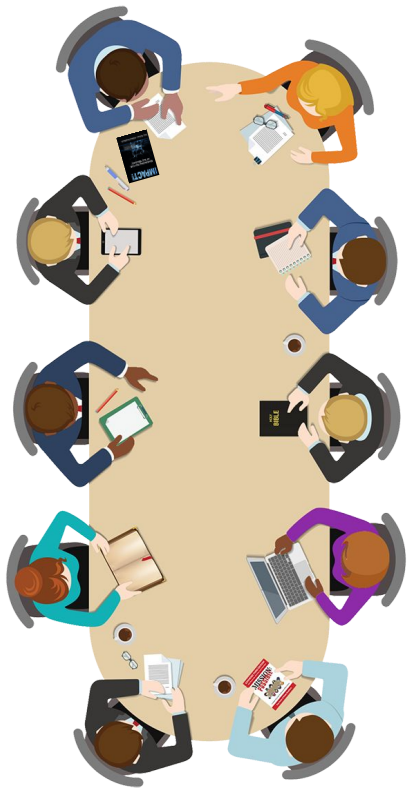


MISSION:
POSSIBLE!



CASE STUDY:

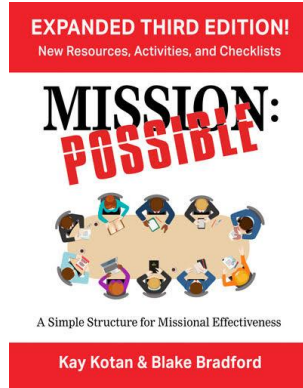


Circuit
Shepherds/Elders
and Group Mentoring
Equipping and Connecting

Authors and Presenters



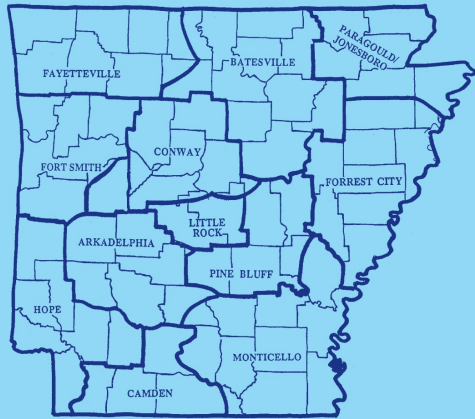
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Case Study: Arkansas Conference

The former 12-district configuration for the United Methodist Church in Arkansas

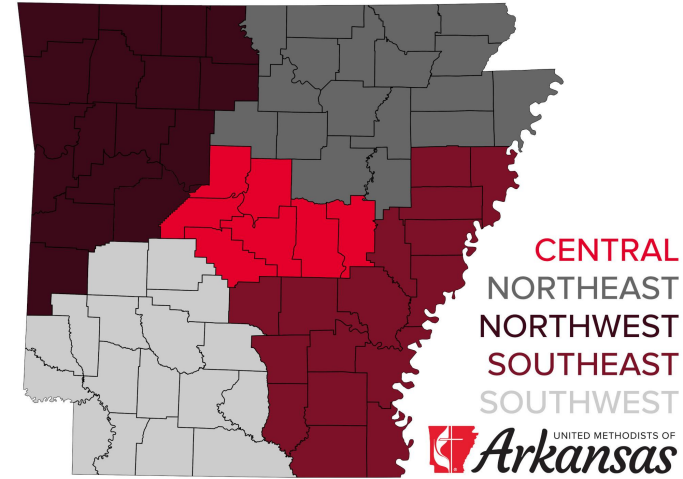


1914-2003
12 Districts
2 Conferences
Unified in 2003




9 Districts

2004
9 Districts
In 2011, 7 Superintendents



CENTRAL
NORTHEAST
NORTHWEST
SOUTHEAST
SOUTHWEST



UNITED METHODISTS OF **Arkansas**

2012
5 Districts
In 2023, 4 Superintendents

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



UNITED METHODISTS OF
Arkansas

MISSION:
POSSIBLE

By 2012, after the reduction of Districts and DSs from 12 to 9 and plans to reduce DSs further, the ARUMC began plans to recruit and train Circuit Elders to “share responsibility with DS in assisting local pastors and churches”. The first class of 95 elders was trained in the Spring of 2012.

