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Introduction

In The United Methodist Church, the roles and responsibilities of the district superintendent (DS) have, as they have for all clergy, dramatically changed over the past decade. In general, the DS, in partnership with the bishop, has responsibility for supervision of the life of the church in a particular geographic location, a district. In response to a variety of social, cultural, and economic changes, the boundaries of many districts have shifted (district mergers and realignments) and role expectations for supervision have shifted, such as how, how often, and with whom supervision is performed.

This research examines how these shifting roles and responsibilities are managed by DSes across the denomination. Telephone interviews were conducted during the summer of 2010 with a random sample of DSes in the United States. Findings from these interviews indicate that district superintendents are indeed busy. For some, the changes occurring across the denomination have created a situation where there are more tasks to accomplish than time to do them. For others, the changes have ushered in new ways of thinking about and doing the work of the superintendent.

This paper examines one portion of the district superintendent survey results. In this paper we examine the roles and responsibilities of DSes. What do the DSes believe their role to be, do DSes have clarity about their role? From the perspective of the DSes, how does the role compare to the DS role 10 years ago? How do DSes allocate their limited time to the myriad tasks assigned them? With so many competing demands for their attention, do DSes experience role conflict? These questions are important to examine as the church continues to restructure itself. Many districts and annual conferences have made a variety of large and small changes to how the superintendency operates. What do those changes mean for the district superintendent?

Methodology

Telephone interviews were conducted with a random sample of district superintendents. As of July 1, 2010 there were 456 district superintendents on record at the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry. A random sample of 208 district superintendents was drawn from the population to achieve representativeness¹. Interviews were completed with 161 district superintendents, achieving a 77.4 percent response rate. Most of the interviews (159) were with the current district superintendents, but two were conducted with the previous DS for that area.

¹ At a confidence level of 95 percent and a confidence interval of 5.

The primary research objective was to understand what functions the district superintendents were performing, how those functions have changed, how DSes are managing those changes, and how these changes may affect the UM connection.

Instrument

The instrument contained 14 sections of questions: appointment term, district description, district mergers, DS roles and responsibilities, job satisfaction, time allocation, clergy supervision, clergy misconduct allegations, appointment process, burnout inventory, decision making, missional role, role ambiguity and role conflict, and a demographics section. All sections of the interview and measures are described in Appendix A. Interviews were standardized and utilized both closed and open-ended questions.

A survey administration tool, SnapSurveys, was utilized to develop the instrument and standardize the script and question ordering. An introductory letter was sent via e-mail informing the DS of the study's purpose, requesting their participation in an interview, and suggesting that they respond with a date and time most convenient to them for the interview. Some DSes responded to the introductory letter, others scheduled time when the interviewer reached them for the first time on the telephone, and some simply participated at the time the interviewer made the first call. The average duration of the interview was 45 minutes, however, a few of the earliest interviews were more than 90 minutes long.

Two of those interviewed were the previous DS for that district, the rest of the respondents (159) were the current district superintendents. The demographics of those interviewed are consistent with the population of DSes. The majority of the district superintendents interviewed were male (71%, 114) and 29 percent (47) were female. Well over half, 58 percent (93) were over the age of 55. The three youngest DSes were between 36 and 45 years old. Fully 81 percent (129) were white, 11 percent (17) African American/Black, 4 percent (7) Asian, and 4 percent (7) were Hispanic/Latino, Native American or multiracial. The racial breakdown is consistent with the demographics of the DS reported by the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (GCSRW) earlier in 2010. GCSRW found that 74 percent of the 467 DS were men, 26 percent were women, and 81 percent of DSes were white.

PART I:
ROLE EXPECTATIONS

District Responsibility

The district superintendents interviewed represented 51 annual conferences (three DSes did not identify their annual conference). The amount of experience the DS had in the district ranged widely from as little as six weeks in the position up to seven years in the district served at the time of the interview. Just over half, 51 percent (81) had been the DS for this district for two years or less. Most DSes represented one district only, however, 6 percent (9) were DS for two or more districts (one DS had three districts). Of those nine DSes, five also share some part of these or other districts. Among those that are responsible for one district, five share responsibility for the district with at least one other DS.

The 161 DSes interviewed reported having supervision responsibility for a total of 11,042 clergy. The number of clergy per DS ranged from 32 to 210 clergy, the average number supervised is 68.58 (mean) per DS.

DSes had difficulty, however, identifying the number of clergy candidates for which they have responsibility. Many DSes seemed to guess at the number of clergy candidates under their supervision. Two did not know how many candidates are in their district and did not offer a response. The DSes reported supervising between one and 65 clergy candidates, on average 13.94 candidates. One DS reported several dozen candidates but that all supervision was conducted by the associate.

There is a positive correlation between the number of clergy and the number of candidates, meaning that as the number of clergy the DS supervises increases so does the number of candidates the DS supervises increase (Pearson Correlation.398, $p < .01$). Where there are few clergy, there are also likely to be few candidates.

The DSes report supervision of 33 to 203 churches in five to 148 charges. On average DSes supervise 75.44 churches (mean) in 56.45 charges. Between one and 126 charge conferences were held in 2009 – the average number of charge conferences per district was around 47. In some cases, charge conferences were held in clusters rather than individually. Excluding those who have been DS less than one year, the vast majority (69%) presided over 100 percent of the charge conferences in their district and on average DSes presided over 89 percent of the charge conferences.

DSes have responsibility for a large pool of people. On average DSes have supervision responsibility for 69 clergy, 14 candidates, 75 churches, and 47 charges. What is expected of the DS in relationship to those they supervise differs and is addressed in the next section.

Primary Role

The relevant literature about the role of the DS indicates that no clear agreement is evident in the role and expectations for the position, but there are varied perspectives. Many argue that the DS position must be changed. What and how change is to take place is contested. For example, William Lawrence (2000) and Jack Tuell (2002) believe the role of the DS is essential, Russell Richey (2009) argues for redefinition of the role while Donald Hayes (2012) argues for discontinuation of the role. Often missing from these discussions is the viewpoint of the DSes.

