

What I believe about - - Redistricting

“9, 8, 7, 6 - - Which is just enough?”

There is a favorite blessing greeting which says “I wish for you enough!”

One of the items constantly on the agenda of the Arkansas Area of the United Methodist Church, from our beginnings, is how we would divide ourselves geographically into Districts.

Of primary concern to the early “Presiding Elders” would be how far can I travel on horseback in a day’s journey. Then as railroading became the primary means of transportation - -we wanted our District Superintendents near a railroad stop, and we tailored or districts along railroad lines.

Then our state highway system began to reach everywhere in the State and we were a mobile society. Now with a high speed Interstate Highway System our state is crisscrossed with easily accessible roadways to every corner of the state.

Our early hearty Methodist folk had to get by on handwritten letters and maybe a telegram if it was very urgent to communicate. Often a church would only hear from a Superintendent at Quarterly Conference time - - that is the reason they had four a year!

Then along came the telephone - - at first just a few here and there. Do you remember when your church got its first telephone? Your parsonage?

Today we all have our personal communicators (cell phones) for instant communication from anywhere to anywhere. We surf the information superhighway on the Internet and we get e-mail from everyone. Our ability to communicate with each other has multiplied several times over in just the last ten years.

Our question is this - - what is enough?

The role of the District Superintendent has dramatically changed over the years. Our current expectations are very high and varied. We want a Superintendent who is immediately accessible to the churches, clergy and laity of the district. One we can call on and get a response to our immediate and long term needs. One who has time to just sit and listen!

One who has time to dream new possibilities for ministry with us and then plug us into the necessary resources to get the job done.

Our small membership churches are the backbone of our denomination! Our Superintendents must dedicate an amount of time necessary, along with providing the resources, to assure not only their survival but their vital ministry and growth!

Well then how much is enough - -

Enough is a series of districts with about equal number of charges, of equal geographic area and of easy access. Enough is when the Superintendent is not trying to catch his or her breath covering all the charge conferences. Enough is when the Superintendent has time to come to a local church Administrative Council meeting and help that congregation dream dreams and see visions - - and then to put muscle and mortar to those dreams and visions.

Enough is when a Superintendent has sufficient time to be a real pastor and friend to the clergy of the district. It is not enough for the once a year consultations at appointment time. Clergy are families and families like a smiling face and helpful hand or just a word of encouragement when times get tough.

We must fully fund our District Superintendents' offices with a full time secretary to efficiently do the work of ministry we are calling them to do.

Enough is when all of the United Methodist Churches in Arkansas are proclaiming Jesus Christ and lifting high the cross! Enough is when we are seeking and training Disciples of Jesus Christ at every place and station. From high steeple church to a humble country church house we are able to say - - we have enough.

At the historic first Annual Conference of the new Arkansas Conference we are going to be asked the question - - how many districts are enough? Study and listen carefully to the proposals - - and then you decide how many are enough!

And that is what I believe about - - redistricting.

A Jim Lane Commentary
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