



Strategic Alignment Team FAQs

1. What is the Strategic Alignment Team (SAT) and what is it supposed to accomplish?

- a. First, we want to be clear that our mission “to join God in God's mission to see more disciples among more populations in a more caring and just world”—and our mission priorities—remain the same with this recommendation. Our mission will not change. The change we are recommending is how we organize to more effectively partner with our conferences, pastors, and churches to continue to live into our shared call and vision.
- b. In the midst of the dramatic societal changes created by the pandemic, we are forced to assess how we can function more effectively. We also have the opportunity to shift and make changes to address identified needs that already exist. As many of us realize, the pandemic not only created change; it accelerated changes already occurring that need to be addressed. Thus, the purpose of the Strategic Alignment Team is to help ensure we are pursuing both *wise stewardship* and *effective mission* in the season ahead.
- c. The Strategic Alignment Team was formed in 2020 and was entrusted with the twin tasks of assessing our missional effectiveness and our financial sustainability as a denomination, while recommending proactive changes that will improve our financial stewardship and enhance our capacity to carry out our mission in partnership with those we are called to serve: our pastors, churches, conferences, and ministries.
- d. In order to address both missional effectiveness and financial sustainability, it is necessary to assess our denominational structures and methods to determine whether they help or hinder our ability to deliver on our mission and mission priorities. Thus, after doing the work of assessment, the primary focus of the SAT has been around creating a proposal to align our denominational structure with the identified needs of our pastors, churches, conferences, and ministries in order to deliver on and steward our mission more effectively.

2. What did the Strategic Alignment Team discover in their assessment?

- a. With the multiple disruptions we are experiencing in our churches, our society, our environment, and our practices, we all continue to pray and seek guidance on how to remain resilient and responsive in this season. Through the listening phase of this process, the SAT learned of significant needs within the denomination as many pastors and churches seek to continue to serve their people and their communities effectively. Strong patterns emerged that were very evident: gaps in the system, potential opportunities going unrealized, and needs that were unmet.

b. In general, the SAT discovered that *our current structure creates an overly complex hierarchy that leads to a lack of flexibility, unintentional redundancies, bottlenecks in responsiveness, and internal competition for limited resources.*

i. The SAT's assessment revealed that the hierarchical, inflexible system of our current denominational team is not built to withstand an uncertain and disruptive environment.

ii. There is no financial margin to staff around areas of need, and we are severely limited in our ability to pursue new opportunities as they arise.

iii. The combination of these issues leads to clear gaps in what the denominational team is doing and what the denomination actually needs most. Our ability to respond to needs, requests, and opportunities is severely hampered and confused by our complexity and unintentional redundancies within our system.

c. Comparing the identified needs to our costly and inflexible organizational structure of ten teams led by ten executives, it became apparent to the SAT that a reorganization of the denominational team would be needed in order to better align their work with the needs and opportunities of the greater denomination that have been identified, and to allow for greater adaptability in our future, so that we can pursue our mission priorities more effectively.

3. This feels really fast. Can we slow this down and gather more data and postpone to next year?

a. This process may feel fast to those who are just now engaging with the work of the SAT. However, we have high confidence in the team's work and believe that the natural next step is for all of us to actively engage with this recommendation as part of our preparation for the Annual Meeting in June. This is our established polity and process.

b. The entire process of the SAT has been thorough and in-depth. The process involved more than seven months of gathering data from all across the denomination and over 350 people hours of meetings, discussions, and processing. The ability to meet virtually exponentially increased the amount of interaction of the SAT itself as well as their ability to meet with and listen to many constituents. Hundreds of pages of comments, meeting notes, and documents have been generated through this comprehensive process.

c. Our intent is not to rush through a decision. We earnestly desire your thoughtful engagement and interaction prior to the Annual Meeting. We will be providing resources and opportunities for everyone to engage with the work of the SAT and the proposal that is being recommended to the Annual Meeting throughout the weeks ahead. *We are encouraging each pastor, church, and conference to be proactive in planning for times and spaces for you and your people to engage with and discuss this proposal.*

d. Because we know that our current system is not working well, the adoption of this recommendation will allow the denominational team to begin now to address the significant areas of need and challenges identified by the SAT, and to better align our team to increase our capacity to serve our pastors, churches, conferences, and ministries more effectively, becoming more responsive to your needs and requests.

e. Without the approval of the recommendation, the denominational team will remain locked into our current model which has proved to be too costly and inflexible for our current missional effectiveness and, we believe, is not the best stewardship of our resources. If the recommendation does not pass and we continue with the current system, these significant needs will remain unaddressed or underserved on an ongoing basis.

f. In addition, we ask everyone to be sensitive to the reality that to postpone another year would increase disruption to the staff on the denominational team, who will have been living in uncertainty for a year by the time the vote comes to the Annual Meeting in June.

