

 GUIDELINES

Small Membership Church

*Serving with
Significance
in Your Context*

Julia Kuhn Wallace
Diana L. Hynson
General Board of Discipleship

SMALL MEMBERSHIP CHURCH

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Some paragraph numbers for and language in the Book of Discipline may have changed in the 2012 revision, which was published after these Guidelines were printed. We regret any inconvenience.

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Called to a Ministry of Faithfulness and Vitality

You are so important to the life of the Christian church! You have consented to join with other people of faith who, through the millennia, have sustained the church by extending God's love to others. You have been called and have committed your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to a position of leadership. This Guideline will help you understand the basic elements of that ministry within your own church and within The United Methodist Church.

Leadership in Vital Ministry

Each person is called to ministry by virtue of his or her baptism, and that ministry takes place in all aspects of daily life, both in and outside of the church. Your leadership role requires that you will be a faithful participant in the **mission of the church**, which is to partner with God to **make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world**. You will not only engage in your area of ministry, but will also work to empower others to be in ministry as well. The vitality of your church, and the Church as a whole, depends upon the faith, abilities, and actions of all who work together for the glory of God.

Clearly then, as a pastoral leader or leader among the laity, your ministry is not just a “job,” but a spiritual endeavor. You are a spiritual leader now, and others will look to you for spiritual leadership. What does this mean?

All persons who follow Jesus are called to grow spiritually through the practice of various Christian habits (or “means of grace”) such as prayer, Bible study, private and corporate worship, acts of service, Christian conferencing, and so on. Jesus taught his disciples practices of spiritual growth and leadership that you will model as you guide others. As members of the congregation grow through the means of grace, they will assume their own role in ministry and help others in the same way. This is the cycle of disciple making.

The Church's Vision

While there is one mission—to make disciples of Jesus Christ—the portrait of a successful mission will differ from one congregation to the next. One of your roles is to listen deeply for the guidance and call of God in your own context. In your church, neighborhood, or greater community, what are the greatest needs? How is God calling your congregation to be in a ministry of service and witness where they are? What does vital ministry look like in the life of your congregation and its neighbors? What are the characteristics, traits, and actions that identify a person as a faithful disciple in your context?

This portrait, or vision, is formed when you and the other leaders discern together how your gifts from God come together to fulfill the will of God.

Assessing Your Efforts

We are generally good at deciding what to do, but we sometimes skip the more important first question of what we want to accomplish. Knowing your task (the mission of disciple making) and knowing what results you want (the vision of your church) are the first two steps in a vital ministry. The third step is in knowing how you will assess or measure the results of what you do and who you are (and become) because of what you do. Those measures relate directly to mission and vision, and they are more than just numbers.

One of your leadership tasks will be to take a hard look, with your team, at all the things your ministry area does or plans to do. No doubt they are good and worthy activities; the question is, “*Do these activities and experiences lead people into a mature relationship with God and a life of deeper discipleship?*” That is the business of the church, and the church needs to do what only the church can do. You may need to eliminate or alter some of what you do if it does not measure up to the standard of faithful disciple making. It will be up to your ministry team to establish the specific standards against which you compare all that you do and hope to do. (This Guideline includes further help in establishing goals, strategies, and measures for this area of ministry.)

The Mission of The United Methodist Church

Each local church is unique, yet it is a part of a *connection*, a living organism of the body of Christ. Being a connectional Church means in part that all United Methodist churches are interrelated through the structure and organization of districts, conferences, and jurisdictions in the larger “family” of the denomination. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* describes, among other things, the ministry of all United Methodist Christians, the essence of servant ministry and leadership, how to organize and accomplish that ministry, and how our connectional structure works (see especially ¶¶126–138).

Our Church extends way beyond your doorstep; it is a global Church with both local and international presence. You are not alone. The resources of the entire denomination are intended to assist you in ministry. With this help and the partnership of God and one another, the mission continues. You are an integral part of God’s church and God’s plan!

(For help in addition to this Guideline and the *Book of Discipline*, see “Resources” at the end of your Guideline, www.umc.org, and the other websites listed on the inside back cover.)

Vital Small Churches

a church's existence is not justified merely because of its age or historic location. A church exists solely for God's mission of making disciples. Churches of any size are called to have a clear vision and a strong sense of purpose that guides everything the church does. This does not require a lot of people. Vitality happens when even a few people possess a powerful sense of God's presence and call upon their lives!

The majority of churches (about 70 percent) in our denomination are small, defined as no more than 200 members. The temptation, perhaps inclination, of a small church is to dwell in a scarcity mind-set: "What can we few do?" The healthier, more productive and faithful question (for any church) is "What can God do through our congregation in this place and time?" This positive, abundance mindset is the attitude in a vital congregation. The size of the membership will determine **how**, but not **whether** the church goes about its mission and ministry.

What are some of the indicators of a vital congregation?

- Being a Christ-centered, transformational, relational community, where each person's name and gifts are known and laity are equipped and engaged in leadership
- Nurturing faith in each person by sharing the Bible, their story, and service both individually and through an intentional system of small groups
- Preserving a sense of continuity and presence despite obstacles or changes with strong pastoral leadership
- Responding to human need in a caring, gracious way with dignity and respect, supported by worship that empowers and enlarges the Christian life

Brandon O'Brien, editor at large for *Leadership* journal and a writer for their popular blog, *Out of Ur*, notes five strengths that smaller churches, particularly, can use with great effectiveness.

