

February 12, 2024

To: Delegates of the South Central Jurisdiction

From: SCJ Episcopacy Committee



We are in a time of extraordinary change in our beloved UMC. We have weathered the storm of disaffiliations and are now, as a smaller church, exploring new opportunities and grappling with institutional adjustments. Amidst these changes, we maintain a strong and fervent faith in the work of the Holy Spirit. We trust in the promise of Ephesians 2, that we are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”

We believe in the future strength and fruitfulness of the churches of the South Central Jurisdiction. To be well positioned for the future, we need to make adjustments on every level of the church, including episcopal deployment.

We intend to recommend to the SCJ Conference that there be no election of bishops in 2024. This recommendation is informed by the high number of disaffiliations in our Jurisdiction, the changing landscape of the church, and the projected financial pressures on the episcopal fund.

Bishop Jimmy Nunn, currently serving the Oklahoma, Oklahoma Indian Missionary, and Northwest Texas annual conferences, has announced his intention to retire as of August 31, 2024. As a result, there will be seven active bishops in the SCJ available for assignment in the next quadrennium.

The 2024 General Conference could always act in a way that would change our thinking. But given what we know today, as we consider ministry affinities, geographic proximity, and relative annual conference strength, we intend to make the following recommendations to the 2024 SCJC regarding episcopal areas:

1. One bishop assigned to the Arkansas Episcopal Area and the Oklahoma Episcopal Area (OK and OIMC annual conferences)
2. One bishop assigned to the Dallas-Fort Worth Episcopal Area (Central Texas, North Texas, and Northwest Texas annual conferences or their successor)
3. One bishop assigned to the Houston Episcopal Area (Texas Annual Conference)
4. One bishop assigned to the Great Plains Episcopal Area
5. One bishop assigned to the Louisiana Episcopal Area
6. One bishop assigned to the Missouri Episcopal Area
7. One bishop assigned to the New Mexico Episcopal Area and the Rio Texas Episcopal Area

We make these recommendations after extensive consultation with the SCJ college of bishops and in line with their recommendations to us. These recommendations as well as the specific bishops assigned to each area, will need to be voted on by the Jurisdictional Conference in July.

We wanted to make these recommendations public now so that delegates can digest and explore the possibilities and challenges they represent. This announcement also gives annual conference staffs and leadership as much lead time as possible to prepare for the new alignment. We realize this is just one step into the future and other configurations might best serve the church in 2028 and 2032.

We ask for your prayers going forward, for discernment, for hopefulness, for grace with one another as we serve Jesus together.