaning and role of a Chief Missional Strategist. All these interpretations equate to different ways across the lines of annual conferences for living out the ministry of a superintendent. Those differences cause confusion as well as disagreement among not only the hierarchy of the Church but among the local congregations as well.

The confusion and disagreement have added to the loss of respect and direction for the office of superintendent. The more verbiage without a solid foundation reflects what was becoming a growing concern in 1971 when Dr. Murray H. Leiffer reflected on the office of the superintendent. After a survey of over 400 superintendents, he stated that one of the biggest problems reported was the increasing

complexity of church structure that had become more handicap than help. [6] This concern continues today in the words of superintendents across the United States. The office lacks respect, the clear direction of what it means to be a Chief Missional Strategist, and a complete disconnect with its historic purpose of being a pastor to pastors.

While some districts and conferences seem to know the way to “do it all” this paper offers a clear roadmap to United Methodists that will give directions for all appointed to this role of Chief Missional Strategist. In so doing, we will reconnect to our Methodist roots, have a realistic and accessible understanding of how to be real missional strategists, and finally regain the respect of the clergy and laity of The United Methodist Church.

Where Have We Been

“Nothing has been introduced into Methodism by the present episcopal form of government, which was not before fully exercised by Mr. Wesley.” [7] These words, penned by Bishops Coke and Asbury in the 1798 annotated *Discipline*, are seen by readers and writers, over the decades, as integral to the understanding and shaping of the role of bishops and presiding elders or district superintendents. According to Russell Richey and Thomas Frank, this is an affirmation of “self-understanding and conceptions of missions, ministry, and leadership,” [8] of who we are as Methodist. Both Richey and Frank allude to the question, “Could there have been another way?” [9]

With the purpose of connecting the fast growing parishes to the larger Methodist movement the General Conference created the office of Presiding Elder in the 1784. The Presiding Elder held the quarterly conferences and shared in the sacramental life of the faith community as the only ordained clergy. He traveled by horseback, like the circuit rider, but with a much larger area to cover. The Presiding Elder was truly the representative of the bishop and spent time encouraging and educating the clergy. From riding to Quarterly Conferences and dedicating churches, to preaching commencement services and performing weddings for the rich, the Presiding Elder had a full plate. [10] There was a great amount of respect shown the Presiding Elder. The clergy and the congregations welcomed his presence. In addition the community at large was also glad to welcome him. Presiding Elders often held the position for the remainder of their lives due to their willingness to serve and because in that day life expectancy was not as long as it is currently. Add to this the fact that the role was difficult and at times draining, this form of ministry worked well until the turn of the 20th century.

The General Conference of 1908 granted that the second and third quarterly meetings (conferences) should be dropped, “and the presiding elder was retitled a “district superintendent” – a name more organizational than sacramental and more focused on a region than on a gathering.” [11] With these two substantial changes, the role of District Superintendent took on a whole new meaning and purpose, a portfolio, which developed over the years into a quagmire of responsibilities according to the bishop they served. Every time the church met in conference whether it was a charge or a church conference, the District Superintendent was present to represent the connection. [12]

Soon, the District Superintendent began to be seen as an organizational administrator. It was expected that through the charge or church conferences, the District Superintendent would guide the church in three very important areas of ministry: 1) oversee the review and evaluation of the total

ministry and mission of the church; 2) receive the reports; and 3) adopt objectives and goals recommended by the church council.^[13] With so many conferences in which to preside and so many different congregations, the first area of ministry was rarely accomplished by a majority of District Superintendents. Retrieving the paper work and making sure that congregations worked to develop goals and objectives became the full extent of the annual charge conference.

The responsibilities of the office of District Superintendent continued to be further separated from the era of the Presiding Elder. The superintendent was seen more as one who connected the bishop, clergy, and congregations than as one who came to administer the sacraments and support the clergy. The role of District Superintendent demanded more time and energy with the changes in the structure of the churches, representing the bishop, and the changing demographics of the district. The District Superintendent's supervisory role now included reminding the clergy and the churches of paying their full apportionments. With many clergy families now relying upon dual careers, the appointment process demanded new considerations. All this brought forth new tensions between the superintendent and the clergy as well as the superintendent and congregations.

The District Superintendent's roles were shown to be muddled and ambiguous in a study done by Michelle Pederson, Ph.D. in 2010. Her study showed that when surveyed, the Annual Conference felt the primary role for a District Superintendent was that of supervisor to clergy and churches. Representing the clergy to the bishop and being an extension of that office to the clergy and congregations were also responsibilities named. In last place was the role of supporter to the local congregations. ^[14] Dr. Pederson's study brought to light the fact that district superintendents are pulled in many directions and appear to have more work to do than there is time in which to complete the work. Although there was a sense of reward at being involved in such an important ministry, the general feeling among district superintendents involved in the study was one of frustration.

Where We Are Now

Over the last six years from Dr. Pederson's study to this study, the feeling of frustration seems to have increased among superintendents and the sense of reward waning due to more changes and new responsibilities. In 2008 the role of Chief Missional Strategist was added to the job description of the District Superintendent. While most District Superintendents are well aware of being empowered to be Chief Missional Strategists, there is still ambiguity about its definition and responsibilities.

In late 2016, I conducted a survey of District Superintendents and bishops in the United States.^[15] Fifty-eight superintendents responded. The best and most enlightening information came from the responses to the question "What is your understanding of the role of superintendent?"