Authenticity. First, be yourself. Second, make sure your behavior lines up with your stated convictions.

Lean and Focused. Instead of running a multitude of generic programs, a better use of resources and energy in the small church is to zero in on one or two programs that focus on the unique needs of your local context.

People-powered. If a small church limits the number of programs it runs, then the lion's share of the church's ministry will have to come from its members. Empowering and releasing members to minister in the community requires that you know your congregants well enough to know what they are passionate about, gifted for, and already involved in.

Intergenerational relationships. Students who actively seek a church home after high school are those who have had meaningful relationships with other adults in the church besides their parents or have been given opportunities to serve younger children in the church [and so] were more likely to view the church as important to their lives.

Ministry on the Margins. The largest churches attract a fairly well-defined demographic. The average age of a mega-church attendee is 40. Nearly a third of them are single and, on the whole, the mega-church crowd is more educated and wealthier than the average members of smaller churches. But smaller, more nimble churches are reaching the people who fall outside this demographic and location.

These small but vital churches embody Christ's activity in the world. The trap is thinking, "We have to get bigger to get better." The freeing, energizing action is realizing, "We have to get better to get bigger," though "bigger" is not a worthy goal in itself. The goal is to focus on what God would have you do. Being faithful to and focused on the mission is what draws others in.

Think about the practical and emotional attitude your church members have about themselves as the church. Do you focus on your assets, gifts, and relationship with God to be out in ministry, or do you seek just to hold on to whatever you have left from days gone by?

A Biblical Witness

God has a special love and purpose for things that are small. Just as God once lifted up the tiny nation of Israel to be a witness, God still calls the small church to do the same today. Jesus taught that the meek and lowly were especially blessed (Luke 6:20-23), that the widow's mite was a valued offering (21:1-4), and that seeking the one lost sheep truly mattered (15:1-7). We might look upon these passages as illustrations of *nurture*.

The writer of Deuteronomy reminded Israel that God chose and loved them not because they were numerous but because they were "the fewest of all peoples" (7:7a), yet they were to be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:5-6).

Jesus taught that the tiny mustard seed had great potential (Luke 13:18-19). We might see these Scriptures as lessons in *outreach* and *witness*.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the community in Corinth, celebrated that “to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. . . . God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12: 7, 28). In the small house churches, or even a cluster of them in a wider community, Paul affirmed that in the divine economy, the people of faith are gifted with the *resources* they need to be in ministry and mission.

Flowing from this, we can see four basic assumptions that guide all healthy small churches.

- The congregation has a strong sense of God’s mission in the world. This purpose drives the vision, stewardship, and commitment of the congregation, and it is not optional! It provides the primary ministry momentum and renews the church’s purpose.
- The ministry of the baptized—lay and clergy—is claimed and celebrated, and it fosters a strong sense of identity. All are included and respected regardless of differences among them. Discovering and using spiritual gifts is crucial to mutual ministry.
- There is a strong connection between church and community. The church knows the community in which it is located and feels responsible for its well-being. The congregation is clear about its capacity to serve and seeks effective ways to do so.
- Discipleship is primetime not pastime. Making disciples and growing in discipleship is the priority that guides every decision.

Organizing for Ministry: NOW(rm)

Local churches have the freedom, within the bounds of the *Book of Discipline*, to organize their ministry in ways that take into account the capacity of the membership and the context in which their ministry happens. This blessing also requires some creativity (we don’t all have to look alike) and imposes a bit of structure (mandated categories of ministry). These mandated ministries are Nurture, Outreach, Witness, and resources for ministry (administration). These categories will be explored next, with the understanding that the lines between them are not at all tidy. Indeed, these ministry areas interconnect and support each other. There are three important keys to designing successful ministries using NOW(rm).

Leadership Commitment. People who make the ministry decisions in the church must support a common understanding of being in ministry, and they must commit themselves toward working together to its success. They must be trained and encouraged. NOW(rm) is not about doing things right, but about doing the right things. A dynamic church must do more than simply nurture the people who come into the building—it must reach beyond itself and live out its discipleship. Leaders must work together to balance nurture, outreach, witness, and resource ministries. When leaders know, respect, and trust one another they may more easily understand and name what the church expects of them and what they offer the church.

Assessment of Current Ministry and Needs. Honestly review the needs and activities of people or groups in the church and community who are being served and those who are not. Successful leaders discern where the place of greatest potential is for ministry by using demographic studies, “pounding the pavement,” interviews, informal conversations, and so on. By knowing the community, you are in a position to respond to those decisive moments that may open or deepen a spiritual experience for someone. Does the church do an equal job of taking care of those outside the church and those within? Are nurture ministries balanced carefully with outreach and witness? Is the church focused more on mission, maintenance, or survival? Do leaders know where unchurched people live and what they need in order to respond to the gospel?

