

Conference Profile 2008
Rocky Mountain Conference - The United Methodist Church

A. Geographical Location & Description:

Imagine a Google search of the RMC-UMC: Colorado, Utah and 2/3's of Wyoming are roughly the dimensions. From southern mountains and desert through vast stretches of stunning wilderness, passing by fossil beds, orchards, ranches, verdant fields of grains and produce, zipping around multiple National Parks of startling beauty and the journey through prairies, around lakes would be but an appetizer. Two urban corridors anchored by Denver and Salt Lake City are magnets for creative enterprises, sports complexes, and educational institutions. Ski slopes and solar energy, extraction industries (including coal and coal bed methane, natural gas, oil, and minerals) with some energy boom towns, and geographical tourist meccas are prominent opportunities in this area.

Or, just consider the words, "Wow! Amazing . . ." and the incomplete sentence, "What holy possibilities . . . !"

B. Demographics (2006):

We have 360 active clergy (and a couple of not so active that we won't be discussing here...) made up of: 251 Elders, 29 Deacons, 42 Licensed Local Pastors, 1 Associate Member, and 37 Probationers.

Among them are stewards of multiple parishes, cooperative parishes and Large Church Initiative pastors.

We have 247 retired clergy, many of whom share their wisdom and courageous faith.

A few just fish for trout.

Lay membership is 67,293 with average worship attendance, a respectable 32,557.

We celebrated 1,871 new members by profession of faith and 1,270 baptisms.

We have some little bitty churches and some of the healthiest and **largest** churches in the WJC.

About half of our churches are under 100 active members, but we also have more 1000-plus member churches (13) than any other conference in the Jurisdiction.

C. Conference Mission Statement:

The Mission of the Rocky Mountain Conference of The United Methodist Church is to participate in growing and sustaining local churches and spiritual communities as they attempt to fulfill their calling as Christians and United Methodists in the world.

D. Political/Social Makeup:

Political Environment:

The region enjoys a robust diversity of political practices and activism with a Western U.S. flavor. There are deeply conservative theological centers in Colorado Springs and Salt Lake City and there are large pockets of independents and progressives. Both Wyoming and Colorado are currently represented by Democratic governors. Wyoming and Utah have Republican legislatures. The United Methodist churches reflect this theological diversity and articulate a covenantal hope to reach beyond our differences.

The region has a strong history and current reality of a military presence: multiple military bases, the nuclear missile strike force, NORAD, and the Air Force Academy among the many.

As a large and complex geographical area, many issues of local intensity are but a bubble in the larger region. Thus, at best, a brief review of issues that dominate the public arena would include:

- Water and drought management in the midst of climate change (Ski slope melting is a hot topic, too.)
- Intense debate over the nature and quality of public education
- Growing urbanization processes . . .
- and Growing ethnic populations
- Affordable & "responsible" housing
- Resort living
- Immigration, especially growth of Hispanic/Latino population
- Traffic and commuting to work and to play
- Environmental issues

Church Trends: In the spirit of entering the 21st century, it is fair to say we are experiencing some areas of wild ecclesial growth and scenes of both urban and rural churches aging, shrinking, and reconfiguring. There is increasing use of less-than-full-time spiritual leadership and local pastors as \$\$ issues confront these same churches.

Opportunity is abundant as well! We see ministry settings thriving from the full spectrum of UMC theological expressions.

Thus:

- There is movement toward strategies with affinity groups and specialized training such as Young Clergy, Small Church Initiatives, Mountain Resort Ministries, Cooperative Parishes, & Spiritual Directors
- Increasing use of indigenous lay staff in local churches
- Social witness **challenges**: Immigration, food, housing, race, inclusion
- Mission Field **opportunities**—Only 25% of region professes a relationship to a church community.
- Movement toward the active, intentional Christian discipleship

Social Environment:

- Experiencing rapid increase in immigrant populations
- Increasing ethnic diversity in our communities
- Influence in our communities and life-styles by young adults and youth
- Chasm between poverty and means
- Concerns about insurance and healthcare
- Increasing population over 65 as more people retire in the region

Ecumenical Environment

- Growing interest in interfaith dialogue and activities
- Openness to ecumenical new church starts / tradition of shared church ministries
- Strong community and ecumenical leadership among lay and clergy
- The Iliff School of Theology as mentor of interfaith relationship

