

Transcript of Bishop Jones' webcast on the redistribution of SCJ bishops in 2012

[BISHOP JONES]

Hi, I'm Scott Jones, Bishop of the Kansas Area of the United Methodist Church. In 2008, the General Conference reworked the formula for how many bishops are allowed in each of the five jurisdictions in the United States. That meant in the South Central Jurisdiction that we will move from having 11 bishops to 10 September 1 of 2012.

I want to talk to you about that decision today, and about what's going to happen and what I know and what I don't know. I'd be glad to receive email questions from you all; you're welcome to send them to kansasbishop – one word – at hotmail.com.

Since we publicized this webcast yesterday a number of you have already sent in questions, so we have several that I can respond to. But if you think of something during this webcast, there are people here with me who are online and will read those questions over the microphone, so that I'll be able to respond to whatever's going to continue to come in.

This decision to create a new episcopal area for three annual conferences – the Nebraska Annual Conference, Kansas East Annual Conference, and Kansas West Annual Conference – was announced yesterday by the South Central Jurisdiction College of Bishops.

I know that a lot of different emotional reactions are already in play about that. Some of you all expected that decision; some of you dreaded it. Some of you are excited about the possibilities that are coming. There's a range of emotions, and I understand that. I want to emphasize that while we in Kansas might not have chosen this for ourselves, there is a blessing that comes.

Whenever change comes, it opens up new possibilities. It's an opportunity to dream, to plan, and to think about how best to do church in this part of the world. It's an opportunity to 'rethink church.' Bishop Sherer and I will be working with leaders in the three annual conferences to try to figure out how to make this transition work as best as it possibly can.

The College of Bishops has helped us in two ways. First, they made the decision early in the quadrennium – actually, I ought to say *we* made the decision, since Bishop Sherer and I were part of the team of bishops that made it. We made it earlier in the quadrennium in order to provide the maximum amount of time to plan for the transition.

Secondly, all of the episcopal areas other than Kansas and Nebraska are going to be contributing \$10,000 each to a fund to help pay for transition expenses. That will fund meetings, that will fund the hiring of consultants – we're not sure how best the

money can be used, but this is a tangible expression of their support and their willingness to help us.

I first want to talk about how this decision was made. General Conference decides how many bishops there are, since the funds for bishops are paid for out of the episcopal fund on a global level. They decided that since the United States part of our church was declining, that every jurisdiction would lose one bishop.

In fact, the Southeast had already decided not to deploy one of the authorized bishops, so there's no change there. But the other four jurisdictions are each losing one bishop from what they have now, and we are the first to make the decision about how we're going to do that.

Then, the jurisdictional conference is the body that votes on conference boundaries. We're not proposing any changes in conference boundaries. We thought about it; we considered some suggestions that might actually be more effective, but that's not something the bishops get to decide. However, the College of Bishops has an awareness that more study is needed.

Frankly, we feel that some conference boundaries in other parts of the jurisdiction need to be changed. And so we will be petitioning the 2012 jurisdictional conference to conduct a Mission 21 study of the whole jurisdiction to ask how we can best align our resources, including conference boundaries, for missional effectiveness in the 21st century.

According to the Book of Discipline, it's the College of Bishops that decides how annual conferences are grouped into episcopal areas. We've taken this seriously. We surveyed the delegates to the 2008 Jurisdictional Conference. We hired Lovett Weems to study and tabulate these responses and to give us other demographic data. We then held listening events in all of the annual conferences of the jurisdiction, in each case with the resident bishop and a guest bishop present for listening. We compiled all of the results, and we read them. The College of Bishops then spent a great deal of time in prayer. This was a discernment that was prayerfully made asking what's the right thing to do.

We looked at lots of options. There were a number of options that required changing conference boundaries, and once we decided not to do that, they were off the table.

Then it was a question of which of the existing conferences should best be grouped together into an episcopal area, or rather how to group all of them into 10 episcopal areas. I suspect that if you were to say to me, "Did you think about this?" the answer will most likely be "yes." Nobody has raised an issue with me that the bishops did not talk about very seriously. It's just that we then looked at all of these and kept whittling down the ones that made the most sense.

We looked at the criteria that had been ranked by the people in the surveys: about missional effectiveness, about positioning ourselves for the future, about all these kinds of things – workloads of bishops. We prioritized those; that's in the Lovett Weems report. By the way, you can get to the Lovett Weems report by going to this new website that our college has set up: www.scjcollegeofbishops.org. You can get to the Lovett Weems report and see what it was that we shared with the listening sessions and what we as bishops studied very carefully.

The final decision was made on August 31st. The decision was that we would create a new episcopal area. The temporary name for it is the Nebraska-Kansas Area, but that is temporary because we as bishops believe that implementing this decision really is in the hands of the three annual conferences. We call it self-determination. We think that people of those three conference know the most about how to be missionally effective in this part of the world, and therefore a process needs to be put in place where those conferences can dream, plan, and ask big questions about how to do mission and ministry better in the 21st century.

We've been given a great opportunity. The way in which Bishop Sherer and I are proposing is that there be a transition team with seven people from each annual conference. She's already put in place the nominating procedure for that. On October 3rd the Leadership Team for the East conference, and on October 10th the Focus Team for the West conference, will be meeting. I intend to ask those bodies how they want to name the seven people from each conference.