4. Why are we voting on something like this when Gather is a virtual event?

a. Although no one knows what the new normal will be post-pandemic, our world has been highly impacted by the events of the past year. We are working diligently to ensure that all delegates registered to attend Gather 2021 can engage in the business of the Annual Meeting virtually. Although a virtual engagement is different from our past in-person experiences, it is our hope to provide the best online experience possible.

b. We do not know when we will be able to gather in person again; yet *even when we are able to meet in person, we believe that online engagement will continue*. All future Annual Meetings are likely to have some participants engaging through virtual means.

c. We actually see this as a new opportunity arising from our current crises. One concern that has been raised in recent years about the Annual Meeting is that of affordability and equity.

i. The increasing cost of attending the meeting has been a barrier to participation for under-resourced churches and communities. As a result, only churches with resources could afford to send delegates to participate in this important gathering of our church.

ii. Therefore, a virtual annual meeting actually increases equity and access for all of our Covenant churches. A virtual annual meeting allows for greater participation and the voice of the entire church to be heard through the discussion and vote on the motion. A significant number of Covenant churches that previously were unable to send delegates will now have the opportunity to engage, exercise their voice, and vote as part of the Annual Meeting.

d. *This realignment recommendation is actually intended to cultivate and strengthen the voice of the church, not diminish it*. The Annual Meeting Planning Committee, with the concurrence of the Annual Meeting Officers, the Council of Administrators, and the Covenant Executive Board have prepared the agenda for the 135th Annual Meeting of the Covenant. As a result of these developments, it is appropriate to bring the matter before the church for communal discernment.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

1. Who is going to do what in the proposed structure? What is the process for determining roles, systems, and details?

- a. We can't know that yet. Due to the congregational polity of our denomination, we will wait for the decision on the recommendation of the Annual Meeting. We will not be presumptive in planning and implementation until a decision has been made. These discussions will come days, weeks, and months after we become aware of the outcome of the vote of the Annual Meeting.

2. Can we move things around?

- a. The SAT is proposing an overall philosophy, similar to erecting studs for the framework of a house. The actual building out of the house comes later—installing walls and flooring, painting, moving in furniture, and other details.
- b. The overall structure has been intentionally constructed to factor in maximizing missional effectiveness in serving the denomination, reducing bottlenecks, meeting compensation goals for financial sustainability, and reducing redundancy. Moving large elements (like one wedge to another circle) creates significant ramifications for the entire system.
- c. However, if the recommendation is adopted, it would be possible to tweak and adjust the details of where initiatives reside, staffing, and processes.

3. Will you be laying off a lot of staff?

- a. Ultimately, the SAT is about a reorganization, not about a reduction in our work force. Although some positions may be closed, we anticipate opening other positions where staff could if there is a match with interest, experience, and talent.
- b. The majority of changes are about reorganizing people into the different circles and groups (wedges).

4. It seems like only one circle (Mobilize) is doing mission. Are we decreasing our mission? Is the proposed model primarily infrastructure?

- a. In the current structures, a distinction has been made between “mission” and “infrastructure.” These are somewhat misnomers, potentially conveying the idea that “mission” is the real work of mission, and that infrastructure is **not** needed and is “overhead.” The reality is that the two are closely interlinked; infrastructure is pointless without mission, and mission cannot be accomplished without infrastructure. Thus, the proposed model balances the importance of the Mission Engagement team and the Mission Infrastructure team because both sides are needed and are closely intertwined on an operational level to realize “mission.”

