

PETITION TO THE 2016 YELLOWSTONE AND ROCKY MOUNTAIN ANNUAL CONFERENCES

No. 402

Consent Calendar No. _____

IMPORTANT NOTE: Carefully read the separate document containing important instructions for critical details. The submittal deadline is March 10. If possible, submit electronically.

1. SUGGESTED TITLE (optional): SEEKING APPROVAL FROM THE WESTERN JURISDICTIONAL CONFERENCE TO REALIGN CONFERENCE BOUNDARIES

2. ACTION BLOCK (The specific action to be taken or approved by the Yellowstone Annual Conference)

We seek approval from the Western Jurisdictional Conference of the United Methodist Church to realign the boundaries of the Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain Annual Conferences to form one, new annual conference, following, and contingent upon, the full discernment and agreement of the two participating conferences.

3. WHY IS THIS ACTION NECESSARY OR DESIRABLE?

I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship and the whole world for my mission field.” - John Wesley

We desire to reclaim our Mission Field in the spirit of John Wesley.

1. The Western Jurisdictional Conference (WJC) meets every four years and will not meet again until July 2020. An approval from the WJC in 2016 would provide the needed flexibility to form a new annual conference before 2020, when and if the conferences are ready.
2. The Yellowstone Annual Conference is faced with an URGENT situation. As of 2012, the Yellowstone Annual Conference was comprised of 99 active clergy (49 elders), 129 churches and 13,602 members. Soon, the resources will no longer be enough to meet the requirements required of an annual conference as defined by the Book of Discipline.
3. The Rocky Mountain Annual Conference is in a FRAGILE state, facing similar trends as the Yellowstone Annual Conference. As of 2012, the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference was comprised of 336 active clergy (229 elders), 265 churches, and 65,820 members. Although the Rocky Mountain Annual Conference has been able to subsist in spite of a continuous decline of resources, expenses continue to outpace income.
4. A consolidated structure would alleviate concerns of declining trends and diminishing resources. These concerns inhibit creativity. A consolidated structure would provide efficiency and economies of scale so that the annual conference could apply energy and resources toward discovering innovative ministry, methods, and service. Only then will the work of the annual conference be renewed to its purpose of equipping churches for ministry, as it is instructed in the Book of Discipline.
5. Our Mission Field is growing. Since the founding of the Rocky Mountain Conference the population of Colorado has more than doubled, from 2.2 million to 5.4 million. Since the founding of the Yellowstone Annual Conference, the population of Montana has increased by almost half, from 700 thousand to just over one million. And these demographic trends are expected to continue with increasing diversity. (See Exhibit B, on Sharing: Context, Vision, and Mission Field.) It is time to reclaim the mission field in the same way John Wesley did.
6. The Mountain Sky Shared Futures Committee was formed in 2014 to explore the question of common purpose between the two existing conferences. The committee discovered and validated a common charge for the shared missional vision and context. In its report to each annual conference in 2015, this team made a recommendation to continue moving forward toward one, new annual conference.

7. The Mission Shaped Future Group (sometimes referred to as the “Group”) continues to discover shared missional vision and context and fully validates the discoveries of the former group. The Mission Shaped Future Group has formed its recommendation for continued work. The Group begins a more formal process by presenting this petition.
8. The Group felt a responsibility to include this Spirit-filled rationale:

Members and delegates of annual conferences are charged with the business of the organization, as required by the Book of Discipline and the laws of the land. However, delegates know that their meetings are not solely about fulfilling corporate requirements. Delegates discover meaning and connection, experience a mutual sense of purpose when coming together from the far corners of their annual conferences. Many leave the conference with a renewed sense of hope, and awe.

In a similar way, the Mission Shaped Future Committee felt spiritual encounters that propelled and inspired its work. The feelings of wonder and excitement that the Shared Futures Committee (2015) and the Mission Shaped Future Group experienced have been difficult to put into words. While there is a practical understanding of realized efficiencies through consolidation of resources, they perceived something much greater.