Creativity: Willing to Risk and Try Something New. Sometimes the patterns of ministry can become our prison. The more successful past ministries are in our minds and hearts, the more powerful they can be in controlling the present and ultimately the future. We do the same activities in the same way year after year (and wonder why we are not getting the same response we once did). A new day often demands a new faithful response. Is there a way to honor traditions and people’s needs and expectations at the same time? Do new ideas thrive or die in your church? Remind your church that it needs to be willing to take some risks. Some of your efforts will produce growth; others won’t. Do not waste time dwelling on the latter. Learn from both your successes and your mistakes. Move on. (More on evaluation later.)

The *Book of Discipline* defines the work of the nurture, outreach, and witness ministries for churches of all sizes:

“The nurturing ministries of the congregation shall give attention to but not be limited to education, worship, Christian formation, membership care, small groups, and stewardship. Attention must be given to the needs of individuals and families of all ages.

“The outreach ministries . . . shall give attention to local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy. These ministries include church and society, global ministries, higher education and campus ministry, health and welfare, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and the status and role of women.

“The witness ministries . . . shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; Lay Speaking Ministries; and other means that give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ” (§252.2.a, b, c).

The various ministries mentioned specifically may be more ambitious than a small membership church can undertake, but within those boundaries, every church will find within the congregation, community, or nation some expression of those areas. The task for your church is to survey the congregation and wider community to discern the needs as well as the capacity of the congregation to respond to those needs.

Nurture Ministries (N)

People need a growing relationship with Jesus Christ and the Christian community. “Nurture” identifies the need for Christians to be cultivated in the Christian faith if they are to acquire and apply the spiritual resources necessary to provide effective outreach and witness ministries.

Nurture brings to mind activities like Sunday school, visitation of sick and homebound members, and the worship ministry of the congregation. However, it is helpful to remember that the church’s nurturing ministries are much broader than just two or three emphases.

The Christian formation ministry of the church, for instance, incorporates Sunday school as well as Bible studies, prayer groups, Confirmation, orientation and membership classes, and other short-term classes or groups. Short-term classes can address a variety of needs in the congregation, from instruction on Christian parenting, to care of the elderly, and even congregational conflict management. The educational ministry of the church also includes leadership training for church officers, Sunday school leaders, teachers, and other small group leaders.

Perhaps the most urgently needed type of nurturing ministry today is simply assisting members of the congregation in their daily walk of faith. Persons who seek to grow in faith are people who are constantly assailed by a variety of activities that compete for their time and energy. Growing disciples need help in developing habits that include the daily practice of the means of grace (Scripture reading, praying, listening to God, and so on).

Although overlooked in many churches, having fun together (fellowship) is another way to provide joyous emotional support to all members of the congregation. Plan events that meet the needs of families, older persons, single persons, children, youth, and those who feel discriminated against or marginalized by society. Sometimes this can be accomplished through intergenerational activities. At other times a particular group of folk in the congregation may find mutual support by spending time with one another.

Members of a congregation need to know that others in the church care about them and pray for them. Lending a helping hand—when someone is sick, ill, or injured or when a baby is born or when a loved one dies—is another way to demonstrate care and love.

The Sunday worship service is an important vehicle for nurturing the congregation. Take care to plan worship with wide appeal. In general, the more the members of the congregation have an opportunity to plan and participate in the worship services, the more meaningful these services are for them. Overall, the worship of the church should be inspirational, spiritually stimulating, and challenging.

SAMPLE EDUCATIONAL NURTURE AND/OR DISCIPLING MINISTRIES

- Short-term Christian education study classes for adults
- DISCIPLE Bible study (within a church or offered cooperatively)
- Spiritual gifts discovery classes
- Covenant Discipleship groups or spiritual growth retreats
- Vacation Bible school for children, youth, and/or adults
- Lenten, Advent, or other seasonal studies and devotions
- Confirmation and membership classes

FELLOWSHIP NURTURE MINISTRIES

- Hospitality training for worship greeters and key leaders
- United Methodist Men, Women, Youth
- Midweek evening program for children, families, or intergenerational groups
- After school or Saturday care programs for children (like Kid's Club)
- Church camp scholarships

PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT NURTURE MINISTRIES

- Being supportive, such as providing meals during trying times
- Providing wheelchairs and other accessibility equipment and building features
- Leadership training and prayer support
- Sending cards and devotional material, such as *The Upper Room*, to homebound members
- Pastoral, caring, and listening lay ministries, such as Stephen Ministry

WORSHIP NURTURE MINISTRIES

- Monthly lectionary study for people who want to help plan and participate as worship leaders
- Special music for worship services (children's choir; special selections; spirited singing involving a new instrument, such as guitar, synthesizer, drums)
- Dramas and short skits

- Special Sundays (social, such as Mother's Day; denominational celebrations, such as Native American Awareness Sunday and Christian Education Day)
- Involvement of various people in worship services in a variety of ways
- Special worship services, such as Thanksgiving, Good Friday, Easter Sunrise
- Ecumenical worship celebrations, such as Church Women United World Day of Prayer
- Fifth Sunday Charge Worship and Fellowship Dinner

One key driver of vitality in congregations is the intentional use of small groups and programs for persons of all ages (or at least the ages represented in your church and local community). Within those group and programs, you have both the training ground and nurturing opportunity to grow disciples, who then mature in faith and become leaders of discipleship.