Tuell (2002) writes that the district superintendent “fills perhaps the most crucial role in connectional United Methodism. In many ways, he or she *is* the connector, the visible symbol to the laity of the local church of United Methodism as a whole” (p. 107 emphasis in original). It is precisely this importance of the DS role that leads many to recommend changes to the district superintendency. For example, Richey (2009) in a reconsideration of the district superintendency calls for *itinerant* presiding superintendent – itinerant (Word), *presiding* elder (Sacrament), *superintendent* similar to Anglicanism’s suffragan episcopacy (Order) (p89).

On the other hand, Hayes (2010) suggests a revamping that would eliminate the DS office. He contends that the DS has little direct authority and that the primary source of authority of the DS lies in the fact that “laity and pastors know that the bishop relies heavily on the superintendent for counsel in appointments” (p.108). In other words, Hayes suggests, the DS does not “have the authority to tell pastors what to do,” but does have the power to make them do what he/she wants. Hayes argues for increasing the number of bishops in order to make clergy appointments and since most of the district superintendent’s time and focus are spent on the clergy appointment process, increasing the number of bishops would eliminate the need for the district superintendent office.

In his research exploring the views of the church about the superintendency, William Lawrence (2000) found the top four priorities for DS that were identified by respondents (superintendents, bishops, pastors, and lay chairs of committees) are “attending cabinet meetings with the bishop and other superintendents; training pastors to be enablers and resource persons for the laity in defining mission, setting goals, and evaluating achievement; working with conflicted churches to analyze their weaknesses or problems, and to develop constructive solutions; and conducting charge conferences in the local churches of the district” (p.48). Lovett Weems, Jr. (2005) surveyed 49 of the 83 newly appointed DSes about their first year in office. He found that the most important activities of the DS are building

trust and relationships, making good appointments, being present and visible, and promoting clergy effectiveness and accountability.

Is the primary function or role of the DS in appointment making as suggested by Hayes, or in some other function(s)? Tuell sees the function of the DS as a “pastor to pastors and their families” (p.108). Arthur Gafke (2000) argues that the defining dimension of the district superintendency is prayer and liturgy; these are “the hub from which all of the elder’s activities emanate” (p.11). Similarly, Fred Price lists “provider of sacraments” in the top of the list of primary roles of the presiding elder office (Price in Richey 2009, p. 84). But, Lawrence (2000) observes that “the capacity to mentor clergy and communities of faith in spiritually centering upon the church’s goals is a leadership gift critically needed by the denomination from its superintendents.” Richey sees the DS as the “regional strategist”(p.72). Tom Frank (1997) describes five basic tasks of the DS: working with pastors and handling complaints against clergy, working with local church administration, handling all church property, oversee programs – resources in annual conference or agencies passed to local churches, and starting new churches (p.221).

In this research, we assessed what DSes believe are the annual conference’s expectations of the role of DS and whether those expectations are congruent with the DSes own expectations.

Four possible roles were listed and DSes were asked “to what extent is your role as DS understood by your annual conference as...” for each of those roles. A rating of a ‘great extent’ is given a value of 4 and ‘no extent’ a value of 1. The, DSes were asked “which of the four roles would you say is your primary role?” The roles were again listed with the addition of “other” as an option.

Shown in Table 1, the majority of the DSes perceive that the annual conference understands their role, to a great extent, as supervisor of clergy (68%, 110). Nearly 60 percent (96) respond that the annual conference understands their role to a great extent as representing the clergy in your district to the bishop and nearly 59 percent (93) to a great extent understand the role as an extension of the office of the bishop. Only 39 percent of the DSes respond that that annual conference understands their role to a great extent as a supporter of local congregations, but over half responded that that role is understood to a moderate extent.

Table 1. Possible DS roles - extent Annual Conference understands as DS role

	Great Extent	Moderate Extent	A little Extent	No Extent	N Responses	Mean
Representing clergy in your district to the Bishop	59.6% (96)	34.2% (55)	6.2% (10)	0	161	3.53
Supervisor of clergy	68.8% (110)	30.6% (49)	.6% (1)	0	160	3.68
Supporter of local congregations	39.4% (63)	52.5% (84)	8.1% (13)	0	160	3.31
Extension of the office of the bishop	58.5% (93)	29.6% (47)	10.7% (17)	1.3% (2)	159	3.45

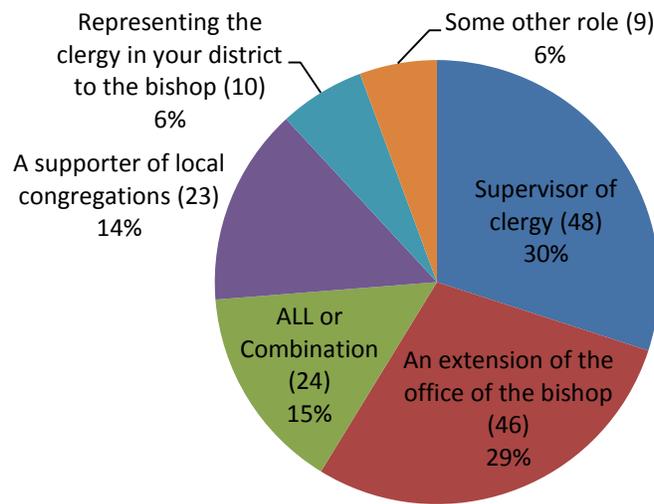
Of these four roles, only one received any rating of “no extent.” For two DSes, the annual conference does not understand the DS role to be an extension of the office of the bishop.

Calculating the mean of responses shows that all four of the roles are understood at least to a moderate extent (a value of 3 is moderate extent) as part of the role of the DS. Supervisor of clergy received the highest average rating (3.68) and supporter of local congregations had the lowest average rating (3.31).

When asked which of these roles the DS would say is primary, one clear role did not emerge. In fact, 15 percent (24) of the DS could not select one primary and instead responded that all or some combination of two or more roles is primary.