“In doing this work, extraordinary experiences of one-ness have overtaken us, leading us to Spirit-filled discoveries. The Spirit moves differently around combined conference work than it does in each conference separately. Together, we are spiritually enlivened by doing the work of the gospel. We feel energized, physically and mentally. We speak, understand, and work together at a level that is higher than when we are apart. We have discovered a Spiritual synergy that makes us yearn for the energy and fire of the first Christian community.” (Members of the Mission Shaped Future Group)

Everyone around was in awe – all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved.

(Acts 2: 43-47, The Message)

9. For many, this feels like the most important work of their careers – a unique historical moment wherein lies an opportunity to transform the way of being Christ in the context of a new, foreign mission field. It is a mission field that does not look like the churches that annual conference delegates have come to know and serve for the past 50 years. Today’s mission field looks more like the opportunities that John Wesley claimed.
10. It is time to follow the example of John Wesley. Together we will reclaim the Gospel in today’s mission field.

For the discernment of the annual conference delegates and in consideration of future work together, these exhibits have been included along with this petition.

Exhibit A – The Beginning: Guiding Principles for a New Annual Conference Model

Exhibit B - The Mountain Sky Shared Futures Group Report to the 2015 Annual Conference Session

Exhibit C – What Next? A Brief Outline of the Continued Work toward a New Annual Conference.

Exhibit D - The Conversations Unfold (Available June 1, 2016 following the Future Discernment Listening Sessions throughout the Mountain Sky Area.)

More information about a Mission Shaped Future and Discernment Listening Sessions are available at:

<http://www.yacumc.org/missionshapedfuture>

4. ELABORATE FURTHER ON THE COST OF YOUR PROPOSED ACTION:

The 2017 proposed budget includes funding which is available to plan for the future of the Yellowstone Conference

5. IF POSSIBLE, SUGGEST SOME PERSON OR GROUP TO PERFORM THIS ACTION:

The Mission Shaped Future Groups and any future implementation groups appointed by Bishop Elaine Stanovsky.

6. WHEN WILL THE PROPOSED ACTION BE COMPLETED: (Short-term? Long-term? Ongoing?)

Upon approval from WJC

7. IF ADOPTED, HOW CAN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION BE EVALUATED?

The new annual conference is firmly established and focused on renewing and expanding *Wesleyan Christian Values* in its Mission Field in order to empower local churches and laity to achieve the Mission of the United Methodist Church. The Mission of the United Methodist Church is to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World,” according to the instructions Jesus gave his Disciples. “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19a NRSV)

8. NAME OF INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP SUBMITTING THIS PETITION:

Mission Shaped Future Groups appointed by Bishop Elaine Stanovsky

Group 1:

Rev. Janet Forbes, Chair (Highlands Ranch, Colorado)

Philip Cardin (Salt Lake City, Utah)

Kristi Kinnison (Denver, Colorado)

Rev. Betty Nguyen (Denver, Colorado)

Mark Sanman (Whitefish, Montana)

Rev. Laura Rainwater (Cheyenne, Wyoming)

Rev. Reuben Wilbur (Loveland, Colorado)

Ruth Wills (Parker, Colorado)

Rev. Debbie Schmidt (Whitefish, Montana)

Group 2:

Rev. Jeremy Scott, Chair (Billings, Montana)

Rev. Sarah Beck (Billings, Montana)

Victoria Casarrubias (Boulder, Colorado)

Chris Frasier (Last Chance, Colorado)

Jerry Krause (Littleton, Colorado)

Janna Lauver (Bozeman, Montana)

Rev. Jasper Peters (Denver, Colorado)

Conference Staff:

Rev. Youngsook Kang (Denver, Colorado)

Rev. David Burt (Billings, Montana)

9. IF GROUP, ALSO STATE NAME OF THE GROUP’S CONTACT PERSON (see Instructions):

10. ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER, AND E-MAIL ADDRESS OF SUBMITTER (OR CONTACT PERSON):

