

The United Methodist Church

Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world

Matthew 28:18-20 –The Great Commission and Matthew 22:36-40 – The Great Commandment

A Call to Action

*The United Methodist Church is called to be a world leader
in developing existing churches and starting new vital congregations
so that we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*

Disciple making and world transformation occurs through vital congregations

*Vital congregations are Spirit-filled, forward-leaning communities of believers that
welcome all people (Galatians 3:28),
make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthews 28:18-20), and
serve like Christ through justice and mercy ministries (Micah 6:8; Luke 4:17-21)*

A vital congregation has

*Inviting and inspiring worship
Engaged disciples in mission and outreach
Gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership
Effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership
Small groups and strong children's programs and youth ministry*

A vital disciple is a changed follower of Jesus

Matthew 22:36-40 - The Great Commandment

*Disciples worship
Disciples make new disciples
Disciples engage in growing their faith
Disciples engage in mission
Disciples give to mission*

The Call to Action

The United Methodist Church continues to be a spiritual influence in the world for the Gospel. Essential to its ministry are healthy, vital congregations. But what makes a congregation vital and what do vital congregations do? The UMC has many vital congregations and while there are multiple ideas about vitality, we have not verified all of the opinions or reached a broad consensus about which elements constitute the essential characteristics. The United Methodist Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table commissioned a study to better identify the key ministries of vital congregations. The comprehensive study focused on churches in the United States because data was readily available, but it is clear that the spiritual movement in the identified vital churches is characteristic of vital congregations around the world.

The study reviewed the statistics of 33,000 churches and found that nearly 5,000 over a five-year period were growing and engaging a greater percentage of their membership in worship and ministry. They were engaging disciples in worship, in making new disciples, in growing their faith, and in giving generously. It was not only that these things were occurring, but they were evident at a significantly higher rate than in other churches and the vital congregations -- no matter what their size, location, or ethnicity -- demonstrated relative growth trends over a period of several years.

The study further examined these churches and found they shared at least 16 ministries/strategies in common. The study called them "drivers of vitality," and indicated that if churches worked on all 16,

they would move toward vitality or become more vital. The 16 ministries/strategies can be grouped into four areas:

Engagement of disciples in small groups and the number of ministries for children and youth

1. Vital churches have more small groups for all ages.
2. Vital churches have more programs for children.
3. Vital churches have more programs for youth.

Lay leadership

4. Vital churches focus on increasing the effectiveness of lay leaders (understand their role and carrying these roles out effectively).
5. Vital churches have lay leaders who demonstrate a vital personal faith (regular worship, intentional spiritual growth, personal devotional life, and giving of financial resources).
6. Vital churches place an emphasis on rotating lay leadership in order to involve more people over time.
7. Vital churches call, equip, use and support more lay leaders than non vital churches. (Twenty percent or more of their worship attendees describe themselves as current or past leaders in their church).

Pastor

8. Vital pastors give attention to developing, coaching, and mentoring lay leadership to enable laity to increase their ability to carry out ministry.
9. Vital pastors use their influence to increase the participation of others in order to accomplish changes in the church.
10. Vital pastors motivate the congregation to set and achieve significant goals through effective leadership.
11. Vital pastors inspire the congregation through preaching.
12. Vital pastors, when they are serving effectively, stay for a longer period of time. (Short-term appointments of effective pastors decreases the vitality of a congregation).

Worship

13. Vital churches offer a mix of contemporary (newer forms of worship style) and traditional services.
14. Vital churches have preachers who tend to use more topical sermon series in traditional services.
15. Vital churches use more contemporary music (less blended music that includes traditional tunes) in contemporary services.
16. Vital churches use more multi-media in contemporary services (Some congregations in other parts of the world may have limited access or do not use multi-media to the same extent and therefore it may not be as important as it is in some cultures.)

While the study noted that vital churches give more to mission, some have noticed that other types of mission engagement and outreach are not listed as proven “drivers.” This is because, during the past, we have not collected this data consistently across the UMC and therefore the research could not quantitatively substantiate mission engagement. But, in conversations with vital congregations, they tell us that this is an important aspect of their ministry. It also should be noted that while the study alludes to spiritual vitality in the faith of the laity and the inspirational leadership of clergy, one should not see these ministries/strategies as mechanical operations. Rather, they are undergirded or enlivened by a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ.

