



VAUMC District Alignment – Communications for March 29, 2021 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

This set of FAQs is in follow up to the communications that went out regarding District Alignment on Monday, February 8, 2021. If you have not read those communications yet, please do so as prerequisite context for this information. Thank you for your participation, for your questions and for your feedback. The District Alignment Team (DAT) are happy to follow up the original communication with more detail and clarity.

The February 8, 2021 materials can be accessed [HERE](#).

1. Why are changes needed at all?

Our churches sit within a larger landscape of adaptive challenges for the 21st century. In the midst of decline and the growing disinterest and disconnection with the church in our communities, the urgency of the Gospel has never been more palpable. More than ever, our commitment must be for the mission of the church to drive the institution, rather than the institution driving the mission.

Among the feedback we have already received has been the question of whether now is the right time to make changes – amidst the uncertainty of a pandemic, the unease of a looming General Conference, our country's racial and political division, and the impact all of these challenges have on church ministry.

Our answer to this question is that these challenges named are precisely why change is needed now. We can choose to WAIT, or we can choose to ACT. We can choose the status quo, or we can choose the new thing God is doing in our midst, in our churches, and in our communities. These adaptive challenges have the capacity to turn us inward toward our own survival, or they have the capacity to turn us outward toward the world that needs the church to offer something new, something substantive, something inspiring in this very moment.

We choose to step out boldly in faith with a strategy that will do the following three important things:

- 1) Resource our clergy
- 2) Foster clergy-clergy and church-church collaboration
- 3) Collaboratively engage our communities in new ways

Now is the perfect time for this movement because it moves us from preserving the institutions and programming to reaching people, helping us rekindle the relationships that have shaped our faith, our calls, our ministries, and our churches. No matter what happens next in our denomination, a new approach is needed, a renewal of the mission is imperative.

2. What are the exact changes that are being made?

Six recommendations have been made to help our districts order themselves for the adaptive challenges of the 21st century. ([See previous communications linked above.](#))

Specifically, the two changes that have been announced are as follows:

- 1) Eight District Superintendents have been appointed for the 2021-2022 year. Each DS will lead two districts during that appointment year.
- 2) A new position, that we are calling the "District Developer," is currently being developed. We anticipate there being seventeen District Developers appointed under the leadership of eight District Superintendents, two for each district (three for the district encompassing the Eastern Shore), taking their first appointments during the 2022-2023 appointment year.

3. How does going to eight District Superintendents, each having two Districts to manage, help us move forward in better resourcing our clergy and our churches?

A move to eight District Superintendents, each having two Districts, offers a great opportunity for the District Superintendents to explore in an intentional way their role as adaptive, effective, and efficient Missional Strategists enhancing their ability to help churches thrive. Adding the role of District Developer further equips our churches for the adaptive challenges of the future. Other conferences are also moving to larger districts with fewer District Superintendents. Most have already made this shift in many ways and for many different reasons with varying results. Our District Alignment Team has been studying the movement and streamlining of other conferences and are excited about what this shift could mean for the life of our churches.

In our own streamlining of district structures, informed by the needs voiced in our quantitative and qualitative interviews, surveys, and research, the Virginia Conference is committed to streamlining in a way that enhances the support of our clergy, laity, and churches. We agree that it can be hard to understand how fewer district superintendents over larger districts can accomplish this goal, but let us explain:

First, as each DS leads across two districts, they will have the opportunity to work with the current people and structures in place to discern how best to go about leading and adapting a larger system.

Second, once they discern the strengths and challenges across their districts and begin to implement new leadership approaches that take these into account, the District Developers will join their team, helping the entire system more easily scale up (as we grow) and scale back (if we shrink).

And third, through this process, our District Superintendents will have learned how to effectively lead larger geographic districts alongside District Developers who will aid them in better knowing and resourcing clergy and the unique cultures, opportunities, and challenges of the churches they serve as well as help to facilitate collaboration among clergy and across churches for wider community engagement and missional impact for the Kingdom of God.

4. I am worried that the District Superintendents will burn out with two districts to manage. What is the plan to get the District Superintendents some help in the short run?

Every DS will keep the current staff on each district in place for at least the first year. So, while the DS is learning & discerning how best to lead a larger district, s/he will have the same level of support that is now in place. Over the course of 2021-2022, the District Superintendents may discover new areas of shared opportunities between their two districts. Also as mentioned above, the District Developer role goes into effect in July 2022. At that time, District Superintendents may choose to change the configuration of district staff. In addition to the staff support, District Superintendents will continue to engage in collaborative leadership with each other, including spiritual, physical and mental support through covenantal self-care.

5. What is the longer-term plan to help District Superintendents create an adaptive system that helps churches connect with their communities?

As mentioned above, the new District Developer position is being created to do three important things:

- 1) Resource our clergy
- 2) Foster clergy-clergy and church-church collaboration
- 3) Collaboratively engage our communities in new ways

This will be the entire focus of District Developers: encouragement, resourcing, and support, so that our clergy, laity and churches can better work together to engage our communities outside the walls of the church with the urgency of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God in mind, rather than just the survival of and competition between individual congregations.

The people in our churches are already attending church less amidst the growing irrelevance of the church in our communities at large. And the current pandemic has effectively ended the "attractational model" of church forever. We must meet people with the Good News of Jesus Christ, which is uniquely the news the church still has to give, where they are in the spaces that they live, work, and play.

6. What are the real ulterior motives for these changes? Is this change really a cost-cutting measure?

The only motives are those of connecting with our communities and offering them Christ. This is not primarily a cost-cutting measure. In fact, much of the savings from moving from 15 to 8 District Superintendents will be used to cover the new District Developer positions. So, while costs decline slightly, this is more of a realignment of expenditures to get new, focused structures in place to help take our churches to a new future. As mentioned above, this change also positions us well for the future because it allows us to be more nimble as we respond to potential growth or decline.

7. Do you want my input? How do I get my opinions heard?

Yes! There are many other pieces to this District Alignment movement. See the full list of recommendations in the [attachment above](#). This entire process is an invitational one that

recognizes more input is always better. You can add your voice to the process by responding via the feedback form attached to this communication or by attending one of the virtual listening posts that will be conducted over the next 12 months. Information will be forthcoming about those events.

8. How do these changes relate to General Conference?

These changes position us for the future regardless of how that future looks after General Conference. Through the implementation of these recommendations, we believe we can become committed anew to the mission of the Gospel driving the institution, rather than the survival of the institution driving the mission, and move into our communities with the always urgent and compelling news of Jesus Christ, while streamlining to become more nimble as we respond to future growth and/or decline.

9. Who are these people on the iDAT & why are they doing this work?

The members of the iDAT team are listed in the [original communication which is attached above](#). They are simply a group of humble servants (clergy and lay) who agreed to commit significant time and energy over nine months to do the hard work of vetting the six recommendations of the District Alignment Team. They are diligently researching possible pathways forward and always keeping an open mind.

10. How do I show my support for these changes?

Feel free to put your comments in the attached feedback form and/or attend an upcoming virtual listening post. But, just as importantly, lead in your congregation by supporting the bold assertion that now is the time to rethink how we do church in order to reconnect with our fellow Christians and those outside the walls of our churches.

11. What & when should I tell my congregation about these changes?

You are free to discuss this at any time with members of your congregation. You can provide them with links to the original communication as well as this one. You can also provide written materials as provided in the original communication linked above. (This document is offered in PDF and Word form for printing as well at www.vaumc.org/DResources.)