The most common (30%, 48) was supervisor of clergy followed closely by the role of extension of the office of the bishop (29%, 46). Supporter of local congregations was rated as the primary role by 14 percent (23) of the DS. Only 6 percent (10) of the DSes perceive their primary role as representing clergy in the district to the bishop.

Figure 1. DS Identified Primary Role



Six percent (9) of DSEs described some other role as their primary role:

- “Improve the effectiveness and mission of the church”
- “Appointment maker, supervisor, and strategist”
- “Conflict manager”
- “Deployment of pastors”
- “Educator of the clergy and laity”
- “Empowering the pastors and local churches to change”
- “Helping my clergy and congregations to be effective in ministry”
- “Revitalizer of congregations”
- “Spiritual director, vision caster, consultant for church growth”

In general, the DS identified the role expectation of the annual conference that was consistent with their own role expectation. The many who selected more than one primary role, may indicate that these roles are competing for the attention of the DS. In any situation, there are many important duties to be completed, often in short periods of time. Positions are often designed to meet the needs of a variety of roles. Everything assigned, however, cannot be the primary or of top priority without producing strain on the DS and upon his or her ability to perform all roles effectively and efficiently.

Role Changes

DSEs who served for more than one year as DS were asked how their role had changed over the past two to five years. Of the 120 DS responses, nearly 13 percent (15) stated there had been no or little change to the DS role over this time period.

Among those who described a change, 22 percent (24) described a personal change or shift in how that DS understood their own role as DS rather than describing how the district superintendency has changed (77%, 81). The personal changes included, for example, describing that their understanding of the position has increased, that they have gotten to know the clergy and churches over the years, or that they have become more effective in their ministry.

Other DSEs described a variety of ways in which the district superintendency has changed over the past two to five years. One change described by many is a focus that has shifted more toward the congregation and less toward the clergy, more on mission, vision, and strategic planning and less on administration and bureaucracy. The changes in the interactions with clergy are often described as now focused on coaching, mentoring, leadership development, and working as a team. DSEs describe being more engaged instead of being “the man” or a figurehead, and more focus on being relational and connective. Many describe focusing less on conflict intervention and conflict management. Several describe having many more responsibilities, workload, and tasks especially those DSEs who are now responsible for more than one district.

Two common ways DSEs describe for adapting to the changed roles are to prioritize and delegate. Similarly, many DSEs describe forming partnerships and involving others and creating opportunities for group rather than individual meetings. DSEs try to be more proactive and less reactive to crisis. Some of the DSEs intentionally focus more on the “high potential” churches, those that are making efforts, and less on the “legacy” churches or those that are not making efforts. Several have focused on their own skill building as well as training for churches and clergy.

DSEs were then asked how the DS role today compares to the role of the DS five to 10 years ago. Overwhelmingly, DSEs describe the current position as more relational, consultative, “hands on,” and involving teamwork compared to the more distant authoritarian, figure head of five to ten years ago. The DS is described as a leader, in a leadership position, and is helping to develop leadership. DSEs commonly see their role as much more supervisory than before and more of a coach, mentor, and encourager.

DSes used language that described the role of the DS five to 10 years ago as an administrative function, or that DSes handled more administrative work. Several DSes stated that the DS five to 10 years ago was respected and had authority, unlike today where DSes believe there is less respect for the office and the DS commands less authority than previously.

Many described—as a result of the elimination of conference staff positions—that the DS has more responsibilities at the conference level or responsibility for “conference work.” One DS described the role as “conference superintendents assigned primary responsibility for a district instead of the other way around.” Some simply stated that there are more responsibilities than before. A few cited having more churches and clergy, more districts, and more geography than previously. DSes also pointed to a changed culture and climate from five to 10 years ago, there is more litigation, a more litigious society, there is concern about the economy, and financial issues are more common than before.

Task Time Allocation

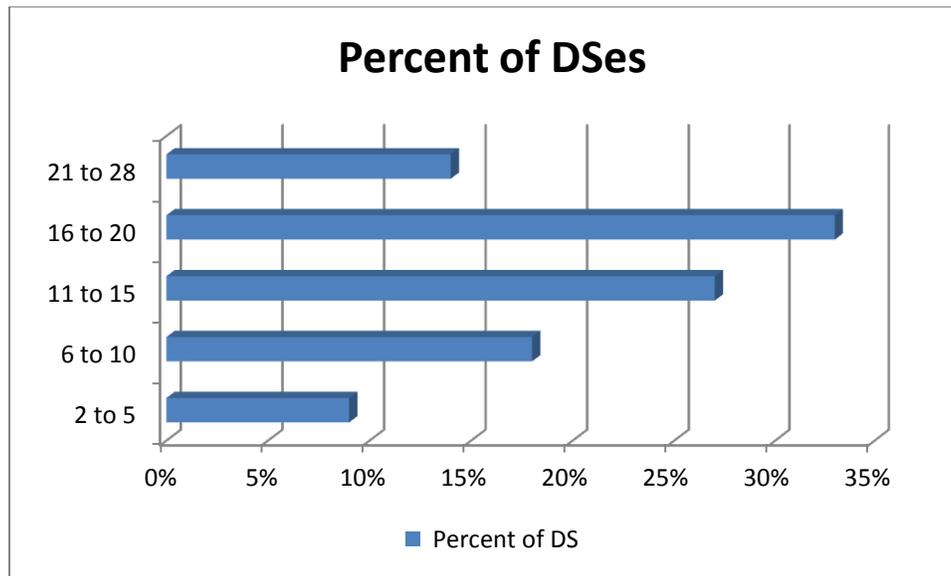
The earliest, often cited, and well respected research on the district superintendency was conducted by Murray Leiffer² in 1970 with 475 district superintendents. As have others since then, Leiffer found discrepancies between the priorities of the DS and how the time of the DS is actually spent. Another measure for understanding the role of the DS is through the amount of time spent in various activities. District superintendents may supervise a large geographic area necessitating frequent travel. This is an activity that may consume vast amounts of DS time.

