

2012  
Kansas Area UMC  
VITAL CONGREGATIONS PLANNING GUIDE

To Fulfill the Mission of  
The United Methodist Church

## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The mission of the United Methodist Church is to *make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*. This mission statement summarizes two passages of Scripture, which are central to the United Methodist way:

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

The question for each of our local churches is: “So what does that really mean for us?” In other words we need to find connections between our mission (and the Biblical foundations of that mission) and our day-to-day life in the congregations and communities we serve.

Over the next several months, we are inviting every congregation in the Kansas area to enter a prayerful and thoughtful process to answer that crucial question. These resources are designed to help your church leadership explore and answer that question. We’ve developed some milestones during the process to encourage you to keep making progress, and there will be a report of your goals at the end. Along the way, there is a report for your Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee to complete. However, the most important part of the process is the “holy conferencing” that will take place as you explore how God wants to use *your* congregation to make disciples of Jesus Christ and change the world.

Though every congregation has its strengths and its challenges, we are convinced of this: God is not finished with us yet! Every Christian and every congregation is called to continue to grow in mission and ministry. (That’s what we Wesleyans like to call “sanctification,” or “going on to perfection.”) Your congregation can and must become more lively, more vital, for the sake of God’s mission.

**Disciple-making and world transformation occur through vital congregations.** What is a vital congregation?

*Vital congregations are Spirit-filled, forward-leaning communities of believers that welcome all people (Galatians 3:28), make disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 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*

**Vital congregations are led by and made up of vital disciples.** These are some marks of vital disciples.

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

This is our target, and we pray that the process outlined in the next pages will help your congregation move toward that vision of a more vital congregation.

## DESIGNING YOUR PROCESS

Each congregation's leaders will develop the process that best suits them. We encourage you to give time to developing the plan. You may wish to gather together on several evenings or other times which meet your congregation's needs. Look at the sections of the plan. **It might be wise to set the meeting schedule in order to deal with one section at a time, allowing for prayer and discernment between meetings.** The milestone dates are suggested to encourage forward progress. Only the December 15 deadline for S/PPRC committees and the March 1 date for the Goals Report are firm. You may need to adjust the other dates to meet your needs.

In general, you will find it helpful for each session to include the following events:

### PRAYER

Start with a time of prayer, praying for wisdom and discernment for the congregation and those preparing the Ministry Plan.

### REFLECTION

Vital congregations need vital leaders (lay and clergy) who are growing in their own Christian discipleship. How are you currently growing in your life with Christ? What actions do you need to take to become the disciple Christ calls you to be? Share this commitment with at least one other person.

### STUDY

Take time to study the Bible together. Here are some suggested texts:

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
1 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

### RESPOND

In the midst of prayerful discernment, answer the questions on the forms below as honestly and candidly as possible in order to gain the fullest sense of where God is working in the midst of this congregation and where God might be calling this congregation to go in the future.

## VITAL CONGREGATION PLANNING GUIDE

Date:

Church Name:

Address:

Senior Pastor:

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

#### MILESTONE: Complete by October 15

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 or who is your congregation most attentive to?

What does your congregation need to help disciples grow further?

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 few 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 else miss these ministries if your church ceased to exist?

Vital signs should be seen in both quantitative and qualitative ways. Indicate on the chart below your signs related to numerical fruit. In addition, note testimonies of what God's Spirit has done in each of these areas. Attach these testimonies to your plan; then pray, giving thanks for God's activity through your congregation (1 Thessalonians 5:16). This form will auto-fill when submitted as an online response.

<b>People and Ministry</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
<b>1. Disciples worship</b> Average worship attendance			
<b>2. Disciples make new disciples</b> Number of people who joined by profession of faith			
<b>3. Disciples engage in growing as a disciple</b> Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies.			
<b>4. Disciples engage in mission</b> Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach activities			
<b>5. Disciples give to mission</b> 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, health, education, justice, mercy, outreach, and welfare anywhere in the world)			

Reviewing what you have written so far, what have you learned about the current vitality of your congregation?

In 50 words or less, describe what you believe God is leading your church to be in five years.

## B. Building Blocks of a Vital Congregation—Spiritual Commitments

### MILESTONE: Complete by Nov. 15

#### 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 vision and 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? You may want to turn to the 2008 Book of Discipline, pages 73-74, the General Rules. Take time to study and reflect on these. List the four to five key words or phrases that describe your values. Start each phrase with "We value..."

#### 3. Promise

If your congregation were to cease to exist tomorrow, what would be missed from the community? What can the community consistently trust or expect from you?