Bishop Sherer and I have tentatively set the afternoon and evening of November 22 for our meeting of the transition team, from 4-7pm. That's partly driven by our calendars, but also thinking through the people who might be named and how they might get to a common location. We're proposing that the first meeting be in Topeka, but I suspect that subsequent meetings will be in Nebraska and in the boundaries of the Kansas West conference.

How are we going to spend the \$90,000? Well, that will be up to the transition team. They don't get to make decisions by themselves; instead, I anticipate that they will bring some sort of transition plan to the three annual conferences meeting next spring, and if there are decisions ready to be made then, they'll make them. Otherwise it might be 2011 when things get done.

So what do we know?

First, we know that there will be a planning process and that each annual conference session will be making decisions over the coming years.

Second, we know that the assignment of the new bishop for this Kansas-Nebraska or Nebraska-Kansas area will be assigned by the jurisdictional conference in 2012. There's no guarantees of who that person will be. That happens every four years;

there's a jurisdictional committee on episcopacy that will make a recommendation, and it's finally settled on by a vote of the jurisdictional conference.

We also know that Bishop Sherer will be retiring in 2012. If you're asking about my situation, I will be finishing eight years of service in the Kansas Area in 2012. I have until 2024, which is the year that I must retire.

What is it that we don't know? What questions will be answered over the next several years?

Well, one of those questions is where will the episcopal office be? Right now, for Kansas, it's in Wichita, by vote of the two Kansas conferences. The one in Nebraska is in Lincoln. That's a discernment that's a sensitive one and that needs to be looked at in as many different viewpoints as possible. I suspect the transition team will be talking about that.

What staff will be necessary in the episcopal office? Again, we don't know what's going to be required, and we don't know exactly what changes will be coming. That's something that the transition team will be looking at as well.

How will the next bishop make appointments? Well, I hope every bishop is making appointments to maximize the missional effectiveness of every church in his or her area. That certainly has been my practice in Kansas for five years, and I know that Bishop Sherer cares deeply about making good appointments. Sometimes questions, though, get raised about moving between annual conferences. I have been bishop of two annual conferences, and each clergy has a commitment to serve in the bounds of his or her annual conference. And a transfer from conference to conference means that the bishops of the two conferences must agree and the clergy person must agree.

Now, quite frankly, having one bishop over multiple conferences facilitates those kinds of transfers. That's why I've been making appointments on an area-wide basis, following the patterns of Bishop Mutti and Bishop Hicks for a long time before me. It maximizes the missional effectiveness of congregations by providing the biggest possible pool. However, if clergy don't want to change conferences, all they have to say is 'I don't want to go there,' and that's an end of the conversation.

The opportunity before us, my friends, is one of creativity. Change is hard, but it stimulates us. We break out of old patterns, we dream new dreams, we think new possibilities. That's what I think is before us. There's a lot of anxiety, and I want you to have as much information as possible. That's why I've set this time to answer the questions that are coming in.

So let's take some time now to see what questions have come in, and I'll respond to as many as I can. We're going to quit this webcast at 12 o'clock [noon]. By the way, it's our intention to take a copy of this webcast and put it on archive. It'll be both on

the Kansas East website, which is www.kansaseast.org, and the Kansas West website, www.kswestumc.org. Don't look for it today; it takes a little while to get that up, but sometime by the middle of next week this ought to be available for people who weren't able to join us today to be a part of the conversation by viewing it online. Okay, what's the first question?

[QUESTION 1 - READER]

Bishop, I understand part of the rationale for the decision is long-term demographic trends. The FAQ says that the bishops will request the formation of a study commission to look at how to best align resources throughout the jurisdiction. Is the creation of a Nebraska-Kansas area viewed as a stop-gap measure to meet the General Conference requirements while a permanent plan is enacted, or can we be reasonably certain that this is a long-term relationship that will last past the outcome of the Mission 21 study group?

[ANSWER 1 - BISHOP JONES]

Well, I can't predict the future, but the question was very smart in asking a very specific question: what's the intention of the bishops? The College of Bishops believes this Kansas-Nebraska area or Nebraska-Kansas area is, in fact, a long-term relationship. We think the planning that ought to go on ought to assume that this will be one episcopal area for a long time to come. However, several of us believe that United Methodism ought to be more nimble and flexible in the future.

So, how long will this last? I don't know, but I should not go into this expecting that in 2016, for example, something else will be different. Relationships are important, they take time to build, people get used to a certain way of doing things and living into this new Nebraska-Kansas area will take a long time.

Most of this request for looking at aligning resources and conference boundaries, and this is my personal opinion now, is really focused on Texas and New Mexico. Some of the boundaries within Texas were formed by rivers; they were set last in the early 1900s. I think it's 1906 maybe; Bishop Hardt has written a book telling us about that.

Here's an anomaly – Austin, as a metropolitan area, includes Round Rock and Georgetown. But Round Rock and Georgetown are in a different annual conference from Austin. That's crazy. So we need to adjust some anomalies like that.