There is wide variation among DSes in the average number of days travelled per month. On average, DSes reported traveling between two to 28 days per month, the mean number of days is 15.35 days. In other words, on average DSes spend half of the month traveling. Illustrated in Figure 2, nearly half of DSes travel more than half of the days (16 – 28) in a month.

The amount of travel appears to be consistent with the understanding of the relational aspect of the DS role as supervisor. In order to participate in this hands-on aspect of supervision, the DS must travel to the clergy. Needing to attend multiple meetings was a commonly cited stressor in the Center for Health's clergy assessment (General Board of Pension and Health Benefits). Likely, travel adds additional stress on top of the stress of the meeting.

²Results of his research informed the development of the *Book of Discipline* sections on the DS (Richey 2009).

Figure 2. Average Number of Days DSEs Travel per Month



A responsibility that consumes less time than it perhaps should is renewal and study leaves. The *Book of Discipline* allows up to three months of leave for the purposes of “reflection, study, and self-renewal” (§425). As expected, the vast majority who had served as DS in the district for 1-3 years had not taken renewal leave. Among those who had been DS in the district for four or more year, 49 percent had not taken renewal leave and less than one-third (28%, 8) had any plans to take renewal leave.

The United Methodist *Book of Discipline* (2008) §§ 419 – 425 identifies five task areas of the DS. Those task areas are (1) spiritual and pastoral leadership; (2) supervision; (3) personnel management; (4) administration; and (5) programmatic oversight. DSEs were asked to identify the percentage of their time overall, to equal 100 percent of their time³, spent in each area and any additional areas not listed. The interviewer provided examples to the DS when clarification of task areas was needed (See Appendix B for examples).

Shown in table 2, there is a wide range in the amount of time each DS spends in each area. For example, the widest gap is in “Other” where as little as 3 percent to as much as 60 percent of the DS time is spent in “Other” activities. In other words, some DS spend very little time outside of the five main tasks while other DSEs spend a great deal of time outside of the five main tasks.

³ Most of the responses equaled between 99 percent and 101 percent of the DS time. There were five DS where the sum of their time spent was less than 100 percent; allocating only 80 to 95 percent of their time and six DS who allocated 105 to 120 percent of time. Therefore, these 11 responses were necessarily excluded from the time allocation calculation.

Table 2. Percentage of Time Spent: Least/Greatest Amount of Time

	Range		Mean	Std.
Spiritual and pastoral leadership	3%	40%	17.01	7.283
Supervision	10%	60%	25.94	9.137
Personnel management	5%	60%	22.17	9.052
Administration	5%	50%	22.79	9.321
Programmatic oversight	0%	30%	11.31	6.216
Other	3%	60%	16.07	14.469

We know that the importance of something does not necessarily translate into a greater amount of time spent in that area. Tasks that are more difficult, regardless of importance, are likely to take up more time than tasks which are easy but could be very important.

The least amount of time on average is spent in programmatic oversight – 11.31 percent of time. The amount of time spent by each DS in programmatic oversight ranges from 0 percent to 30 percent. This represents a fairly small difference in amount of time spent when compared to other areas. The largest difference, 55 percent, is in personnel management where as little as 5 percent is spent in personnel management and as much as 60 percent of the DS time is spent in personnel management.

Following programmatic oversight, on average DSES spend 17 percent of their time in spiritual and pastoral leadership. Some DSES spend as little as 3 percent of their time in spiritual and pastoral leadership and up to 40 percent of their time. Just under one-fourth of DS time is spent in each of the areas of personnel management (mean 22.17%) and administration (22.79%). The range of amount of time spent is similar, the least amount of time spent is 5 percent for each of these areas and up to 50 percent of DS time is spent in administration and up to 60 percent of DS time is spent in personnel management.

The greatest amount of time spent on average is in supervision. On average, about one-fourth (mean 25.94) of the DSES' time is spent in supervision, but there is a wide variation by DS. Some spend as little as 10 percent of their time and others spend 60 percent of their time on supervision.

This is consistent with our earlier finding that supervision of clergy was both perceived as a primary role by the annual conference and as a primary role by the DS as well. This suggests alignment between the priority and the amount of time spent in the activity for many. However, there is a very large gap between the least and greatest amount of time spent. Supervision may be a priority, but there may not be enough time available for supervision.

When asked, “overall, how much of your time is spent in clergy supervision activities? Would you say: a great deal of time, a moderate amount of time, or very little time” in clergy supervision activities. The majority of DSes (65%, 105) reported spending a moderate amount of their time in clergy supervision. One-third (34%, 54) spend a great deal of time in clergy supervision. Only two DSes reported spending very little time in clergy supervision.

Given that these are very general measures, DSes were then asked about the adequacy of the amount of time spent in clergy supervision: “Would you say the amount of time you spend in clergy supervision is too much time, an adequate amount of time, or too little time?” The majority (68%) believe the amount of time spent in clergy supervision is adequate, but 22 percent believe they spend too little time in clergy supervision. Just a few (9%, 15) believe that too much of their time is spent in clergy supervision. Table 3 shows among those who spend a moderate amount of time in clergy supervision, 72 percent assess the amount of time spent as adequate.

Table 3. DS Time spent in Clergy Supervision

Assessment	Amount of Time			Total
	Great Deal	Moderate Amount	Very Little	
Too Much	22.2% (12)	2.9% (3)	0% (0)	9.3% (15)
Adequate	61.1% (33)	72.4% (76)	50% (1)	68.3% (110)
Too Little	16.7% (9)	24.8% (26)	50% (1)	22.4% (36)
Total	100% (54)	100% (105)	100% (2)	100% (161)

DSes were asked to explain their response to their assessment of the amount of time spent in clergy supervision. For the majority of DSes, supervision was viewed as responding to crisis, problems, or meeting with clergy who were in trouble or ineffective. A few DSes viewed supervision more broadly as coaching, mentoring, and developing leaders. Considering that supervision is often seen as responsive to problems rather than as a proactive activity, that DSes spend an adequate amount of time, they “get done what needs to be done,” seems appropriate. Several DSes indicated that when they know the pastors well enough, they are able to respond quicker, spending less time in supervision. No matter the assessment of time spent, DSes prefer to have more time to spend in proactive activities and less in crisis.