#### 4. People

Who is God calling you to reach? Be specific for your community and your congregation.

**MILESTONE: Submit “Marks of a Vital Pastor” to your D.S. by Dec. 15, along with the appointive recommendation form. THIS DATE IS FIRM.**

### C. Setting Vital Church Goals—Spiritual Guideposts for Your Future

**MILESTONE: Complete by Jan. 15, 2012**

Vital congregations engage disciples so that they:

- 1) Worship
- 2) Make new disciples
- 3) Grow as disciples
- 4) Serve in mission
- 5) Give with a generous spirit, including giving 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 (see page 12).** Review your work thus far and identify a *realistic* target for each of the five areas for 2012-2015.

<b>People and Ministry</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>1. Disciples worship</b> Average worship attendance				
<b>2. Disciples make new disciples</b> Number of people who will join by profession of faith				
<b>3. Disciples engage in growing as a disciple</b> Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies.				
<b>4. Disciples engage in mission</b> Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach				
<b>5. Disciples give to mission</b> 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 actions will you take to glorify God?

### MILESTONE: Complete by Feb. 15, 2012

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 or strategy (a new worship service), a *so that* phrase that connects the activity to the purpose and goals (so that we attract new disciples and grow worship attendance), and it is time-framed (by September 1). Write 2-3 SMART Actions following this model for each of the vital areas of ministry. **Be wise in your actions. It may be better to write one action for each of these areas and do it well than to write so many that it ends up being overwhelming.**

1. *Disciples worship*

2. *Disciples make new disciples* (evangelism)

3. *Disciples engage in growing as disciples* (small groups, children and youth ministries)

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

5. *Disciples give to mission* (stewardship)

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

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 those in your congregation who have gifts for ordained ministry?)

MILESTONE: Submit your goals online and your goals form and SMART Action plans to the district office by March 1. THIS DATE IS FIRM.

## E. Story-Telling and Glory Sightings

### MILESTONE: Wrap up this phase of your work by April 8 – Easter Sunday

Goals 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
- 3) Stories that communicate hope

Even now, God is at work in your congregation, bringing God's vision into reality. Identify the ways in which you will intentionally tell the stories that honor your traditions *and* that point to the places where God is changing lives in your midst.

1.

2.

3.

## FINAL REFLECTIONS

Achieving goals is not an end in itself, but rather a tool to see if what we are doing is producing fruit. The actual process of disciple-making is our main priority. Setting goals and measuring outcomes are two tools that help us stay focused on our mission and purpose.

The primary use of the goals is to provide opportunities for reflection and conversation for strengthening ministry. For instance:

- 1) After working on your goals and seeing your results, what have you learned?
- 2) From your learning, what will you continue to do?
- 3) From your learning, what will you do differently during the next six months?
- 4) What training and/or encouragement can the conference provide to support you in meeting your goals? Be sure to share this need with your district superintendent.

What we measure receives attention. Across the denomination, we want to give attention to:

- 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)
- 5) Disciples sharing their resources for mission (amount of money given to mission)

We are measuring the five fruits listed above for the following reasons:

- 1) While churches may measure different activities and results, we will have five common measurable fruits/goals so that we can 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 United Methodist Church Vital Congregation 2012-2016 Goal Offering

*(This form can be filled out online at [www.UMCVitalCongregations.org](http://www.UMCVitalCongregations.org). The historical data will auto-fill on the online submission form. Online Information will be sent to GCFA and each Annual Conference office.)*

Please complete the goal sheet and give it to your District Superintendent, who will ensure your gift to God is presented at General Conference. You are welcome to share a synopsis of one or more testimonies to God’s activity in your congregation.

Church Name:	Annual Conference:
Address:	Country:
Lead Pastor:	

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

**THE STORIES:** *Please use the back of this sheet to share any stories of growth, success, effectiveness and vitality in your congregation.*

## OVERALL TIMELINE

_____	October 15	Churches encouraged to complete Section A: Context for Ministry
_____	November 15	Churches encouraged to complete Section B: Spiritual Commitments
_____	December 15	S/PPRC and pastors complete “Marks of a Vital Pastor” and appointive requests <b><i>This deadline is firm</i></b>
_____	January 15	Churches encouraged to complete Section C: Setting Vital Church Goals
_____	February 15	Churches encouraged to complete Section D: SMART Actions
_____	March 1	Goals report submitted online; goals report and SMART Actions submitted to D.S. <b><i>This deadline is firm</i></b>
_____	April 8 (Easter)	Churches encouraged to complete follow-up reflections in Section E