Another nurture ministry, worship, is a crucial component of vital congregations. While there is much discussion on the appeal and value of traditional versus contemporary worship, any form of worship must take into account the context in which it is offered. As you survey the congregation and the community, you may find that blending styles or increasing opportunities for an alternate form of worship will make your church more welcoming to the "potential" believer just outside your doors.

Outreach Ministries (O)

all churches are called to provide outreach ministries on the local, state, regional, national, and international levels. Doing local outreach is a good way initially to get people involved.

To provide appropriate outreach ministries, first analyze the needs of your community. Start by interviewing persons in your community who are aware of these needs, such as a public school nurse, police chief, senior citizens center director, fire department chief, county or regional social service director, county or regional health director, community organizing project director, and others who serve the community. Ask these and other questions:

- Who are the people with needs in this community?
- What do they need?
- Are there different kinds of needs?
- How can the church respond to these needs?

Be bold. “Because of God’s abundant grace, there is never anything inherently small about any church!” This proclamation tells us that while some tasks may seem enormous, the infinite availability of God’s grace makes it possible for a church of any size to address these tasks. The church with a small membership may not be able to do everything, but it can do something! Outreach ministries may take expression in several forms:

- Ministries of compassion involve a congregation in addressing the immediate needs of individuals, families, and communities. The congregation may respond to local disasters and/or provide food, clothing, emergency housing, counseling, employment opportunities, and so forth in its community.
- Community ministries of concern and advocacy call for a congregation’s involvement in the enrichment of community life and advocacy for justice—changes in local communities related to welfare, long-term housing, education, community economic development, health services, and so on.
- Regional, national, and global outreach ministries call on a congregation to engage the structures and values of society and to move toward justice and righteousness in public policies, such as basic human rights, land use and control, ecology, immigration, and the world’s economic systems.

Outreach Ministries through Giving

Many churches with small membership are doing much-needed and exciting outreach ministries of compassion. United Methodist apportionments help fund outreach ministries in local and annual conference settings as well as

in the fifty states of the United States and in numerous countries around the world. Special “Advance” giving supports approved ministries around the world that are not covered through denominational giving.

Clergy and lay leadership need to find creative ways to inform the congregation about how these apportionments and other missional gifts are used. One way to do this is to offer a “Church in Action” report during worship (monthly or weekly), summarizing our denominational outreach work. It is also important to provide opportunities to celebrate this missional giving and its results.

Outreach ministry includes more than simply giving dollars; congregation members should be encouraged to experience a hands-on project by participating in a current service ministry or by initiating a new ministry of service according to the community’s needs. The resulting sense of satisfaction and accomplishment often far outweighs placing a donation in the offering plate. Hands-on outreach ministries also provide opportunities for church members to reconnect experientially to their local community, nation, and world.

Effective churches with a small membership both support and do outreach ministries. They also embrace John Wesley’s belief that the world is their parish. That is, they see the need to reach out to the local, state, regional, national, and international communities. Sometimes members of the congregation resist supporting international outreach, stating that they prefer “to take care of their own people first,” but God’s creation knows no such artificial boundaries, especially as our world grows ever closer to becoming a global village.

EXAMPLES OF MINISTRIES OF COMPASSION

- Giving childcare scholarships to young mothers in the community to help them complete high school
- Providing free funeral dinners to nonmembers
- Supporting terminally ill persons and families as a Hospice volunteer
- Volunteering to deliver Meals on Wheels
- Providing emergency financial aid such as utilities, food, clothing, shelter, medicine, or serving as an emergency medical technician or volunteer firefighter
- Doing errands or providing transportation for older persons as needed

COMMUNITY CONCERN AND ADVOCACY MINISTRIES

- Donating seeds, fertilizers, and canning equipment to low-income households and teaching them how to garden, can, and freeze foods

- Donating to the Heifer Project International
- Sponsoring work camps designed to improve substandard housing, construct church camp buildings, or support Habitat for Humanity
- Hosting work trips to mission sites
- Financially supporting and volunteering to help with local domestic violence assistance programs or tutoring for vulnerable children

REGIONAL, NATIONAL, AND GLOBAL OUTREACH

- Collecting special offerings, such as One Great Hour of Sharing, Native American Awareness Sunday, or Rural Life Sunday
- Recycling and contributing the proceeds to an outreach project
- Sponsoring a refugee family (perhaps with two or three churches)
- Organizing voter registration or holding political office
- Participating in a Volunteers in Mission trip outside the United States

Organize and Assess Your Outreach Ministries

Form a team of people who will work on developing outreach ministries. Begin by asking what outreach ministries are already being supported financially and how, in general, your church members actually engage in outreach. Then inventory the current outreach ministries according to type (local, state, national, international) and means of support (financial, hands-on, advocacy).

When you have a portrait of current practice, look for what could be next:

- What needs exist in your community?
- What talents, abilities, and experiences exist among your members that could be used to address these needs?
- Think and talk about the needs of your state, nation, and world. What needs currently exist?
- How might your congregation address these needs? What biblical teaching supports it?

It is important to develop a balance of ministries aimed at local, state, national, and international concerns. Also work to develop a balance between outreach ministries that your church supports financially and those in which church members actively participate.

Witness Ministries (W)

The ministry of witness gives people the opportunity to share their faith understanding of personal and corporate salvation, reconciliation, worship, celebration, spiritual development, and discipline. It also provides people with opportunities to share their faith with other persons and to work for justice, righteousness, and the redemption of the world.