Summary

District superintendents are indeed pulled in multiple directions and there appears to be more work to do than time to do it in. On average, DSEs supervise 69 clergy, 14 candidates, 75 churches, and 47 charges. Many DS travel more than half of the days out of the month. In order to meet the various needs of the office, DSEs have had to become skilled at prioritization and delegation.

The primary roles of the DS are supervisor of clergy and an extension of Office of Bishop. The annual conferences' understanding of the role of the DS may not be in line with the understanding of the bishop, DS, clergy, or congregants. Coming to consensus on the role expectations for the DS would enhance the DSEs ability to meet expectations and will allow them to focus their energies. Ensuring that DSEs have time for spiritual growth and renewal leave is important to the health of the DS and the health of the office.

DSEs believe that the changes over the past 5 – 10 years have resulted in a diminishment of the authority and respect of the DS position. Clergy may not understand the role of the DS nor the authority vested in the DS, similarly DSEs may not understand their precise role and where their authority rests. Both the DS and the annual conference understand one of the primary roles of the DS as supervisor of clergy. Clear articulation of that role and the authority invested in that role would be helpful to both the DS and to the clergy they supervise.

From the DS perspective, the DS role is now more relational than the role was previously. DSEs are coaches and mentors in more personal relationship with the clergy rather than the authoritative supervision of the past. Moving toward a more relational supervision is viewed positively, but brings with it additional challenges. This model of supervision requires more time, energy, and commitment to implement and maintain. Additionally, the number of clergy the DS supervises and the geographic area covered has increased for many DSEs. Meanwhile, the number of other DS responsibilities has not decreased. For some, this means that the amount of time necessary to complete all the supervision is inconsistent with the amount available to do so.

One concern, given these constraints, is that clergy supervision simply will not happen. However, the findings of this research indicate that DSEs are meeting with clergy in their districts and are conducting individual supervisory meetings. The amount of time available may necessitate briefer meetings, or meeting only with those clergy who are clearly experiencing difficulty. These solutions may miss an opportunity to intervene before a

situation becomes a crisis. And, cursory meetings will not allow the DS the opportunity to provide appropriate support and resource.

PART 2:
ROLE AMBIGUITY,
ROLE CONFLICT,
AND
APPOINTMENT (JOB) SATISFACTION

Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

Edward Kemery (2006) examined the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity and clergy job satisfaction among clergy in the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church. He writes “According to role theory, role conflict, and role ambiguity are presumed to negatively affect work attitudes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement” (p.562). *Role ambiguity* “may result from a lack of (or vague) policies and procedures, a supervisor who has trouble communicating effectively, or uncommon events for which there are no precedent (p.562). *Role conflict* occurs “when the sent role is inconsistent – when laity, colleagues, supervisors, policies, and procedures disagree” (p.562). Kemery found that among clergy in this conference, where role conflict and role ambiguity were high, satisfaction with appointment was low.

In Part I of this research, we found that there are many expectations of the DS role. Too many expectations can exhaust the DS, but uncertainty about what are the expectations (role ambiguity) or when the roles are incompatible (Role Conflict) may be even more challenging. To assess this, DSEs were asked to rate a series of 15 items; six items to assess role ambiguity and eight items to assess role conflict. Conflict was rated on the scale 1= Very False and 5 = Very True. Ambiguity items were reverse coded so that a high value indicates high role ambiguity or role conflict. The scores were then averaged.

Consistent with Kemery, the average for both role ambiguity and role conflict is fairly low (2.12 role ambiguity and 2.40 role conflict). This indicates that on average, the DSEs have some clarity about their role and are not receiving much conflicting information. This is an average and obviously is not true for all DSEs. Role ambiguity average ranged from 1.17 to 4.17 and role conflict average ranged from 1.22 to 4.56 meaning that for at least one DS role ambiguity and/or role conflict is quite high.

Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the range of average scores and the percentage of DS at each level. As shown in Figure 3, the percentage of DSEs experiencing role ambiguity peaks at 2.17, which means that ambiguity is low. Figure 4 shows, that the percentage of DSEs experience role conflict peaks at 2.56 (slightly higher than ambiguity) and then drops off.