There were three answers that kept appearing on the survey. The terms, "supervisor," appears fifteen times in the survey, "pastor to the pastors," appears nine times, and the most often used term, "missional strategist" or "Chief Missional Strategist" appears thirty-three times, but most often with no explanation of what the term means. Of the fifty-eight responses, there were other roles such as spiritual leader and representative of the bishop but the first three sets of responses were overwhelmingly the understanding of those surveyed. One superintendent covered well the understanding of such roles:

The superintendent is/should be the pastor for the pastors assigned in his/her district. The superintendent is/should be a pastoral resource for all laypersons in his/her district. When pastoral support from the appointed pastor falls short, laity should be able to rely on the superintendent. In addition, the superintendent is the senior administrative officer for the district.[\[16\]](#)

While this is a statement from one District Superintendent, it is a fair representation of many on the survey. Seldom does one see the role as solely Chief Missional Strategist but instead a Chief Missional Strategist plus all the former responsibilities associated with the office of Superintendency. Another survey respondent brought forth a very important thought: “Varied, evolving and often the roles and tasks are in tension with one another. You are at once placed in an appointive, supervisory, administrative and connectional role whilst growing in your ability to be a missional strategist.”[\[17\]](#)

Myron Wingfield, former Assistant General Secretary for Clergy Life for the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry wrote the following conclusion from Pederson’s 2010 study: “The study identified a high degree of ambiguity about the role of a DS, and then General Conference 2012 made changes in the specific responsibilities of DSes *sic* in *The Book of Discipline*.” [\[18\]](#) The specific changes in the 2012 *Book of Discipline* gave more direction and understanding to what the role of Chief Missional Strategist was to include. The action of the General Conference stressed that this is an important role change for the future of The United Methodist Church.

Yet more direction is needed than to simply state that the office of the District Superintendent would now deal with the role of Chief Missional Strategist. Simply stated, “What is a Chief Missional Strategist and what are the tasks added to the already overflowing work of a superintendent?” The problem is best summed up by a superintendent who responded to the October 2016 survey with these words, “My understanding is that we are supposed to be the Chief Missional Strategist. I try to fulfill that function, but I still feel that most of my time is spent on the administrative functions of overseeing pastors, conducting charge conferences, mediating conflict, providing support for those new to the role of pastor, etc.”[\[19\]](#) The 2012 *Book of Discipline* lists the following areas under the responsibilities of District Superintendent: Spiritual and Pastoral Leadership, Supervision, Personnel, Administration, and Program. Each of these headings has subheadings and responsibilities. The term Chief Missional Strategist is lost in the midst of these important and time-consuming tasks. The tasks begin at paragraph 419 and continue through paragraph 424. While the surveys show that there is a sense of accomplishment in the role of District Superintendent there is also much frustration as more responsibilities are added to the role and no guidance is given in how to “do it all.” It is time to consider restructuring this office and transferring some of the functions to other individuals. A clear and concise understanding of the role of Chief Missional Strategist is necessary to be able to measure that this vital work is being done.

According to Gil Rendle, the reason for this frustration is because “District Superintendents have inherited a system that is large, bureaucratic and structured with a centralized authority found in *The Book of Discipline*. *The Book of Discipline* talks of centralized decision-making, the authority of the Annual Conference and a very clear chain of command. This worked because it was natural, organic growth that called for management in an aberrant time, a time that is departing from the right, normal,

or usual course.” [20] This time is over and the roles of the past must be reconsidered if Chief Missional Strategist is the primary function of the District Superintendent.

Perhaps this is the “other way” that Richey and Frank began to allude to in their study from 2004: the need for a Chief Missional Strategist and not a Superintendent. For this “other way” to occur the Church must have a clear and intentional understanding of what the definition and qualifications are for a Chief Missional Strategist. “To be missional means to be sent into the world; we do not expect people to come to us.” [21] The Chief Missional Strategist empowers the congregations in the district to offer viable and cutting edge ways to proclaim the gospel to the community, their world. It is the primary responsibility of a Chief Missional Strategist to demand that congregations be missional. The Chief Missional Strategist will continue to oversee the ministry of the clergy, as well as to empower the congregations in service to Christ and the community. A superintendent or Chief Missional Strategist must model and live out the values of the Church, including community understanding, defining the ecclesiology of the Church, empowering worship and an ethical lifestyle that goes beyond one’s self. The superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist serves as coach, mentor, encourager, teacher, and faith community champion, planning strategically for the present and future of the clergy, congregations, and communities. Bishops who participated in the survey did not have a consensus of the requirements for those serving in the office of District Superintendent. Such a consensus will help the bishops select the best person for this ministry role and it will empower those chosen to serve as Missional Strategist to take the risks and face the challenges of today.

Where the Church Needs To Go

Bishop Minerva Carcaño of the California – Nevada area of The United Methodist Church shared in an interview at the Extended Cabinet Summit that a District Superintendent must “be spiritually grounded, day in and day out seeking to know the will of God.” [22] This need for spiritual groundedness must last the entire time of service. As Bishop Carcaño shares, there is a balance of spiritual leadership and temporal leadership, but the spiritual must come first. *The Book of Discipline* has stated through the years that:

The district superintendent is responsible for giving spiritual leadership to clergy and laity in the churches of the district. The district superintendent should model and encourage spiritual formation through the practices of personal prayer, Bible study, communal worship, service, and frequent participation in the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. [23]