Identified Challenges:

“Pastor to Pastors”

- As avg went from 30 to 55, cracks in the relationally-focused “pastor to pastors” model began to show.
- The (outdated) relational model would be unsustainable when avg moved to 100-150.

Strategic Mindset:

- Moving to a model of chief missional strategist
- Different selection process/values for the DSs.
- Moving from making churches happy to fruitful congregations

Legal and Supervisory Concerns:

- Sharing the DS role is difficult and can cause BOD and relational problems
- A stray word, confusion about who is involved in supervision or appointment-making, or land/property matters require clarity of authority.

The 2012 Launch of Circuit Elders was NOT Optimal:

The first layer of communications did not fully value small-sized congregations

- The narrative needs to differentiate the work of CEs with the DS -- share the value of expansion of connection, instead of a perceived loss of connectivity

Lack of Job Description

- Huge differences in how the role was lived out
- Lack of clarity that supervision was not a function of Circuit Elder work
- Lack of alignment
- dCOM Clergy Mentoring was shoved into the role following launch

Emotional Adjustment

- The relational and casual approach of “the DS dropping in for coffee” was not missional and now was unsustainable.
- Moving to these large districts back in 2012 should have been combined with more intentional communications on the role of the DS as missional strategist, the Orders and Fellowship collaborating with the cabinet in creating a culture of clergy care, and more awareness of the impact on the local church

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



**MISSION:
POSSIBLE**



Circuit Elders Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

PURPOSE: EQUIP AND CONNECT

Circuit Elders serve as extensions of the office of District Superintendent, to assist District Superintendents in equipping local church leaders for ministry and by encouraging connections for ministry beyond the local church.

Circuit Elders are not supervisors and they do not have a role in the appointive process. Instead, the work of Circuit Elders is focused on equipping and connecting leaders and local congregations so that local churches make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world..

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS/TASKS:

1. **Embody the United Methodist Connection through intentional relationships and a ministry of presence by:**
 - a. Encouraging pastors and lay leadership of congregations to engage their communities and neighborhoods with missional purpose.
 - b. Convening and facilitating gatherings regularly online, over meals, and/or through in-person meetings for mutual fellowship, prayer, support, peer coaching, and encouragement.
 - c. Attending special events of the circuit as a representative of the connection when available.
 - d. Along with the other pastors in the circuit, providing mutual pastoral caregiving support to the clergy, certified lay ministers, and lay supply preachers in the circuit, and by keeping the District Office informed of situations of concern to build up a team approach to caregiving.
2. **Collaborate with the District Superintendent to order the life of the church by:**
 - a. Providing coaching and equipping for pastors concerning the practice of ministry and church leadership.
 - b. Coordinating with the DS and Ordained Elders in the region to ensure that congregations with assigned laity have regular access to the sacraments.
 - c. Assisting pastors in preparing for charge conferences and other connectional administrative responsibilities.
 - d. Communicating regularly with the DS regarding the ministry of the churches on the circuit.
 - e. Presiding at annual and called charge conferences as requested by the District Superintendent.
3. **Collaborate with the District Superintendent to encourage strategic connections among congregations by:**
 - a. Supporting and encouraging a team-based approach to ministries in communities..
 - b. Facilitating conversations with congregations and the pastors of the circuit around topics such as vital ministry, mission field engagement, and cooperative parishes.
 - c. Facilitating strategic missional assessments in congregations as requested by the District Superintendent, including utilizing Discipline ¶213 as a guide for conversation as directed.

The ARUMC Circuit Elder Initiative

- The newest evolution is focused on the relational aspects of the role - pastors and churches
- Groups are primarily geographic
- Use of elders to assist with charge conference responsibilities
- The ARUMC Circuit Elder Initiative is now on its 3rd evolution (2012, 2018, 2023)

Outcomes of a healthy & vital Circuit Elder Initiative

- Local pastors and lay supply preachers will experience encouragement in their ministry.
- Congregations and clergy will experience the richness of connectional relationships.
- Circuit Elders will gain experience and equipping as leaders in their circuits and in their appointments.