Figure 3. Percent of DSEs Experiencing Role Ambiguity

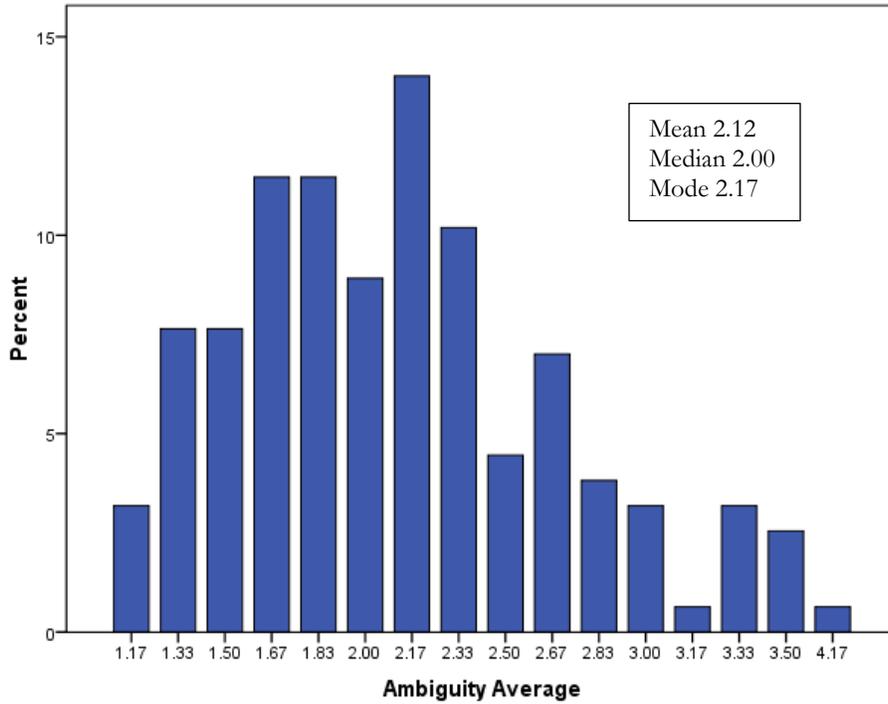
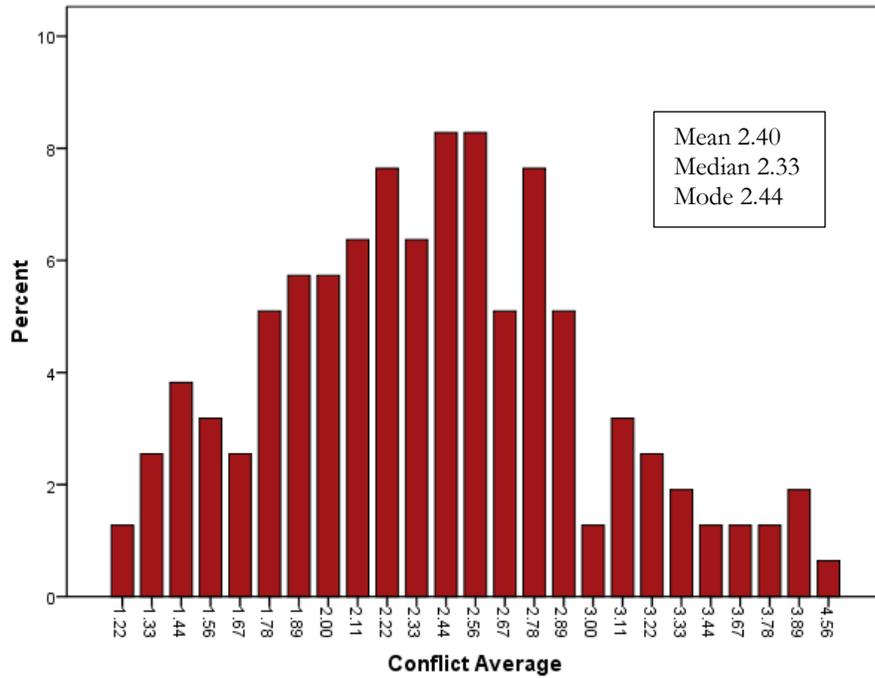


Figure 4. Percent of DSEs Experiencing Role Conflict



To illustrate the relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict, a cut point was created at the median. Table 4 shows that there is a small positive correlation between role ambiguity and role conflict are positively correlated ($r = .185, p < .05$) When ambiguity is low, for 59 percent role conflict is also low. And when ambiguity is high, conflict is also high.

Table 4. Percent of DS
Role Ambiguity by Role Conflict

		Ambiguity	
		<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Conflict	<i>Low</i>	59.5% (47)	41.0% (32)
	<i>High</i>	40.5% (32)	59% (46)

Burnout

Becoming overwhelmed by the vast need and the limited ability to respond to those needs is a real concern for all clergy. In their research into why ministers leave local church ministry, Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger (2005) found that burnout was one of seven motivators clergy described for leaving church ministry (p.38). The Maslach Burnout Inventories have been used extensively to assess burnout in a variety of professions.

This research utilized the MBI-GS⁴ which is a 16-item inventory that focuses on the performance of work and measures “respondents’ relationships with their work on a continuum from engagement to burnout.” Burnout is defined as “a state of exhaustion in which one is cynical about the value of one’s occupation and doubtful of one’s capacity to

⁴ Previous research (Doolittle 2007 & 2008, Randall 2004) of clergy utilized the MBI-HSS which was designed for the human services professions and focuses more on “direct personal contact with service recipients” (p.208). This research is focused on the DS work roles and responsibilities and less on the interaction with clergy, therefore, the MBI-GS is appropriate for this research.

perform” (Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, p.209) The three subscales of the MBI-GS exhaustion, cynicism, and personal efficacy. Exhaustion measures both emotional and physical exhaustion; cynicism is “indifference or a distant attitude toward work” and professional efficacy assesses the respondents’ “expectations for continued effectiveness at work” (p.209-210).

DSEs were asked to rate on a modified scale⁵ how often each of 16 different experiences occurred. Responses were scored on a 7-point scale where 0 = Never; 1 = Sporadic, a few times a year or less; 2= Now and then, once a month or less; 3=Regular, a few times a month 4=Often, once a week; 5=Very Often, a few times a week; and 6=daily. Scores for each scale are summed and averaged.

Overall, DSEs experience a high degree of professional efficacy (mean 5.59). This means that almost daily DSEs believe that they are effective at their work and are making a contribution. Further, cynicism is fairly low (mean 1.78), DSEs experience cynicism less than monthly. Overall, DSEs believe that their work has significance and they are enthusiastic about their work.

Not surprisingly DSEs do experience exhaustion on average once to several times per month (mean 2.57). Considering the number of tasks and the number of clergy and candidates DSEs reported having responsibility for, and the amount of travel per month, feeling exhausted during the month could be expected; we might even anticipate that DSEs would experience exhaustion more often during certain seasons (appointment making, clergy entry to new appointments...).

There is a moderate positive bivariate correlation between exhaustion and cynicism ($r=.378$, $p.<.01$) so that when exhaustion is high, cynicism tends to be high. Similarly, there is a moderate negative relationship between exhaustion and professional efficacy ($r=-.228$, $p.<.01$) and between professional efficacy and cynicism ($r=-.309$, $p.<=.01$). This means that as one is higher, the other tends to be lower.