Revs. Janet Forbes and Jeremy Scott

Janet Forbes

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EXHIBIT A

THE BEGINNING: GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR A NEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE MODEL

Purpose

To renew and expand *Wesleyan Christian Values* in its Mission Field in order to empower local churches and laity to achieve the Mission of the United Methodist Church. The Mission of the United Methodist Church is to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ for the Transformation of the World,” according to the instructions Jesus gave his Disciples. “*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...*” (Matthew 28:19a NRSV)

Definition

We believe that the United Methodist denomination holds the best core values of any Christian faith tradition. Our churches are filled with believers in a Wesleyan Christian theology. We desperately want to love the world around us and share our understanding of the Christian faith. One that is accepting and loving. One that invites questions and creative thought. One that believes ALL humans have sacred worth.

The affiliated and the unaffiliated will experience *Wesleyan Christian values* through people not buildings, actions not meetings, relational not institutional activities, connections not committees. We will serve outwardly, not inwardly, by open expressions of love and understanding with both tangible and intangible gifts.

Priorities

The Purpose of the new annual conference will be achieved by aligning resources (funding, people, programs) first and foremost according to these priorities.

- 1) Renew and establish vital congregations
- 2) Develop leaders who are gifted at empowering local churches and laity in the Church Mission
- 3) Establish new faith communities to meet the needs of our unique Mission Field.

Principles

In all efforts, the new conference will:

- Assure communications and efforts are simply stated and elegantly executed in order to meet the three Priorities in an effective and efficient manner.
- Focus on the Mission of the Church versus the organization of the church, preservation of the conference, or denomination.
- Assure resources are only deployed against goals that have a strong purpose and measurable outcomes.

- Allow for the Holy Spirit to be active in everything that we do and give us needed flexibility in approach.
- Balance consideration of the rich history of the Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain Annual Conferences with consideration of the current and future needs of its unique Mission Field.

Jesus promises us, “*Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*” (Matthew 10:39 NSRV)

This is a rebirth of a conference.

Everyone around was in awe – all those wonders and signs done through the apostles! And all the believers lived in a wonderful harmony, holding everything in common. They sold whatever they owned and pooled their resources so that each person’s need was met. They followed a daily discipline of worship in the Temple followed by meals at home, every meal a celebration, exuberant and joyful, as they praised God. People in general liked what they saw. Every day their number grew as God added those who were saved. (Acts 2: 43-47, The Message)

*You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.*

*Instead of the thornbush will grow the juniper,
and instead of briars the myrtle will grow.
This will be for the Lord’s renown,
for an everlasting sign,
that will endure forever.”* (Isaiah 55: 12-13)

The new conference will keep this spirit in mind that all that we have and all that we are belongs to God and we exist to do God’s work. This is our mission, our purpose, and our reason for existing.

A Pilgrim Song

*It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
when God returned Zion’s exiles.
We laughed, we sang,
we couldn’t believe our good fortune.
We were the talk of the nations—
“God was wonderful to them!”
God was wonderful to us;
we are one happy people.
And now, God, do it again—
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout hurrahs at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.* (Psalm 126:1-6, The Message)

EXHIBIT B

THE MOUNTAIN SKY AREA SHARED FUTURES COMMITTEE
LEANING INTO THE FUTURE
06-04-2015

INVITING: OUR DISCOVERIES AND UNDERSTANDING

Friends, as Easter People, Christ calls us to be recreated anew. We are invited to become a new thing that moves the Mountain Sky Area beyond merger and toward a holy communion of both the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences to better serve the forming of disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We want to share our discoveries and understanding.

