

Great Plains Annual Conference – Mercy and Justice Team

Vision Plan 2015 and Beyond

The Mercy and Justice team of the Great Plains Annual Conference exists to equip and empower local congregations in the work of mercy and justice ministries as we work together to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

This focus is in alignment with the mission of the United Methodist Church and with the Great Plains United Methodist Conference. Further, the Mercy and Justice team serves to support and enhance the missional priorities of the conference, which are: 1) Enhancing the ministry of local churches, 2) New Church starts, 3), Leadership Development, and 4) Global Mission Partnerships, the latter being a direct responsibility of the Mercy and Justice team.

Further, the Mercy and Justice team is charged with the primary purpose of helping local congregations transform the world through ministries of mercy and through ministries of justice that address systemic issues. The team fulfills the functions of the Conference Board of Global Ministries, the Conference Board of Church and Society, Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Commission on Religion and Race, Christian Unity and interfaith organizations and relates to our global mission partnerships, Volunteers in Mission and criminal justice and mercy ministries. We will include those issues of justice and mercy as outlined in our social principles by developing guidelines and best practices conference-wide for the fulfilling of our mission and ministries by participating in bringing the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Our calling to Justice and Mercy

The God who created all that is, the God who is with us in Jesus Christ, calls us (individually and communally) to love mercy and even more so to do justice (Micah 6:8). God desires all creation to live in shalom, in peace and harmony, wholeness and delight, interdependence and love, where everyone and everything has what is needed for abundant life. (John 10:10) When shalom is absent, the work of justice-making – the work of overcoming violence, greed, exploitation, oppression and indifference – remains. Our discipleship is incomplete without both mercy and justice.

Of paramount importance to the Mercy and Justice team is its two-fold mission of mercy and justice. The team seeks to move the Great Plains Annual Conference forward in all of its ministries and mission from the strategy of a mercy only response to a response of mercy with justice. Many pastors and churches have indicated that they feel comfortable with their mercy response, but lack the skills to lead their congregations in long-term sustainable change through addressing justice. **A consistent theme for 2015 and beyond is to bridge the gap between responding to a need and seeking long-term change, in order for justice to become part of the language and DNA of the Great Plains Annual Conference.**

The following plan brings forth the team's vision for the future in areas of justice and mercy.

A. MERCY AND JUSTICE MINISTRIES

Advocacy and Action:

Establish a full-time position of Advocacy and Action

2017

As a team we see this forward-looking vision taking shape by establishing a conference staff position, in addition to the Mercy and Justice coordinator, dedicated to working with congregations, equipping them on how to do advocacy/action work. We envision this staff person as an advocate across the conference in justice work, working not only with local congregations but

also creating a volunteer group and base to mobilize around justice issues locally, in communities and on the state and national levels creating action alerts, and connecting to other justice advocacy agencies in both states of our conference, as well as collaborating with other agencies of the general church on national and global issues.

The team recommends putting a part-time position or internship in place in 2016, transitioning into a full-time position in 2017.

Create Toolkits for Local Congregations

2015 & 2016

As we work to equip and empower local congregations and our Conference in mercy and justice work, we will:

- Create usable resources in the form of toolkits, print, digital, and online media to inform the local church and Conference of mercy and justice issues and areas helping local congregations and our Conference prioritize opportunities, issues, advocacy and action.
- Raise awareness in local congregations across our conference as we listen to their particular needs in their communities while inspiring them to engage in national and global acts of mercy and justice as well.
- Establish toolkits based on the resolutions passed at annual conference.

Educate local churches on Mercy and Justice Issues

2016 & 2017

- Draw on our United Methodist denominational resources in the areas of mercy and justice, not only in print and digital media, but seek to bring speakers and those with experience to share in regional conference events, with emphasis on local churches taking action.
- Within the next five years, the Mercy and Justice team will work with our Sessions Planning Committee in creating a Mercy and Justice theme for an annual conference session, with worship, workshops, mercy and justice outreach opportunities and inviting a keynote speaker and preacher, perhaps from the general church, to address our annual conference.

Micah Corps Summer Internship

Grow Micah Corps to include 16 young adults & two seminary students to serve as mentors 2016

Micah Corps internship offers our young people the opportunity to deepen their walk with God through exploring different prayer practices, as well as helping them to integrate their faith with action, specifically in the area of justice work. In addition, as an internship, Micah Corps creates a sacred space for young people to wrestle with issues of justice, thereby learning skills and approaches to transform the world. The interns have the opportunities to learn from and, at the same time, to share and equip others in the local churches to have the tools to engage issues of justice in their own community. As we expand this ministry and work with the young adults/campus ministries and clergy recruitments, there are also opportunities to recruit and retain young clergy in our conference. We are envisioning the following:

- Increase to 16 Micah interns and add two adults/seminary students to serve as leaders.
- Contract with individual(s) who have overall responsibility to do the groundwork for setting up the schedule (which starts in the fall and winter before the coming summer) and provide orientation and guidance for the two seminary students who will work with the interns.

Opportunities:

Local Churches: The local churches will have the opportunity to welcome and work with the interns.

Strengthening relationship with young clergy: 80% of young adult seminary students attend seminary away from our conference; the opportunity to coordinate Micah Corps during the summer will help them build relationships with congregations, network with other clergy and maintain a relationship with the Great Plains Annual Conference, thus increasing the likelihood they will return to serve in GPAC.

Leadership Development: Micah Internship offers opportunities for young and diverse persons to explore issues of justice that they may be called to work to address.