We looked hard at the possibility of a Kansas City episcopal area. Kansas City is the largest metropolitan area in the United States without a resident United Methodist bishop, but any solution around that would have required changing jurisdictional lines and that is an incredibly hard process. So, we gave up on all of that and decided that this would be the next step, and we hope a study will be more creative in looking at Texas and New Mexico and maybe making some changes down there.

That's a personal opinion, but that's what I was thinking when I voted yes on the Mission 21 petition idea.

[QUESTION 2 - READER]

Greetings, Bishop Jones. On behalf of the Kansas East Conference CCYM, we are interested in how this process is going to affect the youth ministries of each of the current conferences.

[ANSWER 2 – BISHOP JONES]

Well, I think one of the possibilities is that serving under one bishop allows for common relationships. There's not a lot that goes on between Kansas East and Kansas West but there some cooperative things that we do in youth ministry. Because the district superintendents know each other, the two conference staffs know each other, there are possibilities there. My guess is now that you'll have an opportunity in the Kansas East CCYM to have a deeper relationship with Nebraska. But, we're still talking at this point about three annual conferences and so there's a sense in which the Kansas East CCYM will still be the Kansas East CCYM. Next question.

[QUESTION 3 - READER]

Do you see the new area team replacing or supplementing the work of the Kansas Area Dream Team?

[ANSWER 3 – BISHOP JONES]

I formed, at the request of the leadership of both conferences, I named a Dream Team that held their first meeting a few weeks ago. That was their first meeting. There are 28 members of that. The second meeting was scheduled for October 1st. Friday afternoon, I sent an email to all the members cancelling that meeting. Here's why – the Dream Team's mission, as set by the Focus Team and Leadership Team, was to think big thoughts about how to do mission and ministry better for the state of Kansas. The next sentence was important. This may or may not result in us becoming one annual conference.

Now, I think there are a lot of questions that are on the table. I was on Facebook yesterday and saw people already beginning to ask them. I think if we are going to enter into this new relationship with our sisters and brothers in Nebraska that putting the Dream Team process on hold is the right thing to do. It has not been disbanded or abolished, it's on hold. In other words, the next meeting has been cancelled. They may or may not meet again. But I think we need to be very careful to include people in Nebraska about discerning how best to go forward, and whether the Dream Team could meet again and add to this process or have a separate task, or whether this transition team will take its place, I just don't know. But I don't

want to take any steps at this point that would keep our process from going forward when it might overlap with what needs to include the Nebraskans. Next question.

[QUESTION 4 - READER]

I was trying to figure out the best way to explain what difference this combination of episcopal areas will have on the local church I serve. Could you shed some light on this subject? Will our local churches notice the difference?

[ANSWER 4 – BISHOP JONES]

The only direct noticeable difference is that you will see less of your bishop than you have seen in the past. The Nebraska Annual Conference is roughly comparable to each of the Kansas conferences. That means that the bishop's work load, beginning September 1st of 2012, by many measures, will increase by 50%. Let's take an example. A few months ago, back in May, I preached in Goodland, Kansas. I also have preached up in Wathena, Kansas. Those are on separate ends of the state. Now, sometimes I go to churches for anniversary celebrations. Sometimes when my schedule doesn't allow it, I send a DVD. There are churches that are really excited to have the bishop come and I'm really pleased – I love going to these churches and building relationships and seeing what it is that's going on and hearing their stories.

However, by adding an additional conference, there are more churches to go to and whoever is serving the Nebraska-Kansas area will be spread a little more thin. So, that will be the biggest difference that local churches see.

Secondly, sometimes members in local churches want a direct relationship with their bishop. Occasionally, I get an email directly from somebody. Most of the time, it's a district superintendent who responds. That won't change, but having a bishop spread over a third annual conference will make it very different.

Now, I think we ought to be honest to say that when this change comes, it puts a number of other questions on the table. Watching Facebook yesterday, also talking with my cabinet, all of a sudden people have been saying "well, maybe we ought to be thinking more about becoming one annual conference." Does that mean one annual conference for Kansas, or one annual conference for all of Kansas and Nebraska? I don't know, but if that were to be a change, then that really would affect the local churches. But again, nobody is saying that has to happen. At the moment, I'm going into the transition process assuming that the next bishop will be the bishop of the Nebraska-Kansas area with three annual conferences.

[QUESTION 5 - READER]

How will social media and internet technology be utilized in the transition?

[ANSWER 5 – BISHOP JONES]

I think that's very important. I think social media is already a factor here. The webcast yesterday was taped in advance and I did my tape a week before. I was in North Carolina at a meeting yesterday interviewing our students at Duke Divinity School but also participating in other meetings as a member of their board of visitors. So, I watched the announcement in the airport in Raleigh-Durham. I then got on an airplane. This airplane allowed for internet connection in flight, so all the way back to Kansas I was online on my Facebook account. I was watching a number of pastors who were tweeting and putting in Facebook comments about the webcast. I decided not to respond to many of them except the people who said they were going to be praying for me and for this process. I'm grateful for all of those prayers. But people who were speculating about what might happen, I wasn't going there.