- Both conferences have experienced serious declines in attendance and membership over the past 15 years.
 - Yellowstone Annual Conference faces an URGENT situation with 99 active clergy (49 elders), 129 churches, and 13,602 members (as of 2012), is declining at a rate that is no longer sustainable as an annual conference.
 - Rocky Mountain Annual Conference is in a FRAGILE state. With 336 active clergy (229 elders), 265 churches, 65,820 members (as of 2012), this conference has witnessed a 13% decline in worship attendance in the last 10 years and continues on a downward trajectory.
- The current structures of the Annual Conferences have become burdensome and redundant. By joining together, we can be better stewards of our human and financial resources.
- While we honor our distinctive communities and contexts, joyfully we have found there is more that unites us than separates us.
- We think the Wesleyan vision of personal holiness and social holiness is more important than ever. We want keep it vital in our congregations and in our region.
- We need to face it: what we are doing now is not working.
- Here's the good news: admitting that it isn't working can be liberating and healing. It gives us the freedom to re-imagine The United Methodist Church, and conference connections, for our area.
- We need time to better understand how this can happen and what it will look like.
- So, join us on this journey toward new life, continuing the dialog on a deeper level, moving toward vitality, and change.
- This is exciting work, and we are convinced we can best do it together.

The Mountain Sky Shared Futures Committee

Yellowstone Conference: Dave McConnell (Bozeman, MT), Co-Chair; Doug Morton (Great Falls, MT); Margaret Nowak (Chester, MT); Debbie Schmidt (Whitefish, MT); Jeremy Scott (Billings, MT); Alice Swett (Buffalo, WY); David Burt (Billings, MT), Staff

Rocky Mountain Conference: Janet Forbes (Highlands Ranch, CO), Co-Chair; Steve Burnett (Colorado Springs, CO); Chris Frasier (Denver, CO); Kristi Kinnison (Greenwood Village, CO); Elizabeth McVicker (Cheyenne, WY); Doug Palmer (Niwot, CO); Youngsook Kang (Greenwood Village, CO), Staff

SHARING: CONTEXT, VISION, AND MISSION FIELD

As Methodists living in the Intermountain West, what unites us? The Rocky Mountains connect us north to south, running through our states like a spine. They're "the backbone of the world," says the Blackfoot tribe. The five states in the Mountain Sky area — Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho — stretch across the Continental Divide like a woven blanket thrown over a horse's back. Water flows from our upper ranges to the four directions. A rich harvest of natural resources often follows.

This land is filled with wild contradictions. A day's drive can cross high and dry plains, sheer mountain ranges, red-rock formations, and salt flats. It's an area blessed with vibrant communities but conflicted by competing interests. We share declining rural towns and sprawling cities, wide-open vistas and crowded resorts. This region's timeless landscape is changing before our eyes, and our population is changing along with it.

Our demographics shift with the suddenness of our seasons. Workers in recreation and energy migrate into trailer parks and man-camps, and then leave just as quickly, their numbers ebbing and flowing with changes in the global economy. A host of high-tech jobs attract droves of bright, young minds, while dwindling opportunity drains our rural communities of its most creative children. We share a love of visual and musical arts, world-class museums, and leading universities. We are cowboys and farmers, movie stars and ski bums, tech gurus and conservationists, hipsters and retirees, native peoples, immigrants, professors, artists, and laborers. We are divided by an increasing wealth gap, but united by the love of our western way of life. All together, we are people facing the same challenges, united by our love of this place, and its people.

And in the midst of these people, we yearn to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that transform our communities. We believe that the kingdom of God is among us, and we strive to live here as God intends. We have a Wesleyan vision for the Mountain Sky Area, where to be a neighbor is to serve those at our doorstep. Together, we envision safe, non-violent places for children to thrive, welcoming tables of diversity, vital congregations, and new images of Christian community.

We can imagine not just a new Annual Conference, but a new way of reaching those living in the land we call home: the Intermountain West. Join us as we seek to spread Wesleyan vitality in the Mountain Sky Area.

