

Yellowstone Conference Profile

Prepared for 2008 Western Jurisdiction Conference

a. Geographical location & description:

Yellowstone Conference encompasses the state of Montana, northern Wyoming and two churches in Idaho for a total of 184,318 square miles.

b. Demographics:

Clergy Members
Active elders--50
Active deacons--1
Probationers--2
Licensed Local Pastor--15
Elders from other conferences--5
Elders from other denominations--7
Retired members under appointment--9
Supply pastors--4
Lay Member--17,000
Churches--130

c. Conference Mission Statement:

We send leaders to serve disciples who offer the gospel to the world. The primary purpose of the Conference is to serve and support local churches in their ministries.

d. Political/Social Makeup:

Political Makeup: The political makeup tends to be independent leaning to conservative.

Political Issues: Environmental issues around the extractive industries of mining, forestry, coal bed methane, oil, gas & coal. Traditional family issues such as abortion and parents' rights, gay issues, agricultural issues such as subsidies and global free trade, Native American issues of self-governance, water rights, substance abuse, health issues, and generally, poverty, war and peace are all issues of importance.

Church Trends: Population trends and therefore, church attendance trends, go hand in hand. We are losing population in most rural areas. Churches are struggling here.

Social Environment: Ethnically the geographical area includes 93.4% of the population white, 3.1 % Hispanic and 3.4% American Indian. Other ethnic populations are less than 1%. There are 8 Indian reservations within the bounds of the Conference representing 13 tribes. US Census projections regarding age of the population for the next 15 years indicate the "graying" of the residents of this geographical area. The economy is based on agriculture, extractive industries, tourism, service industry, government, education and health services. The per capita income ranges from \$15,086 to one county of \$38,260. The Indian Reservations experience

unemployment as high as 80%. The largest city in the geographical area is Billings, MT; population 97,149. Gambling is a huge social issue. There is a rural vs. urban tension due to population shifts.

e. Financial status:

2007 clergy minimum cash compensation for elders with no experience is \$23,731; for 20 years of experience \$29,664. The Conference average compensation for clergy is \$37,090. The 2008 Conference budget is \$1,552,504. The budget has not been met through apportionment giving for the past several years. In 2006, 76 of 132 churches paid their apportionments in full.

f. Issues:

Clergy issues: Most clergy are immersed in the realities and issues of their local church community. Many deal with survival issues, inter-church squabbles, time management. They are concerned about the future of Yellowstone Annual Conference and how changes will affect their lives and ministry. Pastors are concerned about conference apportionments. There is some anger toward churches and other ministers who do not seem to make much effort to see their apportionments paid. The rising cost of health insurance is an issue.

Lay Issues: Most lay people are mostly concerned about their local church issues. The church for them is the local church. The primary issue seems to be that Conference apportionments are too high.

Conference strengths: Our remarkably dedicated lay persons who stick with the church through great difficulties. The goodness of our geographical location and lifestyle, affirmed by national acknowledgment. There is even a frontier mentality that is proud of doing well in the face of difficulties including economics weather, isolation, financial problems, and on and on. We are problem solvers often reaching unconventional solutions. Because of our small numbers we can see the results of those solutions more quickly. We have gifted the general church with a disproportionate number of talented individuals in national and jurisdictional leadership positions. Our newest church, Living Waters, can serve as an example to other churches.

Areas for improvement: We need to see ourselves as we really are--as a place of mission on the frontier, rather than yearning for the "old days." We need to give more—to be better stewards. We need to develop churches in the growing regions of the state while developing alternative forms of ministry in areas that are losing population. We need to open new churches. We close far too many instead.

g. Conference Episcopal Leader Expectations: the info below is the core of what Rocky is working on. They are concentrating on such issues below because of a lack of response here has been their greatest problem. I think we also shared in these issues. The information that Janet Forbes has shared with me indicates that these concerns will be key in the assignment procedure for us.

- A ministry of presence, even when that presence cannot be physical. Communication skills that will use new technology to share the Bishop's ministry with us.
- Attendance, whenever possible, to clergy gatherings. Mingle with clergy members and get to know them. Also attend major church events in the conference.
- Has and communicates a clarity concerning sexual ethics, boundaries, practices, and enforcement of abuses.
- Cares for the Yellowstone conference, has a sense of personal vulnerability, can listen and take advice, is a learning leader, visible to as many lay people as possible, and shares with us as we seek solutions for our future ministry together.
- Helps the conference become more inclusive.

h. Nine Elements of the Jurisdictional Vision Statement

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

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