But I'm really glad people are speculating because I think there needs to be as broad as possible a conversation and using Twitter, using email, Facebook, MySpace or whatever, I think all of those things to have as broad as possible a conversation is good. You see me doing a live and interactive webcast today. That's digital media. I think the other thing that the next bishop ought to be looking seriously at is expanding our use of teleconferencing. Already, my staff uses Skype. There was one day when I was at a meeting with the conference staff in Topeka and I think it was Lisa Diehl who couldn't get there from Wichita because she had other commitments. What did we do? I have a really big computer screen and we put a camera on it, and we let Lisa look at all of us in the conference office in Topeka and we could see her. She participated digitally in the meeting.

Well, with three conference offices in Lincoln, Topeka and Wichita, wherever the bishop is located, there ought to be a really high-quality digital communications system. Gas is getting more expensive. I know it's less expensive than last year, but it's coming back. We ought to be using digital communications to increase our connection and improve our connectivity. So, I think frankly one of the things that conferences ought to be looking at is ramping up their internet connections and their software that will allow for the highest possible communications.

I'm on the board at SMU. I was at a meeting with leaders of SMU one day. They used a new software that I had never used before that seems better than Skype. It probably costs money. But they also had a really cool camera. It was just me in Wichita and then 5 or 6 people in Dallas. Every time someone in Dallas started speaking, the camera swiveled, drew in close with a head shot on that person and the sound was incredibly good. I would love to have one of those cameras.

Okay, there are some other little toys that might make it better, but we have to evaluate whether the toys are actually going to increase our missional effectiveness and save us money or they just look glitzy. We'll see how it goes. Next question.

[QUESTION 6 - READER]

Bishop, after talking with some of my friends from Nebraska, they expressed that even though there were many “cool people” in Kansas, they felt their affinity was better with the Dakotas. Since the Dakotas are in a different jurisdiction, this union would have needed a constitutional amendment. Could this be a future option?

[ANSWER 6 – BISHOP JONES]

You know, changing jurisdictional lines is in fact an option. The process for that is really, really hard. It requires a constitutional amendment. There’s been a lot of talk for the last 15 years about abolishing jurisdictions all together. Quite frankly, it’s the United Methodists in the Southeast and the West who have the biggest attraction and commitment to keeping those jurisdictional lines. I think that there is a lot of affinity between Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas and Oklahoma quite frankly. The Great Plains has a culture that is very similar in all those areas. We as bishops didn’t have the ability to even touch that. We are under an obligation to make this change by September 1 of 2012.

So, if somebody wants to start a movement to either change the jurisdictional lines or abolish jurisdictions, go for it. When you all elected me as bishop, I lost my voice and vote at General Conference. Frankly, even though it’s General Conference that draws the jurisdictional lines, those sorts of changes aren’t going to happen unless the people who are affected say, “we really want it.” That’s not always the case, but for example, the two Kansas conferences were talking about becoming one conference between 1992 and 1996. That vote is decided at the jurisdiction. But when the two Kansas conferences didn’t agree on that, the jurisdiction was not about to force them to change. It needs to be collaborative and include the people who are most affected in making that decision. So, I think the whole thing about where the greatest affinity is on that needs a careful look but it’s not something the bishops are going to touch.

[QUESTION 7 - READER]

Bishop, the United Methodist Campus Ministry in Kansas is meeting today and they are watching this webcast. How does this change affect campus ministry?

[ANSWER 7 – BISHOP JONES]

Well, I think we have been doing campus ministry in Kansas on a statewide basis. That’s been going on a long time, and that’s good, mainly because we have seven state schools that are really statewide schools. There is sign on I-70 between Lawrence and Kansas City advertising Fort Hays State College and one of my nephews who grew up in Lawrence went to Fort Hays. Same thing back and forth, so we really are a statewide campus ministry system for our state schools. I won’t want to speculate about how this change matters to that but as long as there are two

annual conferences in Kansas, I think the campus ministry for the Kansas state schools is going to be unchanged.

Now, for our United Methodist colleges in Kansas, they also have excellent campus ministries. They're strong schools, but they are tied to each annual conference. So, while Baker does have a campus here in Wichita, really Baker's pull is to undergraduates around the Kansas City, Lawrence and eastern part of the state. Southwestern and Kansas Wesleyan are great schools. They tend to be more focused on the western part of the state. So, my guess is that a lot of our campus ministry will be unchanged. However, I want to emphasize something else. Yesterday in the webcast I made this point, and it's worth repeating.

In Kansas we have a really good and positive momentum. We've been working on four big questions, we're doing great things in revitalization, in starting new churches, in ethnic minority ministries, and in student ministries. Bridges to the Future was an incredibly successful campaign, thanks to the generosity of many, many congregations and individuals but also the hard work of many pastors who led their churches in raising these pledges. The money is coming in, we're refurbishing our camps, we're getting new buildings for campus ministry, we're doing lots of good things in starting new churches and in revitalization. I think that momentum positions us well to take the next step.

So, when I talk about dreaming big dreams, we're not starting from zero, we've got momentum. OK, I know I get to preaching on this stuff, but frankly I'm excited about being your bishop and I think great things are happening in Kansas and whoever the bishop will be in Nebraska will build on the momentum they have going there that Bishop Sherer talked about yesterday. So, I think these are three conferences with great possibilities for the future.

[QUESTION 8 - READER]

Bishop, where else in the United Methodist church does one bishop currently have supervisory responsibilities for three conferences?