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



MISSION:
POSSIBLE



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2. Collaborate with the District Superintendent to order the life of the church by:

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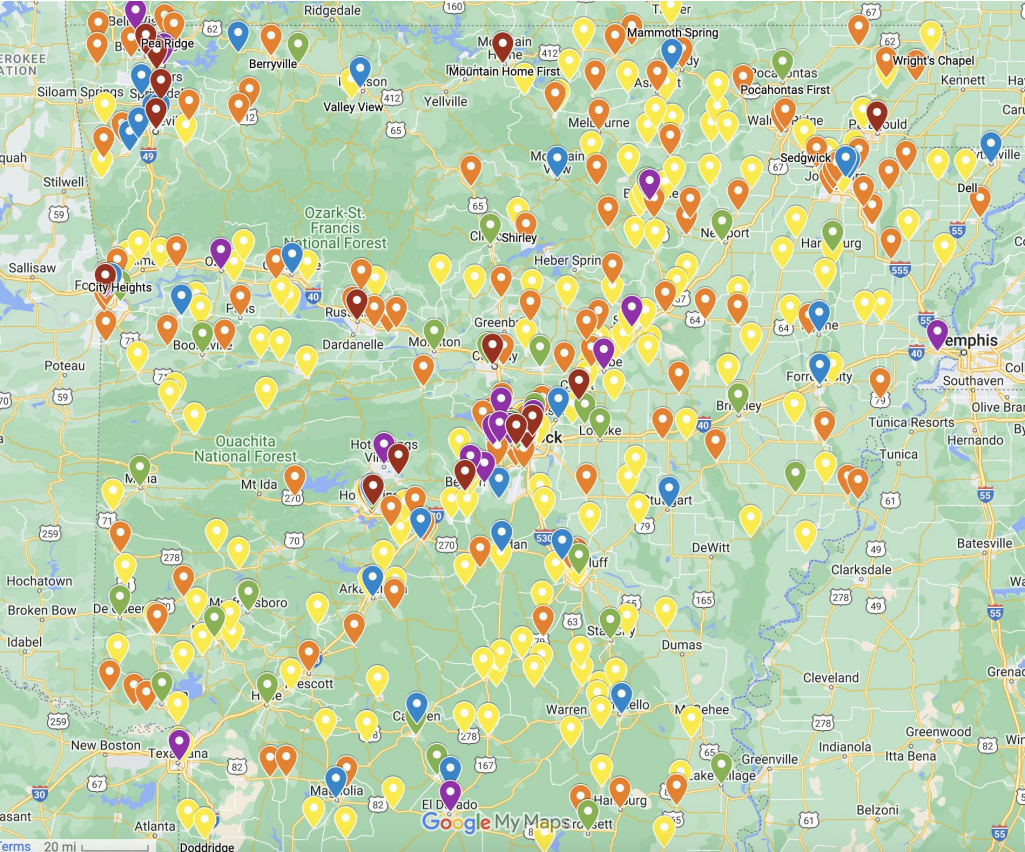
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- Circuit Elders are not supervisors and they do not have a role in the appointive process. Instead, the work of Circuit Elders is focused on equipping and connecting leaders and local congregations so that local churches make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- Each Circuit has 4-8 Churches/Charges
- CEs in the ARUMC are unpaid (mileage only) but possible plans on paying a consultancy for each assigned ¶213 process

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



Circuits created based on locations of elders and geographic affinity



Case Study: Arkansas Conference



MISSION:
POSSIBLE



Circuit Elders Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

Basic Meeting Pattern - Circuit Pastor Group Facilitated by Circuit Elder

1. Devotions rotated among the pastors
2. Check-in and "how goes your soul" time
3. Sharing experiences in ministry (such as "opportunities & challenges")
4. Discuss any matters of ministry practice or church administration
5. Close by sharing prayer requests and praying for one another