Vital Congregations Are Mission Stations of the Church

In the first-century church, Christ's ministry took root and grew as congregations were established. These congregations became the body of Christ -- transforming lives and communities. They were mission centers for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Today, every congregation is important to the ministry of The United Methodist Church. The United Methodist congregation is a mission center in the midst of the community. The key to our world being transformed is congregations who are engaging disciples in vital mission and ministry. These congregations are *courageous and forward-leaning* as they transform lives and communities.

Developing a Ministry Plan for Vitality and Fruitfulness

Vital congregations are ministries that recognize a clear calling from God and develop plans and ministries to achieve God's purposes for their congregation. Below is a resource that when used and evaluated consistently over several years will help a congregation become vital or become more vital. Part of the plan calls for setting goals. The Call to Action report indicated that there was a lack of measures within United Methodism and that goals or clear and recognizable fruit was essential for the health of a congregation, a conference and the denomination.

What we measure, receives attention. Across the denomination, we want to give attention to, and therefore we will measure: 1) disciples in worship (worship attendance), 2) disciples making new disciples (number of professions of faith), 3) disciples growing in their faith (number of small groups), 4) disciples engaged in mission (number of disciples doing outreach in the community and the world), and 5) disciples sharing their resources for mission (amount of money given to mission). You will note that these are for the most part not activities, but results, fruit of our ministry. Activity is not always the best measure. Measuring activity, for example ministries done or people contacted, has some value, but it does not indicate if a congregation is achieving the desired outcomes or fruit. A congregation can be quite satisfied with its activity, but if the activity is not producing fruit, then this activity may be the wrong activity, focused internally only or may lack the power of the Holy Spirit. We are measuring the five fruit listed above for the following reasons:

1. While churches may measure different activities and results, we will have five common measurable fruits so that we learn from one another and focus resourcing on achieving particular fruit. There is synergy and power when we do things together.
2. These measures are essential for the body of Christ. They were demonstrated in the Acts 2 Church (Acts 2:41-47) and they are areas of a church's life that are often described in the New Testament.
3. These measures are core to the values of United Methodism – building up the body of Christ, evangelism and engaging disciples in changing the world.

The Ministry Plan resource will be used by United Methodist congregations around the world that are seeking to become vital, stay vital or increase vitality. The resource will help you to identify your strengths for ministry, your current challenges, and your plan to become more vital. We, as your bishops, district superintendents and denominational leaders, are ready to work with you and support you as you become more vital. There are also resources online to assist your congregation (website address is yet to be identified, this is a working document) you are asked to complete this ministry plan and share it with your district superintendent. He/she will share your congregation's commitments with your bishop, who will share this with the General Conference. We look forward to working with you.

–The Leadership of the United Methodist Church.

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY PLAN

I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

God desires the best for The United Methodist Church and its congregations. God has planned a future with hope for us. God's plans flow from the Holy Spirit and therefore you are called to immerse your planning in prayer, Bible study and testimony.

Before beginning this exercise, spend time praying for wisdom and discernment for your congregation and those preparing the Ministry Plan. You are encouraged to gather together to develop your plan on several evenings or other times that meet your congregation's needs. When you meet, spend time worshipping, praying and studying Bible passages. The following are passages that may enrich your planning: Matthew 28:18-20, *The Great Commission*; Matthew 22:36-40, *The Great Commandment*; Acts 2, *the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church*; I Corinthians 12, *the healthy church is one body and it is the body of Christ*; Ephesians 4:10-13, *Christ has gifted the church through a variety of gifts*; Galatians 3:28, *all are welcome in the body of Christ*; Luke 10:25-37; *the parable of the Good Samaritan*; Micah 6:8, *righteousness and justice are the expectation for God's people*; Luke 4:17-21, *Jesus announces his ministry, which is a calling for the body of Christ today*.

In the midst of prayerful discernment, answer as honestly and candidly as possible in order to gain the fullest sense of where God is working in your midst and where God might be calling you in the future.

Church Name:

Annual Conference:

Date:

Address:

Country:

Pastor:

A. Context for Ministry – *The community and people God has called you to serve*

1. **Community** - Describe the community surrounding your church – the community your congregation is called to partner with and serve.

Who are the people (age, race, educational background, etc.)?

What are the current needs of your community?

What changes are occurring in your community that may impact your future ministry?

2. **Your Church – *the body of Christ God has formed you to be and is calling you to become***

What are the strengths of your church?

What are your challenges and threats? (For example: loss of key givers, needed building repairs, declining worship attendance, no or only a few new professions of faith, changing community, etc.)

What are the opportunities for ministry with children, with youth, with adults?