- b. Both of the circles of Mobilize and Connect are included in the Mission Engagement team. It is immediately evident that many of the functions of “Mobilize” are what would typically be associated with what is considered “mission” work.
- c. However, a significant part of what the mission priority teams do on a regular basis is equipping, creating resources, leading cohorts and trainings, shepherding, and providing immersive learning experiences (such as Sankofa). Our mission priority teams also do the majority of the convening and connecting of networks and groups, building relationships, and collaborating with various leaders around the denomination. All these are “mission” functions that drive the Mobilize and Connect circle.

MISSION PRIORITIES

1. What happened to the mission priorities? Why aren’t these represented in the new structure?

- a. The mission priorities will continue to guide, inform, and influence all ministry initiatives, resources, and strategies.
- b. Our current structure has a team for each mission priority. Each team has its own staff, budget, operating plan, and structure. This is a very expensive structure to maintain and also creates internal confusion, redundancies, and competition.
- c. Because the Covenant mission and the five mission priorities remain central, they serve as the central organizing principle for the entire structure.
- d. The proposed model seeks to enhance and strengthen the five mission priorities in an integrated fashion. Instead of one team working on one mission priority, now all teams are working together to advance each mission priority as strategic objectives that align the work of all team members.
- e. Every team would have a part in delivering all the mission priorities, and the teams would collaborate together to ensure that the priorities are continually being carried out.
- f. The diagram is a visualization of how it will be organized by function, not where all the mission priority elements would fall.

2. How will each mission priority stay on the radar if specific people do not “own” them?

- a. As mission priorities, these function as the “core values” of our calling as a denomination. Thus, each priority is the responsibility of the whole denomination.
- b. Our current structure has each team functioning as *a separate ministry* and focused on one mission priority. This contributes to the identified issues of cost, confusion, redundancy, competition, and a lack of responsiveness to our pastors, churches, conferences, and ministries.

- c. In the new structure, the mission priorities would become the strategic priorities of all teams, working in collaboration with one another as one denominational team.
- d. Every team would own all five mission priorities. Every vice president would own all five mission priorities. Every circle would own the mission priorities, each contributing its own function for the fulfillment and advancement of each mission priority. Establishing clear lines of responsibility and accountability will be part of staff discussions during the implementation phases of the SAT recommendation.
- e. We acknowledge the importance of establishing clear accountability. That is one of the critical reasons for pursuing this realignment plan. We will continue to work with the Covenant Executive Board, the Council of Superintendents, the Council of Administrators, and other Covenant leaders so we can continue to live into the call and intent of the Annual Meeting and mandate as reflected in the Covenant Constitution and Bylaws.

3. Where is _____ [specific program, initiative, or particular leader or people] from _____ [a specific] mission priority going to be?

- a. We can't know this yet. In order to not be presumptive of the vote, the discussions of specific roles, processes, programs, and implementation details will be held only if the vote of the Annual Meeting passes at the end of June.

4. Where is Serve Globally? Of all the mission priorities, Serve Globally is the largest and most complex with a worldwide reach, but I don't see it on the diagram.

- a. As with all five mission priorities, serve globally will continue to be an outcome of everything we do in and through each missional priority together. As we develop greater *collaborative effectiveness*, we will expand both local and global ministry impact.
- b. Serve Globally is deeply valued and reflective of the Covenant ethos of carrying out God's mission across the world.¹ The SAT sought to not only preserve this ethos, but to advance it further. No longer is only one team serving globally, but every team is advancing worldwide mission.
- c. The diagram is organized by function, not by mission priority or initiatives. In organization by function, every circle contributes in local ministry as well as global ministry: Mobilize is mobilizing locally and globally, Connect is resourcing and connecting locally and globally, Fund and Organize are carrying out their functions locally and globally.

¹ "A deep interest in foreign missions has from the very beginning characterized the movement of which the Mission Friends was born, even to the extent of leaving its imprint on the name 'Mission Friends'" (*Covenant Memories Golden Jubilee, 1885-1935*, 81).

EXECUTIVE ROLES AND COVENANT OFFICERS

1. What is the difference between executive ministers/executive directors and vice presidents?

- a. Our current structure has five elected executive ministers and five appointed executive directors. To make the structure less top-heavy and to assist with financial sustainability goals for the future, the new model proposes two elected and two appointed vice presidents.
- b. “Vice presidents” would fulfill the same roles as “executive ministers/directors,” however, the name change would help clarify the change in the structure and more clearly identify the team’s working relationships in partnership with the denominational “president.”
- c. The only executive minister title that would be retained is *executive minister of ordered ministry* because we want to continue to honor the relationship with the Ministerium and acknowledge the uniqueness of this role.

2. Is the executive minister of ordered ministry a vice president?

- a. No, this would not be a vice presidential position and would not be significantly different than our current structure.
- b. The current role of executive minister of ordered ministry and Develop Leaders reports to the *appointed* role of executive director of ministry development, who reports to the president. The proposed structure maintains this relationship except that the executive minister of ordered ministry would report to the *elected* role of vice president of Mobilization.
- c. Additionally, this role interfaces directly with the president in a unique way, and this practice would continue. The executive minister of ordered ministry would focus on shepherding, caring for, and supporting all Covenant credentialed clergy and the Ministerium. This role would not be heavily involved in day-to-day organization-wide operational matters and administration as these elements will be covered with the four vice presidents.

3. Why are you proposing the title “vice president?” Doesn’t that sound too corporate for the Covenant?

- a. The proposal includes vice presidents because it honors the past tradition of the Covenant. It signals a change from the existing structure, with roles and responsibilities that are different from those held by the current executives. And, it coincides with the existing role of president which we currently maintain.
- b. The term “vice president” has been used in the Covenant for its leadership since at least 1957. This title was used before the establishment of the current titles of

“executive minister” and “executive director.”

- c. Our research also uncovered confusion within the Covenant about the difference between executive directors and executive ministers.
- d. The SAT researched other denominations and Christian organizations to learn what kind of titles are used. We felt this was the best title to accurately reflect the responsibilities of leadership roles.
- e. Since we have a president, it seems natural and normal to also have vice presidents identified in our organizational structures.

4. Doesn't this model of four vice presidents become more hierarchical and create more bottlenecks, not less?

- a. No, just the opposite in fact. It reduces hierarchy, diversifies leadership responsibility, and empowers more people to accomplish better ministry.
- b. We would actually remove one layer of hierarchy in the proposed model.
- c. More leaders do not make things more efficient. It actually slows things down because there is more complexity.
- d. We seek to improve the complex dynamics that have hindered our ability to be responsive to our pastors, churches, conferences, and ministries, and to reduce bottlenecks. One way to achieve this is to create a leadership team model that works with a board, similar to some of our local church models.
- e. Bottlenecks are also created when leadership is tasked with many operational matters. In this model, leadership's job is to empower the staff to make decisions and work on establishing overall direction, objectives, and guidelines. This makes the model less hierarchical because staff are empowered to do the work.

5. Doesn't this decrease the voice of the church because you are moving from five elected executive ministers down to two elected vice presidents?

- a. Actually, the voice of the church is elevated.
- b. Not only would there be more elected positions than appointed positions (four elected and two appointed), but the new leadership team philosophy allows the leadership to function more as the Covenant Collaboration Team, giving more opportunity for the whole church to speak more organically into the whole mission.
- c. The current model has five elected executive ministers and five appointed executive directors, leading to a top-heavy structure with a 1:8 executive to staff ratio. The proposed model consolidates executives down to two elected/two appointed vice presidents and the elected executive minister of ordered ministry.

- d. In total, there would continue to be four elected roles: the president, the two vice presidents of Mobilize and Connect, and the executive minister of ordered ministry.

ADDITIONAL BRIEFING SESSIONS

1. I have more questions. How can I get them answered?

- a. There will be delegate briefing sessions via Zoom on:
 - Tuesday, May 4, at 6:00 PM CT
 - Monday, May 10, at 6:00 PM CT
 - Thursday, May 20, at 5:00 PM CT
 - Thursday, May 27, at 5:00 PM CT
 - Thursday, June 10, at 5:00 PM CT

There will be an opportunity to engage in Q&A with President John Wenrich and the executive minister of ministry development, Angela Yee.

Some conferences are also hosting online sessions on this topic. President John Wenrich and the executive minister of ministry development, Angela Yee, will also be available to address questions during these sessions. Please check with your conference office for schedules and details on engaging.

- b. Individual questions not answered in the Q&A sessions or in this FAQ may be sent to sat@covchurch.org, and your question will be acknowledged and responded to via our regular updates to this FAQ page.