Template Annual Schedule of Circuit Meetings and Contacts


July	Circuit Elder Training Email, text, and/or phone contacts with circuit
August-September	Welcome Gathering <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional• Expectations & organization• Share time (call to ministry & current appointment)• Discuss Charge Conference preparations• Everyone share contact information and organize any mutual prayer times
September-October	Check-in contacts (email/text/phone) with circuit
October-November	Preside at Annual Charge Conference
October-December	Meet at least once, based on CC Schedule (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and "how goes it with your soul" time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss Advent and ministry plans for the new year
January-March	Meet at least once (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and "how goes it with your soul" time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss opportunities for community engagement• Discuss Lent and Easter Plans
April-June	Meet at least twice (in-person and/or zoom) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devotional, Check-in and "how goes it with your soul" time• Sharing opportunities and challenges in ministry• Discuss the hopes for next conference year; celebrate any changes in appointments

Basic Meeting Pattern and Template Schedule

- Circuit Elder serves as a peer group leader or convener of a community of practice
- Template schedule includes around 6 meetings a year
- Optional use of the group development tool created by the Texas Methodist Foundation for sharing ministry experiences

Case Study: Arkansas Conference





Circuit Elder Contact Report

Contact Information

Circuit Elder Name * Circuit Elder Email Address *

Type of Contact *

- Contact with a pastor
- Charge Conference with Congregation
- Circuit gathering of the pastors
- Congregational Lay Leadership Gathering
- Contact with a Lay Church Leader (please identify leader in the report's Question 1 below)
- Other

Date of Meeting/Contact * Supervising DS *

Name of Church/Charge (if not a circuit-wide meeting)

Name of Pastor (if not a circuit-wide contact/meeting)

Contact Report

Contact Report

1) Describe the Contact *

2) What next steps are the pastor/congregation going to take?

3) What does the District Superintendent need to know?

Consultation Response

Follow Up Plan:

- No follow-up needed
- I will be following up with the Pastor
- I need a call from the DS about the situation

NOTE: In situations of concern, please complete this form and then immediately **CALL** your district superintendent.

Once you click "submit," your Circuit Shepherd Contact Report will be emailed to the District Office, with a receipt emailed to you.

Reporting


CEs submit a quick online meeting/contact report that is routed to the district office

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



**MISSION:
POSSIBLE**

Benefits of a Circuit Elder Initiative to Congregations and Communities



Circuit Elders
Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

EXPECTATIONS OF STAKEHOLDERS

Circuit Elders

1. Attend Circuit Elders' training and required meetings.
2. Fulfill essential functions of the Circuit Elder role.
3. Facilitate gatherings of circuit pastors
4. Communicate with DS regularly. Note that there are limits on circuit group confidentiality; as an extension of the office of DS, a circuit elder is expected to share concerns with the DS.
5. Be readily available to the circuit pastors and circuit congregations.
6. Share appropriate information with the DS, and hold all conversations and circuit work as confidential with the congregations, pastors, and district superintendent.
7. Communicate regularly (monthly, in most cases) with pastors in circuit.

NOTE: the responsibilities of the dCOM mentor, formally included in the role of the Circuit Elder, are being transferred to a separate dCOM and DS assigned mentor.

Pastors, CLMs, and Assigned Supply Preachers in the Circuit

1. Attend Circuit gatherings.
2. Communicate regularly (monthly in most cases) with Circuit Elder.
3. Complete and submit reports by the appropriate deadline.

Congregations in the Circuit

1. Utilize the Circuit Elder as the initial contact for questions of practice, policy, and polity.
2. Complete and submit charge conference packets as required.
3. Welcome opportunities to share in ministry with the other churches of the circuit and support the ministry of the Circuit Elder

District Superintendent

1. Initiate quarterly contacts with Circuit Elders.
2. Be available for consultation on circuit matters.

Arkansas Conference

1. Assist in Circuit Elder training and resourcing.
2. Provide funding for Circuit Elder mileage

1. **Collaboration in maintaining relationships**
2. **Peer-created congregational cooperation and shared ministries - round-robin services, youth, VBS, shared mission, etc.**
3. **Circuits can provide an avenue for receiving conference support and resources**
4. **Since many of the CEs serve the county seat and smaller/mid size churches, the CEs themselves can be a group that would benefit greatly from equipping opportunities, such as coach approach training, hybrid worship, leadership development, etc., benefitting not only the circuit, but the ministry of the CE's church.**
5. **Create and form holy habits - a community of practice/ Wesleyan band/class**

