

Ministry Priorities Frequently Asked Questions

GNW Special Session – December 5, 2024

What are the ministry priorities, and how were they developed?

The ministry priorities being presented at the Special Session were developed over a series of conversations initiated by Bishop Cedrick Bridgeforth at each conference session in June of 2024. These conversations were followed by online discussions open to lay and clergy from across the Greater Northwest Area throughout the summer. A team of laity and clergy from each conference worked with Bishop Bridgeforth to shape these conversations and interpret the participants' responses.

What are the key priorities being considered for collaboration across the Greater Northwest Area (GNW)?

From the conversations held over the summer, the Ministry Priorities Team identified the following priorities and areas for collaboration for the GNW:

- Lessening housing, hunger, & health disparities
- Supporting young people's ministry development
- Training for lay leadership
- Securing preferred and in-common vendors
- Supporting IT and tech for local ministry teams

These priorities reflect shared values across the Pacific Northwest, Oregon-Idaho, and Alaska Conferences. At the Special Session on December 5, members of each conference will have the opportunity to approve or reject these priorities. Each conference also has distinct priorities that it will vote upon. These and other details can be found in each conference's respective Ministry Priorities presentation.

If these priorities are approved, who will be responsible for implementing them for each conference?

Upon approval, each conference will be responsible for implementing its priorities. Key leadership teams in each conference will help steer this work. For the GNW priorities, if approved, each conference will need to work collaboratively to resource and coordinate shared efforts.

If the Ministry Priorities are rejected, what happens?

If members reject the shared GNW or their conference-specific priorities, each conference will continue to faithfully do the work God has put before it, but we may suffer some from the lack of focus they could provide. Suppose the conferences reject the GNW priorities but approve their conference priorities. In that case, we will work to better understand the hesitation around shared GNW-level work, even as each conference embraces its ministry priorities.

Are existing areas of GNW collaboration part of the Ministry Priorities vote?

They are not, as each conference already funds the GNW Innovation Vitality Office, Circle of Indigenous Ministries, and emerging Shared Administrative Services through its budget

and/or through resources cared for by conference boards. Adjustment to the support of these initiatives would require changes to the conference budget and/or decisions by the supporting boards.

The Ministry Priorities documentation says there will be an emphasis on “less staff, more function” through budgeted funding ... does this mean there will be staff layoffs?
If these priorities are adopted, Directors of Connectional Ministries, Treasurers, and other supervising staff will work together to align our staffing with our priorities so that our impact in local settings increases and multiplies. Some positions may not be required in the re-alignment, but the staff member’s skills and experience may align with a needed function. While this plan seeks to be responsive to a desire for more function, it is also based on the reality that increasing staffing to provide more function is not sustainable.

The Ministry Priorities proposal emphasizes the use of conveners versus the addition of staff to shape future work. Who is a convener? And what does the convener oversee? How are they selected and trained?

Conveners are paid facilitators trained to help groups collaborate effectively. They are not decision-makers or content experts but ensure that group efforts remain focused and productive. Each conference must determine how it will select, train and support this emerging model. This way of working will be new and will take time, care, and trial and error as we move forward.

How will the convener model be incorporated alongside existing boards, agencies and staff structures?

If the GNW Area or Conference Ministry Priorities are passed, the leadership bodies of the respective conferences would need to meet to determine how best to live into these new priorities. The Ministry Priorities team is recommending the use of conveners as a method to seed more work closer to the proverbial ‘ground.’ The goal is to help our conferences to be more supportive of grassroots initiatives and less reliant on top-down solutions and programming. The potential use of conveners is one method to accomplish this goal.

What is the timeline for consolidating funding sources, and how will funds be distributed equitably across diverse ministry priorities?

Conference treasurers have worked with their respective Finance and Administration committees to identify funds to support the emerging models. These resources should be thought of as seed funding to initiate efforts and provide them with support to start. Bigger projects with ambitious goals will likely need to seek funding from other budget lines, when appropriate, or from external sources (i.e., grant writing). If the model is successful, future budgets may allocate additional funding toward this way of working.

How quickly will we see changes in how the conference functions in the ministry priorities are approved?

The first year is expected to start deliberatively as leadership teams develop a process for approving ideas, finding and training conveners, and needed guardrails. Yet, naming and approving ministry priorities will also shape and provide opportunities for existing boards and agencies to align their work with area and conference priorities even as the convener model is being developed further.

What sort of funding commitment will each Annual Conference be asked to make to support GNW priorities that *might* differ from their Conference-specific priorities?

The report from the Ministry Priorities team identifies three areas of current/ongoing collaboration—the Innovation Vitality Office, Circle of Indigenous Ministries, and Shared Services—that are already part of each conference budget. If members approve GNW-level ministry priorities, each conference leadership team would need to discuss how to fund other shared area-level priorities from the funds each conference has allocated to supporting the new Ministry Priorities model.

How would moving to shared GNW priorities and Conference-specific priorities allow for local ministry-centered decision-making?

Laity and clergy participants in the summer conversations expressed a desire for more support for local ministries, with some expressing that conference work was too top-down or conference-centered. Identifying shared GNW and Conference Ministry Priorities helps every level of the church to align efforts toward those ends and to better identify areas of collaboration. A model like the convener approach can shift some of this work away from the conference level toward local and regional efforts that can be more contextual and connected to the work of local ministries.

What existing systems or programs do we have in place to address some of the priorities being discussed here?

Conference boards, agencies and staff are already supporting some of the priorities raised in each conference, though the resourcing can differ significantly based on staffing and the focus of boards and agencies. Some of this work, and particularly the administrative elements, are easy to overlook or underappreciate.

During the Special Session, we will receive a report from the Ministry Priorities Team that is responsive to concerns raised about the alignment of conference efforts with local ministry needs. Regardless of the adoption of ministry priorities, conference boards, agencies, and staff will still be tasked with better aligning their work with local ministries by continuing and adding to existing efforts.