Even in a new day when the position is moving from manager/problem solver to Chief Missional Strategist, this vital fact of responsibility cannot be changed nor viewed with a cursory look. Out of the nine bishops who responded to the question regarding qualities, none listed a deep spirituality. Unlike Bishop Carcaño and Bishop Karen Oliveto who both shared publicly that without the spiritual side the work will not succeed, the majority of bishops began with a business orientation to ministry. It is my belief that this grounding, as Bishop Carcaño calls it, is foundational to the work of a Chief Missional Strategist. It must be in tune with the will of God and acceptance of that may cause the Chief Missional Strategist to feel alone in important decisions. If the work of District Superintendent is to be that of a Chief Missional Strategist, there will be difficult and unpopular decisions made as a result of the work. Both clergy and laity will see a completely different side of the office and the person of the District

Superintendent. This may create tension, and the clergy and laity may not always agree with the discerned strategy. A spiritual grounding will afford the District Superintendent the ability to know “the core of their being” as Dr. Ed Bacon states,

When love is being fully accessed, one is able to feel a profound mixture of peace and joy but also power. It is important to note that when we are accessing our core, we are still aware of the anger or fear or sadness when they arise in ourselves and in others. It’s just that the anger, fear, or sadness arise and are dealt with in the crucible of peace, joy and power.[\[24\]](#)

Being a Superintendent requires a strong spiritual grounding because there will be many challenges to face. Assurance that this call is from Christ is important. Finding time for stillness as Dr. Bacon calls it will center and refresh the soul of one who can grow weary with the burden of the ministry.

It is imperative therefore that the Superintendent must have a strong sense of leadership along with a strong and grounded spiritual life. In our current culture, there are a host of authors and books that discuss the topic of leadership, how to find ones capacities and shortfalls, and how to develop into the leader that one should be. Those called to the office of District Superintendent need to have a good understanding of their gifts of leadership and their growing edges as a leader. Rohr and Ebert’s work entitled *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* offers a study of ones own leadership skills. The Enneagram gives a complete and full Christian worldview in which the enneagram is working. The nine characteristic types lend themselves to the full range of leaders. Knowing what one’s type is will help those who are appointed as Superintendents to have an encounter with their “True Self in God.” Rohr and Ebert state, “Anything this powerful and this converting is sure to be fought and resisted by the egocentric self and even by control needy prelates.”[\[25\]](#) Leadership strengths can become leadership failures, if the Superintendent does not assess her or his abilities. A lack of leadership qualities can lead to a downfall and failure of being the Chief Missional Strategist.

Without understanding one’s strengths and growing edges, those in the office of District Superintendent will keep “retreating back to where we feel at home.”[\[26\]](#) Leadership must be a trait that is constantly evaluated and grown. This can be a most uncomfortable and tiring exercise but will ultimately be of great value to one who is to be the strategist for a region of the church in a changing world. Congregations and clergy may see such leadership as an attack on the ministry or as attacking individuals. They will perhaps take the offensive and respond in negative or hurtful ways. A Superintendent may be tempted to take the attack as personal and have a “failure of nerve.”[\[27\]](#) Instead the Superintendent should heed Marsha Clark Moschella’s words “Attending to counter-transference involves the pastoral counselor’s thoughtful awareness of her own emotional response to the parishioner or client.”[\[28\]](#) People and communities’ anger cannot become the Chief Missional Strategist guide for acting strategically. The Chief Missional Strategist must know oneself and act with fortitude.

Edwin H. Friedman in his book, *Failure of Nerve* also has excellent advice for leaders.

The leader who has clarity about his or her own life goals and therefore someone who is less likely to become lost in the anxious emotional processes swirling about. I mean someone who

can be separate while still remaining connected and therefore can maintain a non-anxious and sometimes challenging presence.[\[29\]](#)

This is precisely the kind of leadership needed in the office of District Superintendent, and more so with the office of Missional Strategist. The Superintendent must trust his ability to be a calm presence while offering a challenge in love to the people he is charged to help. Otherwise, anxiety will infect every decision made for the district, the congregation and the clergy. Moving from a District Superintendent to a Chief Missional Strategist creates its own anxiety and the individual chosen must continue to have leadership skills and be transformed to meet the challenges of the day. This leads directly into four strong qualities of leadership needed to be a Chief Missional Strategist. These four come from the writings of Dr. Charles Bugg. "Being a trustworthy (*transformational, strategic*) leader requires commitment, consistency, competence, and compassion:"[\[30\]](#) commitment to the mission, consistency in the way she treats the laity and clergy, competency in living out the mission and a sense of direction, and the gift of compassion.

While the two very important aspects of leadership, a spiritual grounded-ness and the knowledge of one's own leadership skills, are innate and learned, there are other areas that can and must be learned to be a competent Chief Missional Strategist. These are not necessarily obvious or easy to come by.

