

Highlights of the Call To Action Recommendations

Background:

The Call to Action Project was launched by the Council of Bishops and Connectional Table in November 2009, building on work of the previous Call to Action Committee. In January 2010 the Call to Action Steering Team was formed to gather data, including a mandate to seek an objective operational assessment of the Connection that will result in findings and recommendations leading to the reordering of the life of the Church.

Two bodies of research were conducted for the Call to Action Team: 1) the Vital Congregations Research and 2) an Independent Operational Assessment.

Vital Congregations Research—(Towers Watson)

Reliable statistical findings based on data from over 32,000 congregations show that high-vitality churches consistently share common factors *that work together* to influence congregational vitality.

These common factors are:

- Effective pastoral leadership including inspirational preaching, mentoring laity, and effective management
- Multiple small groups and programs for children and youth
- A mix of traditional and contemporary worship services
- A high percentage of spiritually engaged laity who assume leadership roles (Details of Towers Watson research appear in appendixes 1 through 6.)

Independent Operational Assessment—(Apex)

Objective examination of data, trends, and observations from UMC leaders led to identification of a **creeping crisis of relevancy** with an accompanying acute **crisis of an underperforming economic model** that are both linked to frailties in the UMC's culture.

These include the absence of common definitions for the *meaning* of our mission statement, lack of trust, low levels of mutual respect, the frequent absence of civil dialogue, insufficient clarity about the precise roles and responsibilities of leaders, and a lack of agreed ways to measure success or assure collaboration.

Thus we identify the need for:

- Recognition of the value and need for the Council of Bishops to exercise strong and courageous leadership, working in concert and fostering alignment throughout the Connection
- More clarity and understanding about the UMC's mission, culture, and values
- Less perceived organizational "distance" between and among the foundational units of the church
- Better-defined leadership roles, responsibilities, and accountability; with greater clarity about outcomes
- More standardized management processes and reporting systems
- Streamlining of connectional structures to achieve effective governance, lowered costs, and higher levels of performance.

Results of the research culminated in the Team articulating the adaptive challenge for the UMC as well as specific recommendations to “reorder the life of the Church.” The COB and CT approved and funded the creation of a 7-person Interim Operations Team to recommend the changes.

The adaptive challenge for The United Methodist Church is:

*To redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital **congregations** effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*

To do so requires that we:

- Change our mindset so that our primary focus and commitment is on fostering and sustaining **congregational vitality** (see *The Book of Discipline 2008*, pars. 201, 202)
- Articulate and commit to newly clarified and dramatically higher performance expectations for all levels of the church
- Expect and provide courageous, accountable leadership that assumes responsibility for upsetting current paradigms and shaping and adopting new understandings that result in more effective practices—and that this begin with the Council of Bishops
- Institute and report measurable performance results in all sectors of the Connection on an ongoing and regular basis, enabling us to learn and adjust the ways we invest and use our talent, time, and money.

Leaders, beginning with the bishops and including lay and clergy across the Connection, must *lead* and immediately, repeatedly, and energetically make it plain that our current culture and practices are resulting in overall decline that is toxic and constricts our missional effectiveness.

The research led the team to make the following recommendations:

1. For a minimum of ten years, starting in January, 2011, use the drivers of Vital Congregations as initial areas of attention for sustained and intense concentration on building effective practices in local churches.
2. Dramatically reform the clergy leadership development, deployment, evaluation, and accountability systems.
3. Collect, report and review, and act on statistical information that measures progress in key performance areas to learn and adjust our approaches to leadership, policies, and the use of human and financial resources (this will include indicators such as how congregations and annual conferences are increasing their effectiveness in implementing the three factors of vitality from the Towers Watson report: attendance, growth, and engagement).
4. Reform the Council of Bishops, with the active bishops assuming (1) responsibility and public accountability for improving results in attendance, professions of faith, baptisms, participation in servant/mission ministries, benevolent giving, and lowering the average age of participants in local church life; and (2) establishing a new culture of accountability throughout the church.
5. Consolidate program and administrative agencies, align their work and resources with the priorities of the Church and the decade-long commitment to build vital congregations, and reconstitute them with much smaller competency-based boards of directors in order to overcome current lack of alignment, diffused and redundant activity, and higher than necessary expense due to independent structures. (For a detailed description of the key recommendations, see chapter 5.)

For additional information, please visit: www.umc.org/calltoaction.