LEARNING: UNDERSTANDING CURRENT REALITY IN THE MOUNTAIN SKY AREA

- **The FRAGILE and the URGENT**

The IMAGINE TEAM REPORT of the Rocky Mountain Conference

<http://www.yacumc.org/rmcimagineteam2014>

YELLOWSTONE FUTURES TASK GROUP

<http://bit.ly/YACRecommendation>

The BOTH/AND CHALLENGES of Improving and Creating

WAITING FOR GOD'S NEW THING: Spiritual and Organizational Leadership in the In-Between Time or Why Better Isn't Good Enough

Monograph by Gil Rendle

<http://bit.ly/WaitingforGodsNewThing>

LEADING

We recommend to Bishop Elaine that we move forward with two groups.

1. Leadership that builds a NEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE MODEL AND IDENTITY which moves BEYOND MERGER to a simplified ORGANIZATION, focusing on the basic responsibilities of an annual conference so that resources are freed for new uses.

This group will bring a petition to the 2016 Annual Conference sessions and to the Western Jurisdictional Conference, July 13-16, 2016 in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Questions that might guide our work:

- What form of denomination will serve us well for the next 50 years?
- What impediments or constraints are we working with that are not necessary? What set of rules and principles frame a new identity while we experiment?

2. Leadership that identifies ways that the new Annual Conference can cultivate ministry to spread WESLEYAN VITALITY in the MISSION FIELD...both in congregational and non-congregational ways.

Questions that might guide our work:

- What do we need to live in the post-denominational world, given the generational shifts, distances, and demographics?
- What values and principles do we follow?
- What new forms of Wesleyan witness are emerging?

EXHIBIT C

WHAT NEXT?

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE CONTINUED WORK TOWARD A NEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE

After the June, 2015 annual conference meetings, Bishop Stanovsky formed and appointed a Mission Shaped Future Team (MSF) to pursue the recommendations both in terms of building the new annual conference model and identifying opportunities to express Wesleyan grace and vitality in both congregational and non-congregational ways.

The MSF formed two work groups to guide the new conference formation and our engagement with a new mission field.

- **Mission-Shaped Future - ONE (MSF-1)** will develop a proposal to form a new annual conference comprising the whole territory of the Mountain Sky Area, both the present Yellowstone and the present Rocky Mountain Conferences. We anticipate this proposal coming for a vote at both annual conference sessions and the Western

Jurisdictional Conference in 2016.

- **Mission-Shaped Future - TWO (MSF-2)** will lead a process of envisioning what a new season of Vital Wesleyan ministry in the Mountain Sky Area might look like. It will answer questions like, how do we best use our resources (people, buildings, congregations, and funds) to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? The work of this group will take longer and be on-going. It will work to envision what ministry will look like that is not necessarily rooted in what we have known as "congregations."

(From Mountain Sky Outlook, Bishop Elaine Stanovsky, November 13, 2015)

When the Mission Shaped Future Team was able to dream outside of the boundaries of current structure, it was able to clearly see concise purposes, principles, and priorities of a new annual conference. (Exhibit A).

The Bishop instructed the MSF to actively engage stakeholders in Future Discernment Listening Sessions throughout the Mountain Sky Area.

If the outcome of the petitions to the annual conferences and subsequently to the Western Jurisdiction are both in favor, the conferences will have the flexibility to work at a pace that amenable to creating the best plan for a new conference and may officially form a new conference when ready.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE: CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE

2016

This petition is approved by both conferences and agreed to by the Western Jurisdictional Conference.

We develop a comprehensive PLAN FOR THE CREATION of a new annual conference. The plan may include the Book of Discipline questions, alignment of resources according to vision and missional priorities, structure, staffing, budget, pension and health insurance benefits, property management, candidacy and ordination processes, and appointments. This work continues into 2017 to include the STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION/TRANSITION.

2017

At separate conference sessions, we refine the PLAN FOR THE CREATION and STAGES OF IMPLEMENTATION / TRANSITION. Approval is sought and received from both conferences for creation of the new conference.

2018

We host the FIRST JOINT CONFERENCE SESSION, either face-to-face or in regional locations through cyber-connection.

2019

We affirm the INCORPORATION of a new annual conference and enact the TRANSITION PLAN. This work likely continues into 2020.