If one is to be the Chief Missional Strategist, a new learning curve must be embraced with energy and passion. A Chief Missional Strategist must become aware of the community where appointed. Being aware is more than knowing the size and the ethnicity of the area. It also means being aware of the good things one might hear and include the things unspoken but known by all. "To do theological justice to this community will be to write about its people, about its habits, and idiosyncrasies, its mistakes and its blindness, as well as its moments of honesty and grace."[\[31\]](#) One who would serve as Missional Strategist needs to learn how to invest herself in the community in which she serves. McClintock – Fulkerson speaks of being oblivious to the realities of the church or the community due to a host of assumptions and beliefs. These assumptions and beliefs come from our multiple structures that habituate us: male or female, black or white, the normative or the marginalized, to name a few. [\[32\]](#) Assumptions and beliefs may cause us to be blind regarding the community to which we must think and act strategically for the mission of the Church. A good leader seeks to be aware of any unsuitable practices and how they might shape the understanding of the community. Obliviousness has no place in the leadership of a Chief Missional Strategist. Eyes and hearts, honesty and the non-anxious presence are needed to understand the variety of communities within the geographical area. Congregations are affected by the changing communities and must find a niche or risk becoming a congregation that is irrelevant to the community. The Chief Missional Strategist keeps the congregation honest and moving toward a new vision. Nancy Ammerman states,

As some are dying, others are being born. In the midst of the most difficult of communities, congregations struggle to adapt. And in every community, congregations of every shape and color provide spaces of sociability, laboratories for civic participation, places of moral guidance and nurture, and points of contact with transcendent powers that can work transformative miracles small and large. [\[33\]](#)

A Chief Missional Strategist must study and know the communities of his appointment. The District Superintendent will discover that one community does not represent the entire district but loosely connected and very diverse communities make up the district. If it is sinful for a congregation to move out of their community or resist the changes needed to adapt, it is also sinful to ignore the changes in the community and not find ways to adapt to the changes in the community. The Chief Missional Strategist must be willing to speak this hard truth. [34] While it would be easy to simply lead in the old way of supervision and representing the bishop, it would be not only a failure to the new role of Chief Missional Strategist but it would also deny the fact that all of us are responsible for bringing about viable congregations, thus all are called to strategic thinking but one is called to lead and guide as a vital leader, hence – Chief Missional Strategist. Peter Block captures the need for the Superintendent to move forward in leadership to be the most prepared Strategist. While Block is talking about communities what he says fits well with the leadership qualities needed in order to serve effectively in the appointment made by the bishop.

The world we are creating does not come close to fulfilling its promise. Along with this distress come the knowledge that each of us, myself included, is participating in creating this world. If it is true that we are creating this world, then each of us has the power to heal its woundedness. This is not about guilt, it is about accountability. Citizens [or for present purposes s], in their capacity to come together and choose to be accountable, are our best shot at making a difference. [35]

Strategists must see themselves as a part of the creation team that the Holy Spirit has formed and called “for such a time as this.” Digging in quickly with passion to make a difference is a leadership role that motivates the Strategist.

The best place to begin is with information from Asset Based Community Development (ABCD). While there are many tools, ABCD is one of the strongest resources for the work a . This knowledge will give District Superintendents many tools for leading the community. The true core of ABCD is found in Block’s conversation starter, “What do we want to create together?” [36] To put it another way, “What can we do for you as the Church in making life in this community the best it can be?” For too long, the Church has been telling the community what it needs, how it should change and develop. The Strategist knows that using this old model only harms and widens the deep division between the church and the community. Starting with Block’s model of “them telling us” what needs to be done, strategic planning can happen when the community voices share with the church instead of the other way around. Asset Based Community Development is about listening to the voices in the community, studying resources such as Mission Insight and using other mapping tools. This allows the Strategist to see the best of the community and work with the community. This type of work allows the strategist, to act as an “investor, owner, and creator of this place,” [37] with compassion and concern for the community as well as the local congregation. ABCD information then shows that the good of the community far outweighs the bad of the community. With these eyes, the strategist can begin to see how to guide the congregation to be a life-giving community within the community. This may mean coming up with more questions than answers, but that will again create a sense of belonging, which will open doors for the Church.

Along with ABCD, there are two additional important resources of the . Lovett Weems introduced the first in his communication with new District Superintendents.^[38] Dr. Weems encouraged District Superintendents to drive through the communities surrounding each church in the district. This will allow the District Superintendent to get a sense of the makeup of the community. This will take time and should involve all the senses. These might be called "Drive By Sightings." The District Superintendent/Strategist uses her eyes to take in the community and its life. He should smell the aroma of the community and think what it indicates. She listens to the sounds of the community to see if there is noise or silence. Walking the major areas of the community gives a feeling of the mood that permeates the community. Finally, the community has a "taste" that cannot be denied and the District Superintendent/ must take time to discover that taste. Obviously, while this language is metaphorical each community has a taste that brings to mind the flavor of both the people and the lifestyles that make up the population. Using all these senses found during a drive by, the District Superintendent/ can discover if the congregation is a part of the community or an outsider. She will also discover how the community views the church.

Taking this process a step further is to become a Community Rover. This is a ministry of Broadway United Methodist Church in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Rev. Mike Mather has developed a ministry where members of the congregation rove through the community having conversations with the person on the street. The conversations follow Peter Block's instruction to ask their story. That enables the congregation to help make the community a place of safety, security, and hope. This process, again, takes a great amount of time. Today, the Broadway United Methodist congregation has invested in a Roving Listener on staff. The staff member leads by example and prepares others to act as Roving Listeners as well. Such listening gives the knowledge that previously they could only guess about in relation to the community. Hearing first hand from the community will give the a starting point for a partnership of ministry for church and community.

These tools will give insight to the so that the gap between church and community can be bridged. It will help the church to live and strive with the community. They will serve as boundary leaders according to Gary Gundersen and James Cochrane. Gundersen and Cochrane define boundary leaders as leaders who are critical for working with religious health assets in seeking the health of the whole public.^[39] Key to such efforts are people who are willing to live and learn "at the boundaries" where secular meets religious, public meets private, and subcultures meet each other. "A way of life on the boundaries, lived in community and faith, finds a broad menu of possibilities," these are boundary leaders.^[40] While these two men are talking about physical health, such leadership is needed for spiritual health as well. These tools are only a sampling of what can be done. ABCD identifies many resources that help the individual to get an understanding of the life in the community. ABCD, along with Drive By Sightings and Community Roving must be part of the 's training and daily living as he serves to bring a clear missional strategy to life in a new era of secularization. It will also give him a precise way in which to help equip the local congregations to be a church for all.