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



MISSION:
POSSIBLE

 **Circuit Elders**
Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

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Benefits of a Circuit Elder Initiative to the DS/Conference

1. Collaboration in maintaining relationships
2. Serve as presiding elders at Charge Conferences
3. CEs can offer strategic help to the DS since they serve closer to local contexts
4. DSs can use the gathered CEs as a space for conversation, learning, and group wisdom
5. Conference Staff can deploy programs/initiatives through the CEs, and use them as conversation partners about ministry

Case Study: Arkansas Conference



**MISSION:
POSSIBLE**



Clergy Mentors Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

Who are Clergy Mentors?

1. Clergy Mentors are clergy in full connection, associate members or full-time local pastors who have completed the Course of Study and are trained to provide ongoing oversight and counsel with CLMs and local pastors
2. Clergy Mentors are nominated by the Cabinet. The dCOM, in consultation with the District Superintendent, assigns local pastors (who have not completed educational requirements, such as Course of Study) and CLMs to a mentor/mentoring group.
3. Mentors are not supervisors, experts, counselors or "just friends." When done well, clergy mentoring helps establish and maintain healthy practices for developing in effectiveness throughout ministry
4. Clergy Mentors focus on ministry practice and developing effectiveness. This is distinct and different from Candidacy Mentors, who work with candidates to discern their calling and guide them through the candidacy process
5. A dCOM Clergy Mentor helps to create a sacred space for the members of the group to share and explore their call, roles, educational journey, and vocational office. To have a positive group process, it is vital that the mentor be at ease with group processes and be clear about his or her role in these processes.
6. The "client" for clergy mentors is the dCOM, and the mentor will provide an annual report to the dCOM (<https://arumc.wufoo.com/forms/ar080/>) concerning their mentees. The report is shared digitally with their mentees.

Local Pastor Mentor Responsibilities

- Connect every few months as a group and individually to discuss:
 - Calling to ministry,
 - Local pastors' growing edges in ministry (strengths and future areas of growth),
 - Plans for future ministry, and
 - Educational plans.
- Become familiar with Course of Study and Extension School for local pastors and the educational materials used. Discuss specific assignments from Course of Study/Seminary instructors and offer feedback. Offer feedback about coursework.
- Know about resources, contact persons, and procedures relevant to continuation as a Local Pastor – including any dCOM deadlines related to the application process for continuation and interviews.
- Write annual mentor reports for the dCOM.

Mentors as Mentoring Group Facilitators

- A. In the Arkansas Conference, we have chosen to do clergy mentoring within groups. Two mentor-facilitators are assigned to every mentoring group, and they will share duties as a group facilitation team.
- B. This kind of group mentoring is not the same as Circuit Elder Meetings, where the ministry context is the focus. Neither is it the same as Clinical Pastoral Education with its controls and limits. It is also not a therapy group or a consulting group. Note that there are limits on group confidentiality: as a dCOM mentoring group, the mentor is expected to share an evaluation of the clergy to the dCOM, and to contact the dCOM if a concern is raised.

July 2023

1

Group Based Clergy Mentoring

- After feedback, the 2023 evolution of the circuit elder initiative separates out mentoring into its own ministry
- Mentors are deacons, associate members, LPs who have completed COS, and elders
- Use an annual template of meetings

