

Great Plains Conference Strategic Plan

Communications Team

Team's Mission: The Communications Team is not a ministry area, at least not in the classic definition. But this team can have a dramatic impact on all four missional priorities for the Great Plains Conference. The following plan provides insight into how our team members in Lincoln, Nebraska, and Wichita, Kansas, can further the conference's ministry goals by providing support, resources and by leading the effort to communicate efforts both at the conference and local church levels.

Goals to Address Missional Priorities:

1. Enhancing the Ministry of Local Churches

a. Crisis plan

- Goal: Ensure local congregations are equipped to provide service to their communities by being fully aware and trained on how to communicate with each other, with the conference, with the community and with the local media. The plan will include expected lines of communication not just when a localized crisis happens among the church leadership but also when a larger-scale incident occurs, such as a natural disaster. The communications team will correlate the crisis plan details with the conference's disaster response plan.
- When: 2015
- Resources needed: No additional resources

b. Local Media Strategies

- Goal: Help local churches engage with their communities via outreach using social media and local media – such as radio stations, TV stations and newspapers – to publicize special events and to showcase positive things our local congregations do each day in their communities, regardless of size. Phase 1 will include basic instructions and guidelines in a written plan. Phase 2 will include regional trainings in at least five locations across the Great Plains Conference.
- When: Phase 1 in 2015 with Phase 2 planned for 2016.
- Resources needed: Travel likely can be absorbed in the current budget.

c. Social Media Strategy for the Conference

- Goal: Develop a strategy at the conference level to make more use of our social media channels to promote our various ministry areas, giving more weight to current points of emphasis. Posts would be scheduled in rotations to ensure one area is not emphasized over another without that being a specific strategy. Coordination would be required across ministry

areas to ensure we don't "flood" news feeds and, thus, risk becoming akin to "white noise" for people who see our posts online.

- When: Latter half of 2015

d. Provide Social Media Guidelines and Training For Local Churches

- Goal: As part of the local media strategy, our team will help develop a document of best practices by assembling details from United Methodist Communications and good examples from other conferences and churches across the Great Plains Conference. After that document is created, the communications staff will provide further training with an emphasis on how churches, particularly smaller churches with fewer staff members, can use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Google+ to connect with their communities.

- When: Latter half of 2015 and into 2016

- Resources: Training session from UM Communications is available in October. Cost for one person to attend will be less than \$750.

e. Reduce Risks for Mistakes by Assigning Champions for Ministry Areas

- Goal: Better fulfill requests from the conference's ministry areas by setting up a system for requests and fulfillment on tasks such as videos to building web pages to developing media campaigns. Each communications team member will be the liaison between the rest of the communications team and the ministry areas to ensure requests are explored and scheduled within the team's available resources. This process will provide accountability on both ends, with the requesters being required to share adequate information for scheduling and fulfillment and the communications staff being required to carry out what is agreed to with the ministry areas.

- When: 2015 (this has been completed)

- Resources: No additional resources needed

f. Improved storytelling and timeliness

- Goal: The communications team will provide higher quality in its coverage of events and topics related to the conference's ministries – via text stories and photos, videos and social media – as a means of helping congregants across our large area know better what the conference and its more than 1,034 churches are doing on a regular basis. A key component in this will be timeliness of reporting and posting so events that are covered will be written about and have that story posted within five days of its occurrence – sooner if possible. The communications director will provide some writing training for staff members, and a new videographer with story-telling in his or her background will be recruited to help achieve this goal.

- When: Start in 2015 and ongoing through 2016.

g. Add video team member to the Wichita office

- Goal: Given the likely growth of video work across the conference in terms of training and sharing best practices, we should add to the staff in Wichita to cut down on travel expenses from the Lincoln office, to provide backup and to allow for coverage of more events and topics.
- When: Start with equipment purchases in 2017 and add staff member late in 2017 or in 2018.
- Resources: Equipment costs range from \$2,000 to \$9,000 depending on if we purchase a second Tricaster or similar machine. Staff member salary would range from \$35,000 to \$42,000 depending on the skills needed for the equipment we purchase. All but the Tricaster could be used on a regular basis by other conference communications staff members in Wichita.

2. New Church Starts

a. Assist with Media Campaigns for New Church Starts

- Goal: To provide assistance with the “20-for-20” goal set by New Church Development, the communications team will assist, when approached, with the development of media campaigns to help market the new church. As each church will be in a unique situation, each campaign will need to custom-made. Campaigns may require advertising purchases. All will require social media strategies. Press releases also may be pertinent, depending on the target audience of each new church.
- When: Likely 2016, in coordination with the new church development coordinator
- Resources: Financial means for advertising purchases will be required.

3. Leadership Development

a. Website reorganization

- Goal: Help make the Great Plains Conference’s website easier to navigate by reorganizing the administration and resources areas into a new site that builds off the “Rethink Home” strategy. The new page within the site will have 12 broad themes, with specific topics organized within each of those 12. At least one of the broad themes should be set up for administrative tasks, such as finance, staff-pastor-parish relations and trustees. Another should be the holding place for Clergy Excellence items, such as the Transition into Ministry program, Boundaries training, and resources such as videos and articles to help train in areas of emphasis, such as preaching and worship. Other themes should place a heavy emphasis on helping laity fulfill their duties to their churches and communities, thus providing more avenues for laity to partner with pastors to further the ministries of their local churches. A new feature for this portion of our website includes a chat/story submission feature that will allow clergy and laity to share best practices. This portion of the Great Plains site will be organized two ways: By topic and, via a map on the landing page, by district so people can see the ideas shared from their regions of the conference. This likely is a place

to address goals from two ministry areas: camping, with its recruitment, role model stories and its “Share Your Story” ideas; and Clergy Excellence with its web page for small-church pastors and continuing education materials.

- When: 2015, with further modifications into 2016
- Resources: Approximately \$750, from current budget line items, to work with Brick River on the design of this landing page.

b. Media campaign for recruitment with BoOM

- Goal: Assist the Board of Ordained Ministry with its recruitment efforts by assisting with the development of a media campaign, making use of resources available from the general church and then refined for Kansas and Nebraska.
- When: Timing dependent on BoOM timeline
- Resources: Funds for advertising may be necessary, depending on the agreed-upon strategy.

4. Global Mission Partnerships

a. Develop mission calendar

- Goal: In concert with the Mercy & Justice team, the communications staff will set up a system of gathering mission trip details from churches across the conference and publicizing those in a calendar and via GP Connect to provide a means of people signing up for mission trips across churches and to better educate people on opportunities available across our regional connection.
- When: Start late in 2015 and gather data for 2016 trips
- Resources: No additional resources needed.

b. Communications plan to share global relationships topics with local churches

- Goal: Work with Great Plains Conference directors and coordinators to develop a communications plan to share developments from our global mission partnerships in Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Haiti to better explain how efforts in the Great Plains is helping in those areas and to build relationships between United Methodists in these three nations and the United Methodists here in the Great Plains.
- When: Begin in 2016 and continue into 2017.
- Resources: No additional resources anticipated.