Partners with the Micah Corps:

- Young Adult Leadership Development
- Local Church Youth Ministry Coordinator
- Clergy Recruitment and Development Coordinator
- Hispanic Ministry Coordinator
- Campus Ministries

Annually Provide Hands-on Community Service Activities at Annual Conference or other Great Plains events 2015-2016

- Organize a morning or afternoon time in connection with the annual conference session (or at some other Great Plains events) to invite all the conference delegates and members of the local churches around the community where the annual conference is held to join the efforts. Included in this hands-on event would be a justice component, such as a seminar on advocacy, naming and encouraging people on how to take action.
 - 2015 – Focus on Public School Education; 2016 – Hunger/Food Insecurity, etc.

For example, consider collaborating or developing partnerships with other organizations such as Bread for the World, an UMCOR endorsed organization urging our nation’s leaders to end hunger at home and abroad through a collective Christian voice, or United Methodist Ministries-Omaha (UMM) to educate people on the importance of local food production.

Missions Involvement 2015-2016

- Provide consistent training for all leaders so Volunteers in Missions teams can use best practices and can live out the concept of “mutuality in mission,” developing guidelines for relationship building, sustainability and how to be in mission together.
- Develop guidelines for providing small grants as incentives for teams to engage in missions.
- Provide cross-cultural education
- Develop grant guidelines for designated donations and contributions such as Hockens Estate, Hahn Estate and Wulfkuhle Gingrich Funds.
- Develop guidelines for hosting teams and General Conference global missionaries by churches and individuals.

Mission calendar:

- Work with the GP Communication Staff to create a mission calendar, where all mission teams from the local churches are invited to register the dates of the travel, location of the mission trip, the type of work they will do and the team leader’s information. This will:

- Help congregations that cannot mobilize a national or international mission team to partner with other churches within the conference and join existing teams.
- Enable us to send a monthly note in the GP Connect email announcing and celebrating all the teams going on mission experiences that month and include in the devotional an invitation for people to offer prayers on behalf of teams being sent forth into the mission fields.

B. GLOBAL, JURISDICTIONAL AND GREAT PLAINS MISSION PARTNERSHIPS

2015-2016

Global

The Great Plains Annual Conference has named three Global Mission Partnerships: Haiti, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Each country has a task force that is seeking guidance from the Mercy and Justice team.

A goal of the Mercy and Justice team is to develop criteria for its relationships with existing partners as well as future partnerships, focusing on how to be in mission together. Included would be areas of leadership development and relationship building, economic viability and sustainability, issues of interdependence vs. dependence, reporting, accountability and evaluation criteria, along with a 3- to 5-year planning process of review to determine when the project/program shifts take place for sustainability and independence.

The Mercy and Justice team will convene a task force whose charge will be to review and evaluate the existing relationships, resolutions and covenants, and bring forth recommendations and guidelines to the 2016 annual conference for how to be in mission with a mercy and justice component.

The above newly created task force also will develop guidelines as to how to consider new mission partnerships and relationships to include both mercy and justice components. Guidelines will include mission relationships, project viability, sustainability, reporting, evaluation and an exit strategy when considering support for a new project.

Included in this task will be development of a communication plan in concert with the task forces to local churches and district and annual conference.

South Central Jurisdictional

The above mentioned task force will also consider guidelines for any Jurisdictional Agency Request, including the existing relationship with Lydia Patterson Institute from El Paso, Texas, which is requesting \$100,000 for its new classroom building.

Great Plains

2015

Develop criteria to determine how requests for financial assistance by non-profits or other agencies are reviewed and considered. Include measurement, reporting and evaluation criteria.

Financial Requests

The Mercy and Justice team will consider financial requests in accordance with guidelines established by the task force and approved by the Mercy and Justice team.

C. MISCELLANEOUS

Resolutions – Mercy and Justice

Annually

The Mercy and Justice Team will assess the next steps for social action of resolutions as related to mercy and justice passed by the annual conference. And, the team will move forward with recommendations, if required.

Relationship to the General Agencies

2015

The Mercy and Justice team (under the responsibilities assigned by the Great Plains Annual Conference) fulfills the function of the Conference Board of Global Ministries, the Conference Board of Church and Society, Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Commission on Religion and Race, Christian Unity and interfaith organizations and relates to our global mission partnerships, Volunteers in Mission and restorative justice and mercy ministries.

The team will review the roles and responsibilities of each of the areas and determine ways to incorporate their ministry and operational components into the overall functions of the team.

Events

2015

The Mercy and Justice team will provide conference-wide educational and informational events with a justice component. In 2015, plans are proceeding to have a fall event around the issues of justice, educating communities of faith on how to address poverty. We are looking at bringing in a national speaker, such as Robert Lupton, author of "Toxic Charity," or Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, authors of "When Helping Hurts: Addressing the Issue of Poverty without Hurting the Poor . . . and Yourself."

D. OPERATING PROCEDURES

2015

The Mercy and Justice team will work with the Connecting Council to succinctly outline the roles and responsibilities within the Great Plains Annual Conference with reference to:

- Oversight, accountability and decision making regarding officially recognized mission agencies, including national, jurisdictional and international partnerships.
- Conference advance specials.
- Conference missionaries.
- Persons assigned to boards and agencies, nominating and reporting relationships.
- Financial decision making authority.

The Mercy and Justice team will develop procedures on how to effectively disseminate information in a consistent manner to the Communication Department for distribution to local churches and all involved entities, including the annual conference.

Jurisdictional Conference: The Mercy and Justice team will begin planning on how it can participate within its roles and responsibilities at jurisdictional conference in Wichita in 2016.

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