Most people who become members of churches with small membership are attracted to the congregation because of one or more of the following reasons.

- They are born into the congregation.
- They are attracted to the ministry of the pastor, often because of the pastor's ministry to them during a personal crisis.
- They find a warm, intimate, family-type fellowship there.
- They are able to fill a need in the church's ministry.
- They are recruited through participation in a fellowship or service group related to the church, such as the choir, Scouts, and so forth.

Expanding Our View of Witness Ministries

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ is plain and simple: Christians are supposed to tell others about the gospel and encourage them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:16-20). There are four building blocks for witness ministries in any church, including the small church:

- a concern for unchurched persons living in your community and a willingness to befriend these persons with Christian love
- a commitment to talk to God about your concern for these persons
- a willingness to develop effective and appropriate skills for sharing your faith with those who have no faith or who may have lost it along the way, which includes planning for witness ministries in your church
- a pastor and lay leaders willing to teach members of your church how to accomplish the first three building blocks

People do not make a commitment to Jesus Christ by chance. They do not learn by accident what faith demands regarding their relationship with humanity, other living things, and the land with all its rich resources. Witness ministries must be thoughtfully planned and implemented.

Examine how people who visit your church can become accepted members of your congregation. Most churches with small membership like to think of themselves as “friendly, happy families.” However, friendliness does not guarantee that new members will easily become part of your church family. Just like most families, your church family has a shared history, language,

and behavior. Would you still feel the welcome and support of the congregation if you were the visitor? of a different ethnic background? an elderly person? a teenager with a tongue stud?

Newcomers must be offered ways to learn (and longtime members need to be reminded of) this family background in order to be truly integrated into the congregation. They must also be offered a meaningful role in their new church family that includes sharing a faith and ministry focus they believe they may be called toward. There are several ways to accomplish this.

- Tell the congregation's story on United Methodist Heritage Sunday or at "Homecoming."
- Assign new members and friends a mentor from the congregation. The role of the mentor is to make the newcomers feel acquainted; to facilitate their adoption into the congregation; and to help them discover opportunities for study, fellowship, and service in the church.
- Include newcomers in opportunities for fun and play. Congregations, like all families, need to play together in order to enjoy one another's company and to learn more about one another.

Examples of Witness Ministries

There is a close parallel between witness and outreach ministries, especially those that address the structures and values of society and move toward justice and righteousness. Witness ministry, alone, may seem unclear and may happen (if it does happen) with little focus or intentionality. Be concerned and mindful about sharing the Good News.

SPEAKING AND WORD WITNESS MINISTRIES

- Church members visiting with their friends, relatives, coworkers, fellow students, church visitors, and others about the meaning of the Christian faith in their life
- A door-to-door community canvass, including an invitation to worship (using brochures or informative door hangers—like the ones delivery restaurants use)
- Providing worship services at nursing homes or in a park before ball games or other activities that attract people
- Sponsoring a lay servant course in your church
- Offering an event open to the community, such as a concert with contemporary Christian music, or having outdoor tent revival services

Build upon Your Knowledge of the Community

An accurate awareness of both the unchurched people in your community and the potential for new members in your church is absolutely essential

in planning for effective witness ministries. Before you begin reviewing or developing ministries of witness, however, invite other church leaders and members to gather information relating to the wider community (make specific assignments from the list below). Your research should include

1. The recent United States Census Bureau population statistics for your community. Call your district or conference office for any demographics they may have of your community. You can also obtain demographic information from the General Board of Global Ministries Research Office (<http://research.gbgm-umc.org>). Your local school superintendent and public library may also be sources of data.
2. The breakdown of the total population into age groups: pre-school, younger and older elementary, younger and older teens, young adults, middle adults, and older adults.
3. Total number of churches and other houses of worship in your community, their membership, and average worship attendance.
4. The number and the percentage of unchurched persons in your community (derived from information from questions 1 and 3).
5. From Census data, the percentage of racial or ethnic persons in your community and annual number of newcomers to the community
6. Identify and describe five groups in your community who, for whatever reason, are going through challenges or are difficult to love.
7. Who are the impoverished, hardworking, unchurched persons in your community?
8. Who are the persons in your community who cannot worship on Sunday morning because of their work schedule or a disability?

DOING AND ACTION WITNESS MINISTRIES

- Making the church sanctuary available to the community for funerals, memorial services, and weddings (with clear policies approved by the trustees)
- Offering ecumenical worship services
- Peaceful demonstrations in the community to bring about awareness of social challenges and to press for actions to resolve those problems
- Church-sponsored scholarship program for graduating seniors
- Recycling
- Mobilization of community resistance to hard liquor sales, drug sales and use, gambling, or other activities destructive to the community
- Hosting an art exhibit to display work that answers a question such as “Where do I find God?”

GOOD COMMUNICATION ENHANCES WITNESS

Effective smaller congregations use good public relations techniques. Some churches may feel uneasy about thinking of public relations as a way to witness to their faith. However, it is an indispensable part of witnessing to the local community. There are three important keys to doing effective public relations. They are advertise, advertise, and advertise. That is, keep the story of your church's ministries in front of the public as much as possible. This can be achieved in several ways.

