

Susan Nienaber
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Professional History

MN Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

June 2014 - Present

The [United Methodist Church](#) is the third-largest Christian body in the United States. The Minnesota Annual Conference is the regional body of over 300 churches in the state of Minnesota. The conference credentials and appoints pastors, provides resources, training and supervision to churches and their leaders.

Regional Denominational Executive (District Superintendent)

Recruited into a limited 6-year term (per denominational policy) turn-around effort, ending summer of 2020. Responsible for full-cycle recruitment; appointment; management; and performance of 61 clergy in the region. Work closely with bishop and other denominational executives to resource, train, coach and align churches to mission of the conference. In conjunction to RDE responsibilities, also serve as current Dean of Cabinet.

- Direct all aspects of staffing and personnel recruitment, placement and supervision in the district. Reached 98% successful placement fit of pastors after replacing 70% of clergy since 2014
- Successful turnaround of many churches increasing in vitality
- Took on 1.5-year, interim executive director role for regional organization turn-around
 1. Successful placement of new staff
 2. Organization is now financially sustainable
 3. New foundation created to support the work of this organization
- Coach clergy and lay leaders on vitality, strategic alignment to the mission, property issues, conflict, personnel management, governing structures and reducing risk/liability
 1. Develop training podcasts on leadership, organizational breakthroughs, professional development, best practices and interviews with our innovators
- Participate on the cabinet team which raised \$3.7 million for new initiatives
- Adjunct instructor at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities
 1. 2015-2018 taught Leadership in the Religious and Nonprofit Context

As Dean of Cabinet:

Asked to continue Dean leadership for a third year (unusual for 1-year assignment)

- Lead cabinet meetings, which handles all personnel and strategic matters throughout the state of Minnesota. In addition, but separate: participates on the executive and strategic teams which coordinate, lead and evaluate all strategic matters throughout the state of Minnesota

The Alban Institute, Herndon, VA

June 2004 - May 2014

The Alban Institute is the oldest, faith-based nonprofit in North America that provides consulting, continuing education, original research and publishing to all types of religious and spiritual groups.

Senior Consultant

Responsible for direct intervention and organizational development consulting to faith-based, nonprofit organizations throughout the United States and Canada. This included but was not limited to: staffing structures, governing structures, board and leadership development, conflict transformation and crisis management, size transitions, personnel assessments, senior leader transitions and options for declining organizations.

- Organizational Development Consulting
- Developed and taught continuing education, trainings, workshops and delivered keynote addresses:

Sample Workshop Topics:

1. Changing Landscape of Religion in the US
 2. Strategies for Growth and Size Transitions
 3. Resilient Congregations
 4. Clergy Leadership
 5. Ministry Review Systems
 6. Board Governance
 7. Conflict Transformation
 8. Dialogue and Deliberation
 9. Professional Boundaries, Child Safety and Harassment Prevention
- Generated original research:
 1. The Resilient Congregations Study – this was a research study done in 2005 that examined a group of congregations that had successfully recovered from high conflict or trauma
 - Taught at the graduate school level and provided keynote lectures in areas that promote the strength and vitality of faith-based, nonprofit organizations
 - Published numerous articles of interest, help and support for religious nonprofits and their leaders:
 1. “Myth-Busting: Challenging the Notion of Emotional and Interpersonal Deficits in Candidates for Ministry” published in The Alban Institute’s *Congregations* magazine, Fall 2007. Co-authors Dr. Mark Sundby and Dr. John Henrich. (This article received Honorable Mention by the Associated Church Press in 2008 in the category of Professional Resource.)

Independent Nonprofit Consultant

May 1993 - June 2004

Provided direct intervention and organizational development consulting to faith-based, nonprofit organizations. Workshop leader and keynote speaker. Mentored two Ph.D. candidates and adjunct instructor at Luther Seminary.

Westminster Counseling Center Minneapolis, MN

September 1990 - June 2004

Westminster Counseling Center is a private, nonprofit organization staffed by [licensed psychotherapists](#). The Center integrates the spiritual and psychological dimensions of human experience, including mental health awareness for individuals, couples, and families regardless of ability to pay.

Psychotherapist/Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Day-to-day individual, couple, family and group psychotherapy. In addition, but not limited to:

- Coached and consulted with nonprofit and religious leaders
- Specialized in “Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing” of traumatic memories (Level II Certified)
- Of counsel board-member
- Directly responsible for one of the largest donations in the center history

Abbott-Northwestern Hospital Minneapolis, MN

July 1989 - September 1990

Chaplain Resident

- Chaplain for adult and adolescent, in-patient psychiatric and chemical dependency units
- Co-facilitated a sexual abuse survivor’s group and adolescent group therapy
- Chaplain for perinatal and neonatal units at Children’s Hospital and Clinics
- Facilitated the Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support Group

Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

June 1987 - July 1989

Parish Pastor

Oversaw 4 part-time employees, and led this faith-based organization, growing 80 active volunteers to 125 over a two year period.

- Successfully increased operating budget and achieved sustainability
- Created an endowment to assist those in need
- Raised the down payment for capital improvement project
- Reactivated and expanded governing structure
- Clarified the organization's mission and developed strategic plan
- Brought renewed energy, morale and commitment to the organization, by changing old programming and management

Abbott-Northwestern Hospital, Minneapolis, MN

Summer 1986

Chaplain Intern

- Chaplain for the Life Support Unit and children's cardiac care at Minneapolis Children's Medical Center and adult oncology unit at Abbott-Northwestern

Education

University of Minnesota St. Paul, MN

1993 - 1997

Adult Special Graduate Student: Family Social Science Department

Luther Seminary St. Paul, MN

1990 - 1991

Doctor of Theology Candidate: Pastoral Care and Counseling

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Evanston, IL

1987

Master of Divinity Degree

Central College Pella, Iowa

1983

Bachelor of Arts Degree (Interdisciplinary Concentration in psychology, sociology, religion and French language), one year of study at Trinity College in Carmarthen, Dyfed Wales

Additional Professional Development and Training

- CDR Associates, Boulder, CO "Mediating Workplace Disputes" and "Conflict Coaching"
- The Public Conversations Project, Boston, MA "The Art of Interviewing: Transforming Stories about Conflict" and "The Power of Dialogue"
- Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, St. Paul, MN "Victim-Offender Mediation in Cases of Severe Political/Criminal Violence"
- Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School, Boston, MA "Managing Conflict Inside the Organization"
- The Lake Institute, Indianapolis, IN "Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising"