

Mountain Sky Area: Questions About the Proposal to Merge the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone conferences

“A vital congregation is a congregation that makes disciples.”

Q: What is the Mountain Sky Area?

A: Mountain Sky Area was adopted in 2012 as the new name for the episcopal area (formerly Denver Episcopal Area). The identity represents an intentional commitment to collaborate between the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences. Technically, it is the “episcopal area” overseen by the bishop.

Q: What prompted the recommendation for this merger?

A: The possibility of merger has been discussed for decades. Recently, both conferences recognized an urgency to intervene in order to reverse a long-term decline in vitality.

Q: What is the Yellowstone Futures Task Force?

A: The Yellowstone Futures Task Force is made up of clergy and lay leaders tasked with examining the issues and needs of the Yellowstone Conference in effectively making disciples of Jesus Christ. The Yellowstone Futures Task Force prepared recommendations intended to increase vitality of churches that make up the Yellowstone Conference.

Q: What would this partnership mean for the Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences?

A: The Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences will gain new sisters and brothers in Christ who will bring new perspectives on ministry and mission. This will allow both conferences to develop congregational leadership, which the two conferences have been struggling to address adequately.

Q: How would merger better help churches make disciples of Jesus Christ and help them to become more vital?

A: The hope is that merger would encourage the two conferences to continue to seek God’s future together, aligning their combined resources to strengthen ministries that make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Q: What would this mean structurally and financially?

A: Proposals for the structural and financial plan would be developed over time by leaders of both Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences. No decision about a merger would be made without more information about the impacts.

Q: How would the conferences benefit from connecting people, ideas and resources?

A: Moving the two conferences to one can reduce administrative overhead, expanding resources to address specific mission and ministry needs within the conference. It also would create one clergy pool allowing more flexibility in appointment-making.

Q: What about clergy appointments?

A: A clergy member of either current conference could be appointed to any church in the new conference after merger. As already happens, the cabinet would endeavor to make appointments that serve the missional opportunities and needs of churches as well as the personal and family circumstances of pastors.

Q: Would the identity of Mountain Sky change the identities of Rocky Mountain and Yellowstone Conferences?

A: Yes. Every marriage produces a new identity. The distinctive histories and gifts of both conferences would contribute to an emerging and shared identity. Both conferences have been working with Gil Rendle, who works with issues of change and leadership and is a senior consultant for the Texas Methodist Foundation in Austin, Texas.

Q: Would members of the annual conference have to travel to Denver for the annual conference session each year?

A: Distances are great in the West and they will be a great challenge in a merged Mountain Sky Annual Conference. Leaders from both conferences would work together to find solutions to this and other emerging issues. It might be possible for people to gather at several regional sites that are connected electronically.