Appointment (Job) Satisfaction

To assess their level of job satisfaction, DSEs were asked to “think about your appointment as DS generally. In other words, consider what your appointment is like most of the time.” Each of 18 adjectives was scored 1=No, 2=Can’t Decide, and 4=Yes. The negative adjective

⁵ The self-administered, printed MBI-GS was modified for telephone administration. For clarity and brevity response choices were modified so that the scale descriptions were offered to respondents without their numerical value (Never, A few times a year or less, ...).

items were then reverse coded so that a higher average score indicates a higher level of appointment satisfaction. An appointment satisfaction score was calculated from the sum of the responses and averaged.

Overall, the DSEs surveyed had a high degree of appointment satisfaction, an average of 3.4 on a 4 point scale. This means that while it may not be perfect; DSEs are generally satisfied with their appointments as DS. As shown in Table 5 the majority of the DSEs believe that most of the time their appointments are worthwhile, good, acceptable, pleasant and enjoyable. Most, however, would not say that their appointment is superior or ideal. Few DSEs agreed with any of the negative attributes offered about their appointments.

Table 5. Percent in agreement with statement about their appointment

Positive Attributes		Negative Attributes	
Worthwhile	98.8% (159)	Inadequate	11.2% (18)
Good	94.4% (152)	Disagreeable	9.3% (15)
Acceptable	93.2% (150)	Worse than Most	6.8% (11)
Pleasant	83.9% (135)	Undesirable	5.6% (9)
Enjoyable	83.2% (134)	Bad	3.7% (6)
Better than Most	60.2% (97)	Rotten	1.2% (2)
Makes me content	56.5% (91)	Poor	.6% (1)
Excellent	48.4% (78)	Waste of Time	.6% (1)
Superior	26.7% (43)		
Ideal	18% (29)		

What items contribute to a high level of satisfaction DS experience with their appointment? Can we predict lower appointment satisfaction based on items such as role ambiguity, role conflict, and burnout⁶?

Multiple Regression

In bivariate analysis, appointment (job) satisfaction has a weak to moderate positive correlation with efficacy ($r=.268$, $p<.01$). This means that job satisfaction tends to be higher when personal efficacy is higher. Appointment satisfaction has a moderate to strong negative correlation with cynicism ($r=-.432$, $p<.01$) and a strong negative correlation with exhaustion ($r=-.511$, $p<.01$). This means that when cynicism is high, appointment satisfaction tends to be lower and similarly, when exhaustion is high, appointment satisfaction is low.

These variables were tested in a multiple variable regression model using the enter method and two interaction terms (role ambiguity*role conflict) and (exhaustion*cynicism). Neither of the interaction terms, role conflict, nor professional efficacy contributed statistically significant explanatory power to the model.

The model that provides the best fit for the data includes three variables - two of the burnout subscales (exhaustion and cynicism) and role ambiguity. The variables together improve the predictive power of appointment satisfaction and explain 36 percent of the variance in appointment satisfaction ($F(3,153)=28.849$, $p<.000$). In other words, knowing how much exhaustion the DS is experiencing, how much cynicism the DS experiences, and how much role ambiguity the DS is experiencing helps us to predict their level of satisfaction with their appointment.

Summary

Given that DSEs are pulled in multiple directions, it may come as no surprise that DSEs experience role ambiguity. What may be surprising is that role ambiguity overall is relatively low. DSEs feel a sense of accomplishment in their appointments. They are able to navigate the various demands without becoming cynical. Not at all surprising, DSEs do experience exhaustion relatively frequently.

⁶ Appointment satisfaction was regressed on each of the following variables individually: number of years as DS, jurisdiction, number of clergy, candidates, churches, or charges, district realignment, time allocation, renewal leave, days of travel, exited a clergyperson, age, race, and sex. None of the bivariate regression models adds statistically significant explanatory power to the prediction of appointment satisfaction. They were, therefore, not included in the multiple regression models.

Findings are consistent with Kemery's research. The amount of role conflict and ambiguity among DSEs is very similar to the amount of role conflict and role ambiguity found among the rest of the clergy. The amount of ambiguity and conflict appears to be the similar across clergy positions, whether DS or not.

Appointment satisfaction is affected by role ambiguity, exhaustion, and cynicism. Together, these variables help us predict the over satisfaction of DSEs with their appointment. We may predict that DSEs who are feeling emotionally drained, used up, and tired, who experience role ambiguity, and who do not believe that their work makes a contribution will experience lower satisfaction with their appointment than other DSEs. Surprising is that the number of clergy, candidates, or churches the DS has responsibility for does not influence appointment satisfaction alone. These variables, however, may influence the amount of exhaustion the DS experiences which does influence appointment satisfaction.

There have been many changes to the office of the district superintendent. Many of these changes are viewed positively, but some of the changes produce additional challenges for the DSEs. The DSEs are pulled in many directions, are often exhausted, but overall are satisfied with the appointment as DS.

APPENDIX A

MEASURES

DS Term

This section consisted of nine basic questions about the DS term, such as the length of tenure in the current district and the number of districts served. A technical error resulted in the two questions addressing the length of time as DS overall and the number of terms served did not appear for the interviewer.

District Descriptors

One of the concerns about district mergers is the inability of the DS to preside at all charge conferences. To assess the reality of this concern, DSEs were asked the number (or estimated number) of charge conferences held last fall and the percentage they presided over. Additionally, DSEs were requested to provide the number of (or estimated number) of clergy, candidates, churches, and charges for which they have responsibility.

District Mergers

Thought to be one of the causes of increased commitments and responsibilities, this section asked DSEs about any mergers or alignments in the district, their role, and how the merger/realignment affected their workload.

Roles and Responsibilities

In the introduction of his research, Lawrence (2000) identified several competing claims for the role of DS depending upon the perspective, for example the perspective of the annual conference, the DS, or the *Book of Discipline* (p.6-7). To better understand the tension between annual conference and DS expectations for the DS role, two questions were developed with four response choices. The questions were "From the perspective of your annual conference, is your primary role as DS understood as" and "Which of the four roles would you say is your primary role?" The response choices, developed from those identified in Lawrence and others, were (a) representing the clergy in your district to the bishop; (b) supervisor of clergy; (c) supporter of local congregations; (d) an extension of office of the bishop; or (e) none of the above.