It is vital that the have a clear understanding of the ecclesiology of the churches in the district and how that ecclesiology affects both church and community. We can never forget, regardless of the many administrative tasks involved in superintending churches, what church is and what is needed to have church. This takes superintending to a totally different level. Some would suggest that this model brings the Church back to the time of the Presiding Elder, but that is not true. He was concerned with

the liturgy and sacramental life of the church in a large way but a strategist understands that the “church is a society, an assembly, of human beings. ... In fact, all of us continue urgently to need reform, deeper understanding, and connection to the intellectual traditions of Christians.” [41] With the modern search for “what works” and a “one size fits all” mentality, the understanding of what is needed to have church is easily lost. Lost is the ecclesiology: the speech about church in its most powerful moments.

“Ecclesiology” sounds like an abstract word, but speech about church, about its conditions and its existence, about its well-being and its relationships, is not uncommon. Indeed, speech about church can be present in our daily life in ways that are pressing, urgent, with strong images for our longing. [42]

A will have these conversations with the pastors appointed to his care but not with them alone. The must invite all voices to the discussion. This would include long time members of the congregation, inactive members and new members. It would also be important to seek out people of the community. The image of church is different today than it was 30 years ago. As the church becomes more secular, talk and meaning about its ministry is being lost. A will need to lift up her voice in the communities in her care to ask the question, “What is church here?” In his book, *Holy People*, Gordon Lathrop lifts up the image that where there is a clear liturgical understanding, there is church. That liturgy, even as it bears the old name, may be a liturgy that is unknown to many mainline churchgoers. The helps the congregations to realize this very important fact. Sharing the difficult truth that challenges the images of the church from days long gone will prove uncomfortable to those set in their ways, both clergy and laity. The hope for United Methodists “is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” and our ecclesiology is vital to that happening in this new day. Again, Lathrop notes that

Still, even in the most idealized of those old descriptions, the hope was by no means always realized. Ordinary, quarrelsome, nonexemplary, needy, sinful people met and still meet. But Christian faith finds God active in the meeting, finds in the fact of meeting a deep ground for thanksgiving. [43]

When the has learned about the community and the congregation is ready to accept a fresh wind from the Spirit, a new understanding of Church begins to form and take shape for the people and the entire community. She will encourage a different kind of gathering, a different space for meeting, and a different way of sharing and doing ministry. Bishop Ken Carter of the Florida Episcopal area in an address at the Extended Cabinet Summit said, “A bad church is worse than no church at all...Our job is to be in mission, not just to take care of members.” [44] Then he ventured further with the image of too many churches are like “Blockbusters in a Netflix World.” [45] His words caught this superintendent’s attention. We have grown to expect people to come to us for the Gospel rather than take the Gospel to them. We must have a new understanding of ecclesiology of the Church if it is to have any impact in the future of our communities. No longer can those appointed to the office of superintendent complain about the changing communities causing their once golden congregations to fail and close. Instead those appointed as Chief Missional Strategist must help the congregations and communities come up with a new way to be the church.

The idea of strategist will be instrumental in this discussion of church. One of the most important components will be worship and what it might look like. Over the last 30 years the church has been in the midst of a worship war. In fact, it is our forms of worship that many claim are the reason for the decline in worship attendance and church membership. While this may have some bearing on the decline it is not the worship but the untrained voices and lack of understanding of clergy and congregations that cannot or will not provide relevant worship that is the culprit. Strategists come into this war zone equipped to help congregations and communities see that worship functions at two levels: the macro-pattern and the liturgical.

The macro pattern has a goal it aims to achieve.^[46] A Chief Missional Strategist, working with clergy and lay people in and out of the church, should help set the goals the church hopes to achieve when the gathering of people occurs. While care must always be given to the sacramental nature of the church so as to not bring two opposing items together, such as worship styles, for the sake of worship, worship must be looked at again in new ways for achieving the goal of a relevant and meaningful spiritual experience with God. Worship has stood for hundreds of years as the primary function of the church but in this day and time this may not be true. The Chief Missional Strategist must be prepared with an understanding of what worship is and what it is not in order to help churches go into the communities with a fresh wind, a fresh start, a “Fresh Expression.” Travis Collins, author of *Fresh Expressions*, writes about new ways of reaching those who would perhaps never come to our churches

These leading-edge types of church are now found in multiple countries, in almost countless settings, and among various traditions and denominations. God is blessing these fresh expressions of church with transformed lives and the movement is helping established congregations find new ways to invest themselves in God’s mission to a changing world. Fresh expressions of church offer real hope for the future of the Christian faith, and real hope for people who need Jesus and his church.^[47]

Thinking of church and worship in new ways will allow the Chief Missional Strategist to help those on his team to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, a world that longs to be living a life of meaning and purpose.