E. Financial status:

- In 2008, we will receive apportionments in the form of a **title** of 11% of church expenses.
- The 2008 clergy minimum cash compensation is **29,673**, plus either a parsonage or additional compensation to afford adequate housing in the community.
- The 2008 Conference average compensation is: **50,293**.
- The percentage of apportionment collections in the last four years is:
2006: 82.3%; 2005: 78.8%; 2004: 80.3%; 2003: 80.7%.
- Critical mortgage issues **exist** at conference camps.
- Extravagant benevolence giving is: **205,043**

F. Issues:

Clergy Issues:

- Clergy health (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) and health care costs, isolating geography, self-discipline and self-care issues
- Respectful (most of the time) dialog between different theological opinions, including **clergy covenant**
- The dance of trust between clergy/churches/cabinet/bishop
- New Effectiveness Plan leading to church/clergy/conference dialog
- Balancing worship trends (tradition, contemporary, emergent and, “You are doing . . . What?”).
- Orders events increasing collegiality

Lay Issues:

- Deep participation in **Volunteers in Mission** and the **Transformation of the World**
- Strong desire for sharing in training and development for spiritual leadership
- Focus pulled toward the BIG TWO: Wider Mission **\$\$\$** (Apportionments) and Appointments
- Radical hospitality to stranger and guest

Conference Strengths:

- Strong, dedicated men and women, lay and clergy leaders
- Theological diversity
- Communications
- Iliff School of Theology
- **Beauty** of geography (location, location, location)
- Commitment to social issues
- General constructive Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors--except in windy Casper & Boulder!

Areas for Improvement:

(We are at a Missional Moment for Pairing Growth and Ministry to Grace-Fully Emerge . . .)

- Equipping ourselves to respond to our communities' ethnic diversity

- and to our communities' young adult populations
- Embracing the geographical fullness of our conference
- **Committing** to new church starts and then to their sustainability
- Fueling growing congregations
- Growing a dynamic understanding of evangelism
- Being/Doing/Practicing the sense of identity as United Methodist
- Effective ministry with non-white population
- Expanding ministry with the poor and the rich. We are primarily serving the middle class.
- **Seeking to commit to** Less Whining

G. Conference Episcopal Leader Expectations:

- **Embodies** trust with all people including laity, church and conference staffs, and clergy
- Aims for excellence in the appointive process so that churches radiate constructive love that is able to transform in healing and holy ways the culture and world about us
- **Exemplifies** a delightful model of what it means to be progressively available to the future AND steadfastly faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ as expressed in the best of our shared Wesleyan tradition
- **Communicates** regularly with the WHOLE of our Conference
- **Demonstrates the** ability to be relational and listen, as well as to be prophetic and visionary
- **Models** service, worship, prayer, study, cooking multi-cultural communion bread, cheering Rockies & Jazz
- **Shows** responsible care and respect for theological diversity
- **Is** nimble in bridge-building and conflict resolution
- **Shines as a** great example of the Artist of delegation, authority and **responsible/authentic** leadership

H. On a scale of 1 to 5 (1= mastered; 2=doing much of the time; 3=mixed results; 4=needs work; 5=no work begun;) what is your conference level of accomplishment in fulfilling the

"9 Elements of the Jurisdictional Vision Statement"?

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. A multicultural, inclusive church | 3 | 2. Churches engaged in life of the community | 2 |
| 3. Confident, effective leadership | 3 | 4. Congregations forming disciples | 3 |
| 5. Diverse ministry settings | 4 | 6. Congregations living as global citizens | 2 |
| 7. A church that thinks and acts regionally | 2 | 8. Fully accessible churches | 4 |
| 9. Ministry enhanced by technology | 2 | | |

Whimsically speaking, these averaged out to **"2.77,"** meaning we aren't **there** yet, we remain **"mixed-results"!**

A VISION of WHAT CAN BE

The Rocky Mountain Conference is potentially and uniquely positioned to lead the larger church into a living witness of Igniting Ministries!



An Episcopal leader with this spirit and vision will be able to lead us in an adventure that the larger UMC at its best dreams of becoming. We are at the cusp of dramatic leadership choices. We can help the church evolve a healthy progressive Christianity, conservative and liberal **together**. In a world of closed hearts, minds and doors, we will have a dynamic place at the larger table of constructive responses to interfaith tensions around this country and the world.

We have a vibrant and strong Conference with brilliant theological leaders and gifted practitioners of a wide diversity of faith styles, both lay and clergy. Rocky Mountain is poised to explore the real possibilities and has the resources to take some bold and holy steps. These, joined with a visionary Bishop who is able to knit us together, to provide linkages and to creatively engage the fullness of our churches, can move the whole UMC denomination forward into living its advertising. **Amen**, and . . .

Only the faithfully foolish need apply.