[ANSWER 8 - BISHOP JONES]

In the United States, nowhere. There used to be a bishop with three conferences in northern and western New York, but they are -- because of rapidly decreasing in size over the last 10 years -- redrawing conference boundaries in a way that the jurisdiction is making them do. So, they are realigning episcopal areas and conference boundaries in that part of the state, and I don't think there is going to be a place. I cannot think of any other place in the United States. Now, in Congo and in the Philippines, bishops have multiple annual conferences but the annual conferences there function in different ways than they do here. I know one bishop in the Philippines who has 13 annual conferences. But, again transportation and communication is so difficult that it is the bishop who goes from one place to the

next rather than people coming together over great distances. So, if your question was really about the United States, this will be the only episcopal area with three annual conferences.

[QUESTION 9 - READER]

What can we learn from the worldwide church about how one bishop can effectively supervise such a large area?

[ANSWER 9 – BISHOP JONES]

That's an excellent question. I think those conversations with bishops in the Congo and Philippines are good conversations to have. They are conversations, though, that need to be culturally sensitive. For example, a bishop in the Congo – well, people accept the bishop's leadership there in a different way than they do for American bishops. Because culturally speaking, leadership in the United States is more accountable to the people. There are lessons to be learned, but you just have to do it.

Let me tell you since you raised the three conference question, I think how a bishop functions over three conferences will have to change from the way that either Bishop Sherer has done it or the way that I've done it. It means that there are three leadership teams, three conference centers, three conference staffs. I've had a lot of experience with that for the last five years. I have a life plan that talks about how I spend time in both Wichita and Topeka. I have used digital communication. We have a variety of meetings. Sometimes conference staffs meet by conference and sometimes they meet on an area basis. So, there are a lot of those questions that the next bishop is going to have to answer. I believe it's doable, quite frankly, but it will mean, because it's just one person and you have to take care of yourself and there are only so many hours in the day, that some things will have to be given up.

[QUESTION 10 - READER]

This is a related question in some ways. How are other jurisdictions handling the reduction in the number of bishops?

[ANSWER 10 – BISHOP JONES]

I hear only anecdotal reports from my colleagues in other areas. My sense is that we in the South Central have been the most pro-active. We've been the most open to listening to input. We've done the best job of thinking through lots of alternatives and we have acted most quickly. I know that the North Central bishops are probably next in line and they've just recently held a College meeting where that is being talked about. Frankly, we've been talking to them and sharing ideas back and forth. I don't think the West and Northeast are nearly as far along.

[QUESTION 11 - READER]

Given the decision, should the Kansas West Conference reconsider rebuilding our conference office?

[ANSWER 11 – BISHOP JONES]

When a building is destroyed by fire, you have an insurance settlement that allows for the rebuilding. At the same time, there were structural issues that were exposed and needed to be addressed. We knew about them, but they turned out to be a lot worse.

So, I think that the conference building ought to be repaired for two reasons. One, even if we were to decide eventually that it's not needed, we need to have it in shape to sell it. But also, this change is three years away. OK – two years and eleven months and 18 days away or something like that. It's 2012 people. We've got a great conference staff in the West conference that needs a place to work. They have undergone incredible difficulties in this transition. The fire was bad in what it destroyed, but frankly, the disruption was much longer lasting than I ever expected. I'm still in a temporary office and we finally got our internet up and working really well about three weeks ago. It just takes time when you're trying to do stuff on a temporary basis. So, my advice to anybody who is asking that question -- and it's really the conference trustees driving that process -- my advice is, let's keep on track to repair the building. Now, will the bishop be there after 2012? That's a decision that the transition team is going to have to address and make recommendations to the three annual conferences. I don't know the answer.

[QUESTION 12 - READER]

Would this new episcopal area be considered a missional reason for you to have a third four-year term in Kansas, that is, with the addition of Nebraska?

[ANSWER 12 – BISHOP JONES]

You know, that's a very interesting question in which I have a personal stake, but I'm not going there.

Let me describe how the process works. Every quadrennium, the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy interviews the continuing bishops. They ask us lots of questions. Most of them are missionally driven. How is your ministry going? What do you sense about your ability to be effective as an episcopal leader? On that committee there is a clergy and a lay person from each annual conference, and so I give a personal report. They also interview newly elected bishops. So, when I got elected in 2004, I was elected at 9:31 on Friday morning, Bishop Crutchfield about 2:30 that afternoon. He and I then went individually to the committee. They asked lots of questions. Of course, I was brand new at that point but they said "what are

your strengths, what would you bring to an area?" I described how I thought I might make a contribution to a number of different annual conferences and I listed what I knew about them and how my skills and strengths might make a difference. But, there's also a personal factor and I told them that because my wife had a construction company that was based in Kansas and Texas, the closest that I could be to Salina, Kansas, would make my life easier. I then left.

What the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy decides is up to them. It's confidential. So, whoever is asking this question, my advice is find out who your conference's two representatives are on the Jurisdictional Committee on Episcopacy and make your desires and wishes known. People, deep down I am a United Methodist elder. When I took my elder's ordination years ago, I made a commitment to go where the bishop sent me. Now that I'm a bishop, I have a commitment to go where the jurisdictional conference sends me. I am really at peace about where that is going to be. If that's in Kansas, great. If that's going to some other annual conference, great. If that's in the Nebraska-Kansas Area, great.