Transformation is that moment when one becomes aware of the tremendous grace of God for their life and how that grace compels them to change and become a new creation, a new person that lives for and serves God. The church needs a similar transformation if it is to continue to be a community of faith in the community. God is continually bringing about transformation in the lives of all of God’s creation. This is true for the sinner and the saint; it is also true for one chosen to fulfill the role of Superintendent. According one bishop in the 2016 survey,

The Superintendent is a missional strategist for the Annual Conference (in conjunction with the other Superintendents and Bishop). This involves strategic appointments, inspiring and shepherding the churches and clergy in the District and implementing the vision, mission and priorities in the District where he/she serves.^[48]

This is a long way from the presiding elder and even the District Superintendent of the early 2000's. A change occurred in the understanding of the role of District Superintendent but the change did not happen to those in the role; it has been slow coming.

Transformation for the Superintendent means one will have the courage to speak the truth to the local region; clergy, congregation, and community even if it is unpopular, in order to look honestly at the community in which the church is planted and demand that the church opens its eyes, ears, and other senses to make disciples of the people within its reach so that the world then might be transformed. John Paul Lederach expresses it in a way where one must go deep with one's own gifts in this new day. Lederach shares that a relationship must, "Develop a full range of capacities that help you sense what is around you. Be attentive with eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin. Never narrow to a single way to sense the soul of the place."[\[49\]](#) The Superintendent will supply congregations and clergy with these findings and facts that should shape their own missional strategy.

Superintendents can be seen as the first man in Mary Oliver's poem; *The Man Who Has Many Answers* but a Chief Missional Strategist more so in the second man.

The man who has many answers
is often found
in the theaters of information
where he offers graciously
his deep findings.

While the man who has only questions
to comfort himself, makes music.[\[50\]](#)

This new theology of transformation will empower and equip a superintendent to become a true Chief Missional Strategist; a strategist who speaks the truth in love as well as with clarity and power to the district to which one has been appointed. The realization is that there must be more than mere words on the page. Each congregation is a unique instrument in this grand symphony. The hope is to transform each congregation into the best instrument it can be to allow this district to play the music that transforms the world for Jesus Christ.

The road from presiding elder to superintendent was a difficult journey, but the path was cleared over time and many great men and women have traveled a multi-lane highway over the years. They accomplished so much despite being all things to all people. But they did so at great expense. The respect for the office and person has been lost with a notion of a Superintendent being nothing more than an extension of church bureaucracy and in a sense Superintendents have been seen as the enemy who prevents pastors and churches from doing ministry. Superintendents weave all over the roadway trying desperately to be pastor to pastors, supervisors, extensions of the bishop, administrators, and now attempting to fully understand this Chief Missional Strategist task.

As the superintendent becomes a Chief Missional Strategist, the new road is an expressway. Here clergy, congregations, and communities can use the tools offered by the Chief Missional Strategist to be a vital and living community of faith.

In order to be this new kind of leader there must be changes in *The Book of Discipline*. Also, those appointed to the ministry of Chief Missional Strategist must be given training described above. The one who serves in this appointment must have a keen sense of self-awareness and leadership style. The Chief Missional Strategist must be educated in the Asset Based Community Development for a clearer ecclesiology of the churches in the community to which he is appointed. The Chief Missional Strategist should be comfortable with new expressions of and for the Church.

Bishop Ken Carter, the president-elect of the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, has been one of the chief proponents of the move from the old Superintendency to Chief Missional Strategist. In a paper he shared with the Extended Cabinet Summit in November of 2016 he mapped out what Missional Strategy must look like:

The role of superintendent as missional strategist is often noted as a contrast from the former designation of DS and Bishop as “pastor to pastor.” There is some overlap but also some distinctions in the new term, and this has to do with the changing needs of the church and culture. Some of this can be understood in the distinction between the roles of chaplain and missionary. The need that the chaplain at times met – although this was always ambiguous, because the person was also the supervisor – may be best addressed in peer or covenant groups; in this instance the role of the superintendent is to design and interpret the importance of covenant relationships. The distinction between chaplain and missional strategist is also related to the continuum between the person (the clergy) and the work (the mission). In practice, the missional strategist will attend to some of each. For example, in a time of crisis the district superintendent or bishop may be a “pastor to pastor.” But in everyday, ordinary life, the leadership need in our time is for missional strategy.[\[51\]](#)

The leadership need, the primary focus on this new super highway will be that of Chief Missional Strategist. The Chief Missional Strategist will work with what can be and seek to serve the future. This will in turn create a different leadership style, one where instead of “doing things right, a strategist will do right things.”[\[52\]](#) Instead of following the rules, they will make choices with a plan of action. The Chief Missional Strategist will see clergy and congregations as resources for mission that will help make disciples and a transformed world.

Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson is the episcopal leader of the North Georgia area of The United Methodist Church, and a former superintendent in the Florida Annual Conference under Bishop Carter. Carter gave her Annual Conference guidelines for District Superintendent selection. These guidelines support this need for a change in this direction. While spiritual depth is the first priority she speaks of in her video interview, she also lists the following:

- A team player
- One who thinks strategically and sees the big picture
- Fruitful and effective in previous appointments

- Innovative, creative and will to envision Church in new ways while keeping the best
- Good listener who pays attention
- Able to communicate hope and create a culture of joy
- Make difficult decisions and conduct difficult conversations
- Must be courageous and not shrink from being an agent of change
- Be honest with the bishop and tell her when she has a bad idea.[\[53\]](#)

Our bishops are preparing the new expressway. Those appointed to the office of District Superintendent must be ready to travel fast in a new role. As Bishop Carter shared, some of the roles remain there out of necessity but the everyday life will be that of Chief Missional Strategist. One may not be so honored to hold this office but instead be filled with a humility that will allow the Holy Spirit to work through them to fulfill the hopes and needs of the Church for this day and time.