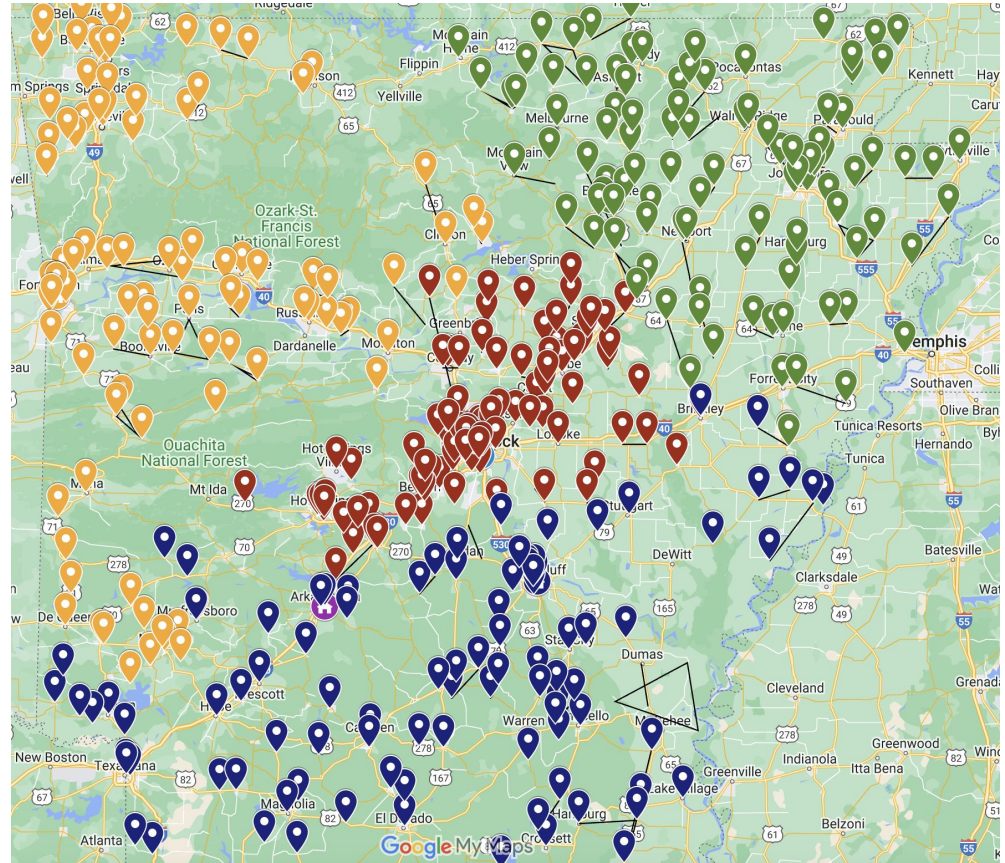
Case Study: Arkansas Conference



Group Clergy Mentoring:

While circuit assignment is based on geography, clergy mentor groups created based on status/educational needs, such as:

- Seminarians serving under appointment
- Full Time LPs (seminary-based COSS)
- Part Time LPs (local extension COSS)
- Bivocational LPs (need non-workday gathering times)
- CLM/Lay Supply



Case Study: Arkansas Conference



**MISSION:
POSSIBLE!**

Arkansas UNITED METHODISTS OF
Circuit Elders
Ministry Job Description & Resource Pack

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 - a. Supporting and encouraging a team-based approach to ministerial communities.
 - b. Facilitating conversations with congregations and the pastors of the circuit around topics such as vital ministry, mission field engagement, and cooperative pathways.
 - c. Facilitating strategic, missional assessments in congregations as requested by the District Superintendent, including utilizing Discipline ¶13 as a guide for conversation as directed.

July 2023 1

Future Possibilities

- Circuit-based groups for lay leaders
- Encouraging more circuit-based shared ministries and shared resources (curriculum, VBS supplies, etc.)
- Organic-born, grassroots cooperative parishes

Arkansas UNITED METHODISTS OF
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- Contact every five months with a group and individually to discuss:
 - i. Calling to ministry.
 - ii. Local pastors' growing edges in ministry (strengths and future areas of growth).
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- Become familiar with Course of Study and Extension School for local pastors and the educational materials used. Discuss specific assignments from Course of Study/Seminary instructors and offer feedback. Offer feedback about coursework.
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July 2023 1

Download the Handouts: <https://www.blakebradford.org/circuit-elders>

TABLE TALK: Equipping and Connecting with Larger Districts

**MISSION:
POSSIBLE**

- 1. What do you identify as the challenges inherent with larger districts?**
 - ✓ Relational
 - ✓ Practical
 - ✓ Institutional
 - ✓ Strategic
- 2. The case study identified the use of Circuit Elders/Circuit Shepherds, which has now been utilized in many conferences. What methods to connect pastors have been successful (or not successful) in the past in your conference**
- 3. What processes or methods could be used in your conference to address these challenges?**