You know, my job is to do what I can to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world as an episcopal leader in this church. That's my commitment, and I'm really not in a position to comment on who the next bishop ought to be because, fundamentally, it's not my decision.

[QUESTION 13 - READER]

Bishop Bledsoe spoke of this decision creates an opportunity for new creative ways to serve Jesus Christ and he later spoke of self-determination. My question is, which are the creative ways that the bishops foresaw?

[ANSWER 13 – BISHOP JONES]

I don't think there are any specific creative ways. I have my ideas, but once again, self-determination means that you involve leaders elected by representatives who have the gifts to think creatively. So, I hope the transition team has people on it who are driven by the mission of the church, who know the context, and are willing to think outside the box.

Here's what the bishops meant and what Bishop Bledsoe was trying to convey in that webcast yesterday. Any time there is change, all of a sudden, it opens up new possibilities. Sometimes the change isn't very welcome. Sometimes it's something that you wouldn't have chosen and yet because it's change, you have to think differently. We have a new campaign by United Methodist Communications called "Rethink Church". That's really hard if it's the same old, same old, day in, day out, but if all of a sudden you're picked up and moved to a different place with a different opportunity and different challenges and the old ways don't work anymore because you're in a new place, then all of a sudden it's time to think outside the box.

Our sense is that by creating a new episcopal area, it gives the annual conferences that kind of creative space. Now, the transition team could recommend that we do church the same old way that we've always done it in all three conferences, and it's just the new bishop who has to figure out how to make that work. That's a possibility, and if we don't want to make any changes, we don't have to. The new bishop can figure out how to be the best possible bishop she or he can be for that new area.

On the other hand, there will be people who want to think outside the box and do things differently. Let me tell you my daughter's story. Marynell was a preacher's kid. She had always lived in a parsonage, she loved being a preacher's kid. In Commerce, she used to go between Sunday school and church to the pastor's office and hang out there. I then took a faculty appointment at Perkins School of Theology. My family really didn't care about my commute to SMU; what they cared about was finding a church that would be great for them, and then schools that would be good for the kids. So we moved to Highland Village and attended church at Trietsch Memorial United Methodist Church.

On a Chrysalis flight one time, Marynell gave a talk where she talked about what a crisis that was for her faith. Several things were different. She had to go someplace else between Sunday school and church because her daddy wasn't the pastor anymore. She also had to figure out why she was going to church. Did she really want to be a Christian because she loved the Lord? Yes, she had been through confirmation in Commerce, but all of a sudden everything about going to church was different. It wasn't the church her daddy was pastor of. This was a huge crisis for her, but the way she tells it, her faith was strengthened and she became a stronger Christian and a better disciple because of going through that change. Did she choose the change? No. Did she make the most of the change? You bet. I think that same sort of opportunity is ahead of us, as we talk about how to do church in Kansas and Nebraska differently that this is an opportunity to think outside the box to try some new ways.

[QUESTION 14 - READER]

You've talked a lot about ministry at the conference level; how would you foresee the districts being handled in the new larger area -- perhaps streamlining the role of district superintendents, doing things in a different way? Could you talk about that a little bit?

[ANSWER 14 - BISHOP JONES]

A number of years ago, a group of us from Kansas went down to the School of Congregational Development when it was held in Dallas. A lot of the cabinet went, other people - leaders from the Kansas conferences went. I gathered them together on Sunday night as it was ending, to process 'what have you learned?' 'What do you think?' 'How is life going to be different for you back home?' At that point, Kent

Melcher was the superintendent of the Topeka District, and in front of that group of people he said, "Bishop, this is a great stuff. We have learned a lot. My question is, especially for district superintendents, what are we going to *quit* doing so that we can start doing some of this stuff?"

That's a question that has haunted me. Then four district superintendents and I went to a special conference on how to make appointments better. And one of the presenters there said that the role of the district superintendent is to be the chief missional strategist for that district. Wow – that hit me like a ton of bricks. Because too often district superintendents are weighed down by the bureaucracy, by the forms, by the conflicts, by the complaints, by personnel crises. Where do they get the time to step back and to say 'what's God calling us to do in this district?' Now, I've been appointing district superintendents who have that missional vision, and yet the current way we do church weighs them down. So we've been in a conversation – what can you quit doing in order to do more of the missional stuff to really make a difference? Where is your time and energy best spent?

I frankly have floated an idea with the Dream Team and with the extended cabinet: what would it mean if we reduced the number of districts in Kansas from eleven to six? That would mean each district superintendent would have 130 churches or 120 churches. That means that we would have to have other leaders in the districts doing some supervision work - holding charge conferences and things like that. Now, I've told everybody involved: I'm not committed to this; it's a thought experiment. But it's one way of introducing enough change.

You see, in Kansas, when we went from seven districts to six in the Kansas West conference, the role of the DS didn't change, it just got harder because you had to do more of the same old stuff. If you really want to change the role of DS and the identity of the district, then you really have to introduce some more significant change. So that idea is being talked about.