What does your congregation currently value as its most important ministries? Would anyone miss these ministries if your church ceased to exist?

What are some of your vital signs? Complete the chart

People and Ministry	2008	2009	2010
1. Disciples worship Average worship attendance			
2. Disciples make new disciples Number of people who joined by profession of faith			
3. Disciples engage in growing as a disciple Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies.			
4. Disciples engage in mission Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach activities			
5. Disciples give to mission The total amount given by local church to other organizations for support of benevolent and charitable ministries (this amount includes apportionments paid and support for all United Methodist and non-United Methodist organizations active in work such as advocacy, education, health, justice, mercy, outreach, and welfare anywhere in the world)			

Review what you have written so far, and write a 50-word description of your church based on the information above.

Now write a 50-word or less description of what you would like your church to be in five years.

B. Building Blocks of a Vital Congregation – spiritual commitments

1. Purpose

Why does your church exist? What does Christ call you to be and do in your community at this time? Does your church have a vision or mission statements? If so, what are they? When is the last time these statements were reviewed? Do they reflect your current reality?

2. Principles

What values guide your congregation’s decision making? List the four to five key words or phrases that describe your values. Start each phrase with, *we value...*

3. Promise

What can the community consistently trust or expect from you?

4. People

Who is your church passionate about reaching?

C. Setting Vital Church Goals – *Spiritual Guideposts for your future*

Vital congregations engage disciples so that they 1) worship, 2) make new disciples, 3) grow as disciples, 4) serve in mission, and 5) give to mission. Around the world, congregations will identify their commitment in each of these areas. These commitments will be gathered by your annual conference and presented to General Conference as an offering from your congregation. Reviewing the material above and identify a realistic target for each of the five areas for 2012-2015.

People and Ministry	2012	2013	2014	2015
1. Disciples worship Average worship attendance				
2. Disciples make new disciples Number of people who will join by profession of faith				
3. Disciples engage in growing as a disciple Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies.				
4. Disciples engage in mission Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach				
5. Disciples give to mission The total amount given by your congregation to other organizations for support of benevolent and charitable ministries (this amount includes apportionments paid and support for all United Methodist and non-United Methodist organizations active in work such as advocacy, education, health, justice, mercy, outreach, and welfare anywhere in the world)				

D. SMART Actions – *what will actions will you take to glorify God*

SMART actions are activities and strategies that help congregations reach their five goals listed above. They are SMART because they are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant (to your purpose, mission and ministry plan), and **T**ime-framed. An example of a SMART action is: Start a new worship service so that we attract new disciples and grow worship attendance by September 1, 2012. This phrase begins with an action word (Start), describes the activity/strategy (a new worship service), a *so that* phrase that connects your activity to your purpose and goals (so that we attract new disciples and grow worship attendance), and it is time-framed (by September 1). After reviewing 16 ministry strategies on page 2, write 2-3 SMART actions following the model above for each of the vital areas of ministry. Most of your actions should relate to the 16 ministry strategies.

1. Disciples worship

- a.
- b.
- c.

2. Disciples make new disciples (evangelism)

- a.
- b.
- c.

3. Disciples engage in growing as a disciple (small groups and children and youth ministry)

- a.
- b.
- c.

4. Disciples engage in mission (justice and mercy ministry)

- a.
- b.
- c.

5. Disciples give to mission (stewardship)

- a.
- b.
- c.

6. Lay Leadership (What will you do to develop laity to be effective spiritual leaders?)

- a.
- b.
- c.

7. Clergy Leadership (What will you do to support and encourage your pastor to be an effective spiritual leader? What will you do to help notice, name and nurture others in your congregation who have gifts for ordained ministry?)

- a.
- b.
- c.

E. Actions, even SMART actions do not move forward unless the goals, action plans and change are linked to appropriate steps (sometimes small steps) and are connected to emotions and accomplishments (hope, aspirations, appropriate honoring of tradition, changed lives, and results). Goals, “drivers,” and action plans move forward as they are connected to: 1) stories and testimonies of changed lives, 2) stories that link past traditions with present and future change and action, and 3) stories that communicate hope. Identify the steps, stories, and hopeful signs that will be used with your plans?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Post card that churches complete to share their goals with the General Conference.

People and Ministry	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
<i>Disciples worship</i> - Average worship attendance							
<i>Disciples make new disciples</i> - Number of people who joined by profession of faith							
<i>Disciples engage in growing their faith</i> - Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies.							
<i>Disciples engage in mission</i> - Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach activities							
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