All who have spoken about the new role of Chief Missional Strategist have spoken of the need for courage. “Courage is the willingness to lead without regard for reward.” [\[54\]](#) Here is where Friedman’s “non-anxious presence” comes into play for the office of Chief Missional Strategist. Change always requires courage because of the unknown and unexpected that is ahead. The Chief Missional Strategist must not give in to the anxious time but hold faithfully to the task. The Church is in need of strong and dedicated Chief Missional Strategists who are different leaders than the presiding elder or district superintendent. There will be a price for not always being liked and accepted with this new model but to quote a cliché, “It is not about us.” Those called and appointed to the Office of Chief Missional Strategist must be here to serve. “We will sometimes be the ‘lighting rod’ or the ‘scapegoat’, but our work is to keep the conversations focused on the mission and the role of the leader in that mission.” [\[55\]](#) Chief Missional Strategists will listen and pay attention to diagnose but not to fix. Only if the clergy, congregation, and community work together to fix the situation will it be a true fix. The new expressway will not be for the faint of heart but for those grounded in their own spirituality, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and willing to learn the skills needed to change the direction of a church and to make it vital and alive for this day.

District Superintendents who have served over recent years have come to fully appreciate the struggle of change upon this office and have come to see the very important need for change, for a total transformation from the old way. Yes, the old way worked well for a period of time in North Georgia but we have entered a new period and the old ways are not able to bridge the gap of clergy, congregation, and community let alone the gap between the hierarchy and the local church. Now is the time for The United Methodist Church to state clearly that we have an Office of Chief Missional Strategist, what that office will do for the Church, and the gifts and graces needed to fill that office.

It would be easy to continue down the four-lane highway bemoaning the secularization of the world and the church but as the poet Mary Oliver states in her poem, *I Go Down to The Shore*,

I go down to the shore in the morning
and depending on the hour the waves

are rolling in or moving out,
and I say, oh, I am miserable,
what shall –
what should I do? And the sea says
in its lovely voice:
Excuse me, I have work to do. [\[56\]](#)

There is work to do and one who is a Chief Missional Strategist can only do that work. No bemoaning the changes or fearing what lies down the road but with confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit, “So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!” (2 Corinthians 15:17 CEB) and with courage we drive on!

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Appendix 1

Resolution to the 2020 General Conference of The United Methodist Church

Total Number of Pages: 8

Suggested Title: District Superintendent/ (District Strategist)

Discipline Paragraph: 401 through 419.13

General Church Budget Implications: None

Global Implications: Yes

¶ 401. *Task* – The task of superintending in The United Methodist Church resides in the office of bishop and extends to the district superintendent, creating a team, with each possessing distinct and collegial responsibilities. The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (see Part IV, Section I). From apostolic times, certain ordained persons have been entrusted with the particular tasks of superintending. The purpose of superintending is to equip the Church in its disciple-making ministry. Those who superintend carry a primary responsibility for ordering the life of the Church. It is their task to enable the gather church to worship, ~~and~~ to evangelize, the community for Jesus Christ faithfully.

¶ 417. *Selection and Assignment* – Inasmuch as the district Superintendency/Chief Missional Strategist is an extension of the general Superintendency, the bishop shall appoint deacons and elders to serve as district superintendents/chief missional strategist. Prior to each appointment, the bishop shall consult with the cabinet and the committee on district Superintendency of the district to which the new superintendent/chief missional strategist will be assigned (¶ 426) for the purpose of determining leadership needs of the annual conference and the district (¶ 401). In the selection of superintendents/chief missional strategist, bishops shall give due consideration to the inclusiveness of

The United Methodist Church with respect to sex, race, national origin, physical challenge, and age, except for the provision of mandatory retirement.

¶ 418. *Limitations on Years of Service* – The normal term for a district superintendent/chief missional strategist shall be ~~up to six years, eight years but this may be extended to no more than up to eight years at the discretion of the bishop,~~ in consultation with the cabinet and the district committee on Superintendency.

No superintendent shall serve for more than eight years in any consecutive ~~eleven~~ sixteen years. No deacons or elders shall serve as district superintendent more than ~~fourteen~~ sixteen years. In addition, consideration shall be given to the nature of the Superintendency/Chief Missional Strategist as described in ¶ 401.

¶ 419. ~~As an extension~~ a team member of the office of with the bishop, the district superintendent/chief missional strategist shall oversee the total ministry of the clergy (including clergy in extension ministry and ministry beyond the local church) and of the churches in the communities of the district in their missions of witness and service to the world. This oversight requires the superintendent to use his or her gifts and skills related to spiritual and pastoral leadership, personnel leadership, administration, ~~and~~ program, and Asset Based Community Development. ~~The superintendent is the acting administrator of any pastoral charge in which a pastoral vacancy may develop, or where no pastor is appointed. The superintendent/~~ chief missional strategist will be assisted by ordained clergy who will be appointed to assist in the administrative needs of the assigned area. The one assisting will serve as acting administrator of any pastoral charge in which a pastoral vacancy may develop, or where no pastor is appointed.

1. The Church expects as part of the superintendent/chief missional strategist ministry, that the superintendent/chief missional strategist will be the chief missional strategist of the district and 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 between the church the community and the world; and working with persons across the Church and the world to develop programs of ministry and mission that extend the witness of Christ into the local community and the world.
2. The superintendent/chief missional strategist shall work with the bishops and cabinet in the process of strategic appointment and assignment for ordained and licensed clergy; or assignment of qualified and trained laypersons, lay ministers or lay missionaries (¶ 205.4)
3. The superintendent/chief missional strategist shall work with the district committee on ordained ministry to develop an effective and functioning system for recruitment and examination of candidates for ordained or licensed ministry, and the ongoing oversight of person approved for licensing (¶ 349).
4. The superintendent/chief missional strategist 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 (¶ 246.4-5), congregational studies (¶213), Asset Based Community Development studies, MissionInsight, and other gathering, the superintendent shall seek to form creative and effective connections with the local congregation and the communities where the churches are located on his or her district.

5. The superintendent/chief missional strategist shall serve as an example of spiritual leadership by living a balanced and faithful life, and by encouraging both laity and clergy to continue to grow in spiritual formation through both personal and corporate worship and devotional practices, including participation in the sacraments.
6. In the framework of their supervisory responsibilities, superintendents/chief missional strategist shall offer support, care, and counsel to clergy concerning matters affecting their effective ministry. Further, the superintendents/chief missional strategist shall encourage building of covenant groups and communities among both clergy and clergy families, and the laity on the district.
7. The superintendent/chief missional strategist or one appointed to assist shall seek to be in regular contact with the clergy on the district for counsel and supervision, and shall receive written or electronic reports of the clergy's continuing education, spiritual practices, current ministry work, and goals for future ministry.
8. The superintendent/chief missional strategist or one appointed to assist shall maintain the appropriate records of all clergy appointed to or related to the charges on the district (including clergy in extension ministry and ministry beyond the local church), as well as records dealing with property, endowments, and other tangible assets of The United Methodist Church within the district.
9. The superintendent/chief missional strategist, in consultations with the bishop and cabinet, shall work to develop the best strategic deployment of clergy possible in the district, including realignment of pastoral charges when needed and the exploration of larger parishes, cooperative parishes, multiple staff configurations, new faith communities, and ecumenical shared communities. Best strategies should be considered for future deployment of clergy using the long-term view of the needs of the churches and ministries in the annual conference.
10. The district superintendent/chief missional strategist shall interpret and decide all questions of Church law and discipline raised by the churches in the district, subject to review by the resident bishop of the annual conference.
11. The superintendent/chief missional strategist or one appointed to assist shall cooperate with the conference Board of Ordained Ministry in its efforts to provide or arrange support and liaison for clergy in a time of change in conference relationship or termination.
12. The superintendent/chief missional strategist shall serve at the pleasure of the bishop ~~and~~. In discussion with the bishop and cabinet, the superintendent/chief missional strategist may assume other leadership responsibilities as the bishop determines for the health and effectiveness of the district and annual conference as long as the primary work of the superintendent/chief missional strategist is not compromised.
13. The bishop along with the cabinet and the appointed superintendent/chief missional strategist shall consider the need for support in the work of the office of the superintendent/chief missional strategist and appoint either full time or part time assistance for the administrative tasks of the office. The ordained clergy filling this role shall meet the same standards required of a superintendent/chief missional strategist.

Whereas the Office of District Superintendent has changed dramatically over the last decades and the needs of the bishops, clergy, congregations, and communities have changed with the culture, and

Whereas the leadership in The United Methodist Church and leaders of other denominations has called upon a new and fresh way of leading the church that reflects more of the current understanding of leadership, and

Whereas the future of The United Methodist Church and the developing of vital congregation in order to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world is of prime importance,

Let it therefore be resolved that:

The Office of District Superintendent also bear the name of Chief Missional Strategist in order reflect the prime directive. It shall read, District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist or for continuity sake, District Strategist.

The Office of District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist shall be filled with the appointment of either an elder or deacon in full connection. The office no longer has need for sacramental authority, as in the past, and the deacon is known as one who has gifts of leadership that a Missional Strategist must have and truly “connects the church to the world and the world to the church.”

The Office of Missional Strategist will be an 8-year term as it has been proven by several studies on leadership that it takes at least 7 years for change to occur. One who serves as a District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist may serve no more then two 8-year terms as District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist. Returning to the local church and community is important to keep the call to ordained ministry real and fresh.

The District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist will not be so much “an extension of the Office of Bishop” but more so a “part of the Team” with the Bishop doing the strategic work of the Annual Conference.

One chosen for the Office of District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist will exhibit the following gifts in their ministry: A strong grounded spirituality, understanding in Asset Based Community Development, understanding in MissionInsite and its interpretation, understanding regarding the ecclesiology of the church in community and the over arching ecclesiology of The United Methodist

Church in community, fresh expressions of worship and the gathering of the Body of Christ, and a sense of the transformative power of Christ in their own lives and ministry. Training will be offered to empower the gifts already present in the one chosen to serve as District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist.

Key aspects from the Office of District Superintendent/Missional Strategist that will remain are the following:

- Making of strategic appointments
- Supervision where the church and/or clergy may be in danger of not being a vital congregation fulfilling the strategic plan for ministry or for regularly evaluation of the clergy making sure the clergy are growing and becoming the best in their situation.

The Annual Conference will supply clerical support through the conference in order that the District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist will be able to focus on the main thing, making clergy and congregations vital. It is suggested that when possible the Missional Strategist will have an Associate or Assistant to be in charge of the more supervisory issues currently dealt with by the District Superintendent. It is hoped that this individual will be trained up in this position to fill the Office of District Superintendent/Chief Missional Strategist at a later time in their ministry.

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[34] *Ibid.*, 4.

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