In light of the increasing attention on the DS office and the claims that the responsibilities are increasing, several questions address the perception of the DSEs regarding how their role has changed over time.

The final question of the interview, DSEs are given the opportunity to suggest what could be done to improve the district superintendency.

Job Satisfaction

Satisfaction with appointment is measured utilizing E.R. Kemery's (2006) modification of the Job in General Scale developed by Ironson, Smith, Rannick, Gibson & Paul (1989). Respondents are asked to "think about your appointment as DS generally" and respond Yes, No, or Can't decide to 18 adjectives. A No response received a value of 1, Can't decide a value of 2, and Yes a value of 4. Ten of the adjectives were positive and eight negative. The negative items were reverse coded. A high score indicates a high degree of satisfaction with their appointment.

Time Allocation

There are five areas of DS responsibility described in the *Book of Discipline* as responsibilities of district superintendents - ¶420 Spiritual and Pastoral Leadership, ¶421 Supervision, ¶422 Personnel, ¶423 Administration, and ¶424 Program. The issue here is not whether these are appropriate roles or whether DSes complete these responsibilities, but rather the importance of these responsibilities and particularly how much time DSes devote to each of the areas. DSes are requested to identify the percentage of time they spend on average per month in spiritual and pastoral leadership, supervision, personnel management, administration, and programmatic oversight. A catchall of other was added for activities that are not listed. In addition, DSes are asked to specifically estimate the amount of time spent in travel and supervision.

In recent years, greater attention has been placed upon the health of clergy in The United Methodist Church. Renewal and study leave are important pieces of a healthy lifestyle and are specifically mentioned in the *Disciplinary* paragraphs. DSes are asked if they have taken that leave in this term, and if not, whether they have plans to take that leave.

Clergy Supervision

A significant portion of the work of DSes is spent in some sort of clergy supervision. One of the concerns around supervision is the type and quantity – whether DS are conducting effective supervision and whether those who need supervision are receiving adequate supervision. Questions here elicit the DS style of supervision, the DS decision making process for supervision, and the process used for supervision. Similarly, DSes are asked about the process for conducting congregational visits. DSes compare their supervision style to that of the Bishop and also to the DS who supervised them during their own candidacy.

Clergy Misconduct

Here, the focus is not on the incident of clergy misconduct, but rather the amount of time, energy, and care that DSes must commit to responding to accusations of clergy misconduct.

Questions examine the process DSEs use for managing accusations and exiting clergy from ministry.

Appointment Process

The area where DSEs may have significant authority is in the decision making process about clergy appointments. This section seeks to better understand the DS role in the appointment process and specifically, how (if) DSEs collaborate with the congregations in making decisions about the appointments and how the DS collaborates with the bishop in this process.

If the DS is instrumental to maintaining the connection, there is concern that the increasing responsibilities of the DS will mean the loss of connectionalism and consequently the increase of congregationalism. One measure of congregationalism is in decision making, shared decision making is an element of a denomination that is congregational (Carroll 2006). Questions in this section begin to test the level of shared decision making: Under what conditions will you consult with the congregation about potential clergy appointment, how often do you consult, what do you seek to learn from the congregation and what type of information do you share with the congregation?

Burnout inventory

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was obtained from Arcadia University on July 6, 2010. The MBI measures exhaustion, cynicism, and personal efficacy using a 16-item printed questionnaire on a 6-point scale where 0 = Never; 1 = Sporadic, a few times a year or less; 2= Now and then, once a month or less; 3=Regular, a few times a month 4=Often, once a week; 5=Very Often, a few times a week; and 6=daily. For the DS telephone interviews, the 16 items were maintained. For clarity and brevity in the interview wording, response choices were limited to the second part of the scale description (for example, 2 = once a month or less).

Decision Making

If, as has been hypothesized, DS responsibilities are continuing to increase, what do DSEs do to manage those multiple demands. DSEs are asked how they make decisions about the multiple demands, which items consistently receive highest/lowest priority and are asked to explain their answers.

Missional Role

Frank (1997) suggested that a critical element of performing the missional role of the district superintendency is in teaching the value of the connection to those in your district. DSEs are asked how they go about teaching the value of the connection. Financial support of the structures of the connection is necessary. For this reason, DSEs are asked what they do

about local churches that pay less than 100 percent of their apportionments and how they encourage their annual conference to pay 100 percent of their apportionment.

Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict

The role ambiguity and role conflict items developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) as modified by E.R. Kemery (2006) are utilized to examine the relationship between role conflict, role ambiguity and satisfaction with appointment among district superintendents. Role ambiguity is measured with six – items on a five point scale of Very False (1) to Very True (5). Role conflict is measured with nine-items also on the five point scale Very False (1) to Very True (5). These items were reverse coded for analysis so that a high value indicates role ambiguity and role conflict while a low value indicates little ambiguity or conflict. Scores are summed and averaged. The item “I work under incompatible theology with my local church” is modified by removing the term ‘local church’ and inserting ‘bishop’; the local church is less relevant than the bishop to the work of the DS.

Training

The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry has responsibility for the training of new DSEs. For this reason DSEs were asked to identify any training that they would like to see offered.

Demographics

To better assess the experience of the DS, ordination date is requested. DSEs are asked to identify their age range from under 25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, and over age 65. Racial categories are those used by the General Council on Finance and Administration in annual conference reports.

APPENDIX B

Examples of tasks from 5 task areas in *Book of Discipline*

Examples provided for Question 33, five task areas. These are examples of tasks; tasks are not limited to those listed.

Spiritual/Pastoral Leadership: Counsel, pastoral support, covenant

Supervision: Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) appointment consultation, clergy reports, ongoing clergy supervision

Personnel: Ministerial candidates, cabinet/bishop appointment consultation

Administration: Charge conferences

Programming: Conference Council on Ministry (CCM), district programs, long-range planning

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