Other annual conferences – I know Indiana is doing that, I think the Dakotas are doing some of this, California-Nevada is doing some of it. We ought to learn from those conferences and say, "What's been your experience down that road?" It makes some sense to me, on the other hand, maybe there's too much that's lost in that kind of change. I really believe that our connectional system is the right way to do church. But I also think the connectional system as it was designed in 1900 and redesigned in 1968... well, it's the 21st century, people. We need to look hard at how to be most effective and fruitful for our mission in the 21st century.

[QUESTION 15 - READER]

If the three conferences remain separate, would there be three separate annual conference gatherings, much like there are now? Or will the three conferences meet all together once a year to do the work of the two states and the three conferences?

[ANSWER 15 – BISHOP JONES]

Those are great questions that I think the three annual conferences will decide over time. To remain three is sort of the default mode. And, if that happens, my normal pattern – well, right now I do Kansas West and then Kansas East. Some years there's been a week break in between (that helps the communications staff, by the way), but some years it's been back-to-back. It's quite possible that if we continue with three annual conferences, the bishop would do one, then the next, then the next in three consecutive weeks in May and June. It's for that reason that the bishop gets to set the dates of annual conference.

However, there has been a time in the past when Kansas East and Kansas West have held joint sessions of Annual Conference. Frankly, I think that was around the idea of becoming one annual conference, either before that decision was made or maybe once afterwards to see if there were ways of working together. Meeting together as one annual conference, if you're not actually one annual conference, well... there might be good reasons for that; I'd have to hear them. Once again, that's something that the transition team will be looking at, I suspect, and will make recommendations to each of the three annual conferences over the next several years.

[QUESTION 16 - READER]

Bishop, saying the area wants to move more quickly than 2012 would it be possible to form one annual conference before 2012?

[ANSWER 16 – BISHOP JONES]

Wow. You know, I have not screened these questions ahead of time, people, so let me think about that one for a minute!

Here's the process: normally the merger of annual conferences is something that the ones that are affected talk about and decide on. It requires a vote of the jurisdictional conference because in our discipline it's the jurisdiction that draws the boundaries. Hence, the last time we did a merger the two Missouri conferences voted – or maybe it was the Arkansas; those are two mergers that have happened recently – both annual conference submitted a joint request to the jurisdiction for them to merge. So if you wanted to move very quickly, you'd almost have to get that done in 2011? 2010? That would be *really* quick for all of this to be thought through.

And then the normal thing would be to take it to the 2012 jurisdictional conference. Calling a special session of the jurisdictional conference is a really hard thing. The bishops can do it, so it's technically possible, but golly. It's a lot of time and money, and normally these sorts of things ought to be thought through very carefully. They'll be controversial!

I know that there are people in Kansas who think becoming one annual conference is a bad idea. There are people who think it's the way of the future and a great idea! Setting up those conversations so we can hear each other and do it – whichever we do, remain the same or become one conference in Kansas – is something that needs a lot of conversation and careful thought. Most of all, it needs to be done for missional reasons. Somebody needs to be able to articulate very clearly our mission as United Methodist Christians will be stronger if we do it this way. That's the point.

Next question. Great questions, by the way! You guys have done a wonderful job; thanks for sending them in! Okay, do we have another one?

[READER]

Yes, we do. We have a couple more questions; this one is about anxiety and then a follow-up one about the kingdom of God.

[BISHOP JONES]

Is it about *my* anxiety, or somebody else's anxiety?

[READER]

Well, actually, it could include yours.

[BISHOP JONES]

Okay.

[QUESTION 17 - READER]

Even before the announcement, there was great anxiety about merger in Kansas. I believe mergers should be based on common ministry and not necessity, and especially not because 'we did not have any other options; the bishops made us do it!' I know that the College of Bishops have no hidden agenda. But did they consider that this new arrangement may mean that we would feel it necessary for the conferences to merge? If so, how is the College planning to calm that anxiety?

[ANSWER 17 – BISHOP JONES]

Wow. Let me first of all address the 'no hidden agenda' claim. That's exactly right. People, I hope that as we talk about this, that you trust me. I do not tell lies. I don't always tell you everything I know, but if I say it, it's because I believe it's the truth. I believe the bishops looked hard at all of the possible options, and that all of us who had a vote – the 11 active bishops – voted with the best possible intentions. Do we all have our own biases and own approaches and our own way of ranking the

various criteria? You bet. We're human beings. And yet, there's no hidden agenda here that say that the bishops are forcing anything else to happen.

This really is about self-determination. And we believe and we know that the best way forward is for the three conferences to grab hold of this process and to pray, talk, think, discern, dream, and then act. And so that's absolutely important. Can one bishop supervise three annual conferences? You bet. It is quite possible. Is it the best way forward? Well, the next bishop is going to inherit three conferences, unless the three conferences decide to do something different. That's ok! There is no necessity here. I've been in lots of private conversations about whether or not the two Kansas conferences should become one conference, and my answer has always been, "let's think of how to do mission and ministry better." There's no financial necessity. You're not doing this for the bishop's convenience.

There are things we can do better together; hence, a number of years ago we set up an area communications office. That's because the West conference was better at communications and the East needed help. And so an area communications office has proven very beneficial. In the same way, we set up an area office of new church development. That's because the East was ahead of the West on this one, and the West needed help. Those are things we can do together. We do campus ministry together. That's important. We do appointments together. That's important. You know, I think that there are some things we do together better.

However, in the East conference when the treasurer retired, I put on the table, "Do you want to have a single conference treasurer for both conferences?" The answer was, "No thank you!" That's fine. I thought the question ought to be raised. In the West, the treasurer has submitted an intention to retire. Not—well, it's a complicated thing, but basically her husband is retiring and for a variety of reasons she needs to scale back. So we're beginning to talk about a new conference treasurer and director of administrative ministries. I've put on the table for that group, "Do you want to have a single one for both conferences?" So far, nobody's biting on that, but I thought it was important to ask the question.

The College of Bishops is going to lower anxiety by the way in which [Nebraska Bishop] Ann Sherer and I lead the three conferences. She's done a webcast earlier this morning and will be making visits to all of the districts in her conference. I'm doing a webcast today; we're going to have a meeting of the orders and fellowship in each conference on October 6th and 7th. My guess is there will be some conversation there. October 3rd and 10th I'll be meeting with the leadership teams.

I've already talked to the extended cabinet. I've placed phone calls to the four members of the representatives of the jurisdictional episcopacy committee. Part of the anxiety is who you all – the ones watching this – talk about it. If you say, "You know, it's going to be okay. There's a process in place. God's leading us!" then you can help with that process.

I hope you can also build trust. If you have questions, then contact me. We're doing a lot of that today, but I hope nobody goes to a bad place of saying, "Those bishops had a hidden agenda, that I know that it was already decided."

For example, somebody asked me, "Bishop, when you called the meetings of the orders, did you know that this was going to be decided and that there would be a Kansas-Nebraska Area?" The answer is, no, I didn't know that. That was a separate track. I've been talking to leaders in the boards of ordained ministry and extended cabinet for three years. I'm supposed to call a meeting of the orders annually! I have not done that yet. This'll be the first time! And so we decided this summer – in June – that it was a needed thing. Okay, Susan Steuber got to me in August and said, "Scott? Are you calling a meeting of the orders or not?" She's the one that keeps my calendar and she said, "You gotta make up your mind!" And so, mid-August I said, "we're gonna do it." I put everything in place. Why? Because I think the clergy need to gather for a variety of reasons. Then August 31st the College made this decision. Did I know how it was going to go? No, I really didn't. I went into that meeting not knowing where my colleagues were going to come out because we had talked about a lot of options and there were other options that I thought might be the way we ended up. There was really genuine debate and discussion. Okay, next question.

[QUESTION 18 - READER]

There's one last question and just a few minutes to respond. But speaking of building the kingdom of God, and United Methodist churches' ability and resources and spiritual resolve to do this, could you speak for a moment as we conclude how do you see the spirit of God moving through this whole process from General Conference to Jurisdiction and now as we come to this place?

[ANSWER 18 – BISHOP JONES]

That's a great question and a place I'm happy to end up. I think that the best days of the United Methodist Church are before it. We're moving into the 21st century. We in the United States have been in decline for a long time. But there are a number of things – the Four Areas of Focus, talking about developing principled leaders, talking about starting new churches, talking about addressing people in poverty, talking about global health – these are things that provide a clear focus. There's lots of great stuff going on, from the Nothing but Nets program, to the Path One program, that is going on all over the church.

The worldwide nature of the church is something I'm giving leadership to. Our relationship with our sisters and brothers in Africa, Asia and Europe is really important and strengthens it. The Kansas West conference is talking about developing a partnership with the Zimbabwe East conference that will be just full of good stuff both for the Zimbabweans and for the people in the Kansas West conference. I think the other factor here is that there's great momentum. We know change has to come.

If you keep doing the things you've always done you're going to get the same results. I told both conferences in Kansas in 2005 that they'd been in 30 years of decline. I showed them the numbers. Oh yeah, we have lots of growing churches, but we have too many churches that are doing maintenance – they're simply growing older, some of them are declining, we've had to close a few. I think the future is great. But people, the future means change.

I've not been introducing change too rapidly, I hope. But by golly, if you've been around me at all, you know that I've been changing some things. From the way we do appointments to the importance of campus ministry, to refurbishing our camps, to strengthening our ethnic ministries – it's all important.

We United Methodists have the best grasp of the gospel of any Christian body I know. God expects more of us than we've been giving for the last 30 or 40 years. This change – a new episcopal area – well, it's change and nobody likes it. But – I keep coming back to this – change provides space for creative, new approaches. I'm interested in how the Holy Spirit is going to lead this process; I'm available to give it my very best. I'm going to be engaged with the transition team, and Bishop Sherer is. I look forward to the challenge of prayerfully and thoughtfully figuring out 'how can we best do United Methodist church in Nebraska and Kansas for the 21st century?'

Thanks for being a part of this. This webcast is just the beginning of a longer conversation – actually yesterday was the beginning but for us in Kansas this is the next step. I'm going to be out of town for a long time, so if you're trying to call my office, hey, I've got other places to be for a while, including a week of vacation. But when I'm back, engaged with leaders in various settings, I'm really happy to talk to you about it.

Thanks.

[END]