Place temporary signs in front of the church. These signs should be attractively designed and used to promote such activities as vacation Bible school, special seasonal programs, rally days, and so forth.

As a general rule, make some recognizable change to the outside of your church building and property annually. This reminds the community that your church is active and present within the community and gives it a fresh look. The change need not be substantial. Something as simple as putting an attractive canvas banner across the front of the building, planting different colored annual flowers, or painting the front door a different color is enough to attract the attention of those who pass by.

Make good use of your church website, local newspaper, radio, or cable company. Think beyond simply listing your worship services. Placing articles describing the ministries of your congregation and upcoming events can be highly effective.

When decorating the church for celebrations, do not forget the outside of the building. Wreaths and lights are helpful during Advent and Christmas. A simple wooden cross draped with purple fabric during Lent and changed to white during Eastertide is especially attractive.

BEING INTENTIONAL IS THE KEY

You may find you need more preparation for doing witness ministries than for nurture and outreach ministries. If the pastor has little or no training or experience in this type of ministry, he or she may need to attend a continuing education event designed to give direction, resources, and ideas for how to do witness ministries together.

Members of the congregation may need to participate in a witness ministry training event or series of workshops. While this type of training should be made available to anyone who wishes to participate, it may be helpful for the pastor, lay leader, or witness committee chairperson to pick several key persons to be trained.

If your congregation feels that there is potential for numerical growth in your community, you may want to consider forming a “church growth team.” Such a team would include the pastor, statistician, new member development worker (who assists new members in becoming involved in the congregation), church council chairperson, youth sponsor, Sunday school superintendent or leader, outreach captain (who focuses the congregation’s attention on reaching out to unchurched persons), and others with a special interest or skill. The church growth team’s primary responsibility is to devise, resource, and monitor church growth ministries in the congregation.

Members of the team should be seen as coordinators and co-participants in this ministry, not as the only ones responsible for this work. Together, examine these issues.

- Based on the local data you have collected, is it possible that effective witness ministries might result in numerical growth for your congregation? Why or why not?
- How do people become a part of your congregation? Do they reflect the biblical situations described in this resource?
- Do people who have become part of your church in recent years reflect ways that people become members of small churches as described in this resource? If not, in what ways did they become members?
- How does your church understand witness ministries? Where do you need continuing education in witness ministries?
- Do you personally know unchurched people? Are there unchurched people in your community? Is your congregation equipped to do effective witness ministries?
- What witness ministries are currently taking place at your church?
- What witness ministries would you like your congregation to add to those being accomplished already?

Resource Ministries (rm)

The work of organizing and administering the church's ministries always requires careful planning, implementation, and evaluation. While the work of administration and organization of the church's ministries is absolutely essential, it is never an end in itself; it must always be seen as a means to bring about the actual ministries of the church. Each group has different tasks, but all provide support for the ministries of the church. The finance, staff/pastor-parish, nominations and leadership development committees, and the trustees should meet at least quarterly to coordinate their support of ministry and communicate with one another. Generally this would be done through the church council.

Consult the *Book of Discipline* (§258) for further descriptions of the committee on finance, board of trustees, staff/pastor-parish relations committee, and church treasurer. ***Look at the Guideline for each of those ministry areas for helps in leading those ministry areas.*** A brief description follows here.

Trustees

The trustees manage the building and site as a resource for ministry (see the *Discipline*, §§258.3; 2524–2552). They ensure that everything is in proper working order. Among their responsibilities, they will

- review the site as a place for ministry and make sure that everything is easily located and accessible
- maintain facility appearance, cleanliness, safety, and function
- manage risk reduction and guarantee safety both in the facility and during church activities, including Safe Sanctuaries® practices
- develop policies for the use of the building, property, facilities, and equipment for members and community
- develop signage for rooms, directions, and so on so that people know where to go for worship, nursery, classes, and other activities

Imagine that you are a visitor to the church with little or no knowledge of the floor plan. Take a brief mental tour of the church to see what, if anything, can improve your appearance, accessibility, and hospitality.

Finance

Developing a budget can both interpret and support ministry. Using the NOW(rm) model as a guide for developing the church's general budget is another way to interpret the model—and the focus on ministry—to the congregation. A church budget set up according to your nurture, outreach, and witness priorities is not only an informative interpretation tool but is also a

theological document that clearly delineates the Christian ministries of the congregation. Consider using the NOW(rm) model for outlining your line item budget.

The responsibilities of the finance committee can be found in the *Book of Discipline* (§258.4). In the main, the finance committee creates and administers the church's budget, which may also include taking responsibility for raising the money through stewardship efforts.

Raising money for ministry is essential. There are many ways to raise money for ministry in the small membership church:

- offerings
- special appeals
- sales
- fundraisers
- capital improvement gifts
- grants
- memorials
- rent for space
- foundations
- conference funds
- financial partnerships with others

A key to supporting ministry financially is intentionally setting guidelines for fundraising. Another consideration is finding out where the grant sources are in your area. It is crucial to keep in view that money is not what drives the budget and fundraising. Rather, look to the ministries to which God has called the church, and work to establish the practical means to carry out those ministries. The *why* of fundraising is the heart of the matter; it separates the church from a small business and demonstrates our stewardship.

Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations

The staff/pastor-parish relations committee is defined in the *Book of Discipline* (§258.2). The main focus of this group is to help bridge the gifts and abilities of the pastor (and other staff) and laity in the church. Building the bridges that will link the faithfulness of the past with the possibilities of the future is crucial. Staff/pastor-parish relations committees that want to do effective work will learn about

- understanding the nature of chaos and change
- resolving and transforming conflict
- establishing a covenant to guide behavior
- developing clear, open communication
- developing ministry support from district strategies (especially inside the Church), conferences, and general Church agencies

Nominations and Leadership Development

The work of this committee is described in the *Book of Discipline* (§258.1). Think of this group in your church as the gardeners, whose task is to

nourish the roots of the plants. In a church, it is this team that identifies the gifts of individuals and provides training and support for ministry.

An engaged committee on nominations and leadership development will offer opportunities for spiritual growth that include spiritual gift discovery. The committee (or team) members will also take the time to talk with people in leadership positions to find out their experience of serving in the church. Pay particular attention to what the leadership believes it has accomplished, what would have helped support its work in the last year, and what improvements can be made in leading.

Pastoral Leadership

In smaller churches where the pastoral leader is the only paid leader, he or she does well to engage an active laity through coaching, mentoring, and practicing the spiritual disciplines that help them grow in grace and faith. The pastor is also a change agent who has a vision for growth in the congregation and who can lead the planning and goal setting to achieve the greatest potential of the congregation as a household of faith. That said, the solo pastor brings his or her gifts and strengths, whatever they are, knowing that no one is gifted in everything.

The pastor-parish relationship committee, as well as the ministry leaders, will do well to have frank and open conversations about the gifts and strengths of all the leaders. As was already mentioned, in God's economy, the gifts needed to flourish are most likely present in the congregation. Your task is to discern where they lie and then, as a church leadership team, to find ways to support and complement each other. As each leader, including the pastor, is empowered to live out of their strengths, the governance of congregational life and mission will itself be strengthened.

Administration and Evaluation

Working with laity leaders to carry out ministry will depend on the kind of parish or charge you have. There are numerous ways in which congregations are yoked or clustered. In addition, the pastoral leader could be lay or clergy, and may or may not have sacramental privileges. He or she may be part-time and serve only one church. For administrative convenience, you may have church officers who execute their office across a multiple charge, rather than duplicating that office in two or more churches. You might have a blend of local church and charge leaders, depending on the size, location, need, and desire of the participating congregations.

When one pastoral leader (or team) conducts ministry and pastoral care across two or more churches, it is crucial to coordinate ministries among those congregations. It is equally essential that laity take up the mantle and responsibility for leading their respective congregations. One pastor only stretches so far, and the various ministries (or churches) should be cooperating, rather than competing with each other.

Planning

Individual churches or churches on a charge may have distinctly different “personalities” but the vision will still be the same: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The specific vision statement will be framed by each church or charge to reflect what a faithful disciple looks like in that context. The *means* of disciple making (what you do as a church) will be determined by the context of ministry, the gifts and capacities of the church members, and the budget.

Whatever ministries the church or charge conducts will be evaluated in light of their value in disciple making. The church may do wonderful things, but if those activities do not advance the cause of making disciples, perhaps they are better left to someone else. Likewise, in a small membership church, ministry should be carefully focused so that it enriches, rather than exhausts, its finite number of leaders and members.

The members of a multiple charge will have different gifts and interests, so you may want to consider planning across the charge, rather than church by church. There may be no need to duplicate ministries that will, or can be, more robust by cooperating. One youth group with ten members may be more satisfying and effective than three groups with three or four members (though numbers are certainly not the only, or even main, factor in vital ministry).

MISSION AND VISION

As you plan for the activities and experiences that lead people into a life of discipleship, you will organize around a flow or process. For example, consider the mission and vision of Little UMC, which is in an economically depressed area: “The **mission** of Little UMC is to form, nurture, and equip disciples of Jesus Christ. Our **vision** is disciples who are grounded in Scripture, engaged in radical hospitality, encouraging hope, and steeped in love for all in need.” In other words, if Little UMC does its mission, their members will become their vision. **Mission** is the big picture of what you do; **vision** is the big picture of what it looks like when you have succeeded.

With a clear idea of your mission and vision, you then begin to plan the interim goals and strategies, which are smaller, more specific steps that cumulatively lead to the final goal. So, at Little UMC, four goals are implied in the vision. People who are

- grounded in Scripture
- engaged in significant hospitality
- hopeful and who encourage hope
- steeped in love for those in need

Some strategies by which you will implement those goals might include

- basic and in-depth Bible study
- fellowship and intentional growth groups
- support networks, particularly those that open up preparation for employment or retooling job skills
- training and orientation for all members to “be the church” for any and all who attend, as well as embodying the church in the community
- cooperative community ministry that meets the practical needs of the community, such as child-care ministry, food pantry, or free medical clinic

Success breeds further success, so it is important to have short-term, easily reachable goals. These early “victories” are motivating and encouraging; they keep you moving forward while you undertake longer-term, more ambitious goals. Little UMC may begin with fellowship opportunities between persons who are employed and those who aren’t in order to network, sharpen job skills, become familiar with their strengths, and gain counsel for weaknesses. Eventually, they may become the community center where others can come for Bible study, personal nurture, and all the other networking and work-related helps.

SET PRIORITIES

In developing short- and longer-term goals and strategies, you will need to decide what gets first attention. Many ideas may be wonderful, but you

can't do everything, and you certainly can't do everything first. All of those ideas should be filtered through the mission and vision. If they uphold and advance your church's plan, keep them. If not, move to something else.

Capacity affects your goals and priorities. How many people, how much energy, what amount of time, which skills, how much space, what sort of equipment, how much money do you have to do what you want? Guard against "scarcity thinking" and focus on what you do have. With careful "abundance" scrutiny, you may be amazed at the extent of assets you didn't realize you have.

DEVELOP AND USE A CALENDAR

A planning calendar, whether it is maintained by the pastor or lay leader, is essential in smaller congregations. Ministry groups and other committees should check with this calendar before scheduling church programs and events. It is also appropriate for the church council to supervise this calendar.

Plan with the end in mind (your vision) for whatever you do. It is not unusual to start with the question, What shall we do? The prior question, though, is What does God want us to accomplish? To further assess your plans, ask yourself, Who is being served? What will be done? Why is it important? How it will be done? When and where it will happen? By whom and how we will know we have been successful?

The calendar is not just to keep track of what specific events will happen on what days in what space. It will be a necessary tool to help keep on track for long-range plans. If Little UMC's plan is to become the Christ-centered community hub for employment networking in three years, you will want to set target dates *and put them on the calendar* for the interim steps it will take to become the hub. The calendar then adds to the accountability process.

EXAMINE POLICIES AND PROCESSES

No matter what the size of the church, there are certain ways things get done (processes) and there are particular, though often unspoken, policies behind the decisions that are made (why we do what we do). Once those processes and policies are clear and spoken, they can be examined to ensure that they keep the church and its members safe (personally and legally) and that they still do further the mission of the church effectively. Regular examination will help to keep operations fresh and outside the "we've always done it that way" rut.

Evaluation

Evaluate and celebrate ministry. Take stock regularly of the what, why, and how of what you're doing. Then take it a step further to evaluate what the results are and what impact it has on the spiritual and material lives of the participants. In order to do this effectively, you will need to establish measures.

Measures (or metrics) are indicators of activity and impact, and they are implied by the mission and vision statements and your established goals and strategies. Looking again at Little UMC, you see a flow of activity that leads to the vision, which we will abbreviate in key words

- **Form** in faith (grounded in Scripture)
- **Relate** (engaged in significant hospitality/hopeful and who encourage hope)
- **Serve:** (steeped in love for those in need)

It is important to define your terms carefully so that there is enough specificity to measure with some objectivity how well you have done. Measures should be both **quantitative** (how many, how much) and **qualitative** (what sort of change, what difference did it make). **Quantitative** measures are easy because they can be counted: We had 50 people in worship; our Sunday school grew by 4 percent in a year; our pledges increased by 2 percent. Much of what you will be required to report (to your conference “dashboard”) will be countable—worship attendance, group participation, and so on. But quantitative measures only go so far. They don't get at what is actually going on inside the disciple we are trying to make and nurture.

Qualitative measures or impact awareness are personal; sometimes intangible, but they can be described and observed. Consider a few of these possible measures of spiritual growth

- regular participation in worship
- regular participation in other Christian formation group(s)
- personal stories attesting to spiritual growth and change
- move from “member” to “leader”
- personal involvement is Christ-centered and other-directed
- invites and/or mentors others
- invests in the ministry and nurture of children and youth
- habituated in one or more means of grace, or has added practices
- seeks continuing education and formation activities

This suggestion of establishing measures may sound too “big church” or ambitious for a small membership church, but intentionally developing

strategies and the quantitative and qualitative measures that will evaluate them will strengthen your ministry. ***It is a blessing to your leaders, and this is why:***

- Having a plan gives focus and direction. It helps to see where there are gaps and needs in an overall ministry plan. In addition, it helps to keep track of the little steps, which could be easily overlooked, in the long-term goals.
- Leaders need to know what is expected and how it will be evaluated. That breeds more confidence and works to eliminate a high degree of subjectivity or arbitrariness in the evaluation.
- If problems arise and leaders need more help or training, there is a way to talk about it and deal with it.
- A plan with specific strategies and measures will have been discussed and approved in the church council. **When the leaders and other volunteers executing the plan do as well as they can on what everyone agreed upon, and the plan doesn't work so well, examine the strategies rather than criticizing the volunteers who are doing their best.** They are nurtured better when they know they will be supported during a "failure," especially when the strategy is flawed.

For more helps on planning and evaluation, see the Guide to the Guidelines on the CD and visit www.umvitalcongregations.com. See especially "Measures Evaluation Tool" in the "Setting Goals" tab.

WHEN IT'S NOT WORKING

Rarely does everything go according to even the best laid plans. Sometimes gifts and strengths don't match up; people come and go; personalities clash; the vision becomes obscure for a bit; emergencies come up that drain energy and resources; there was a fatal, but unseen flaw in a major strategy—any number of things can subvert your goals.

If the issue is the strategy, ditch it and find a different one, with no recriminations. Try to learn from whatever worked and what didn't (failure can be an excellent teacher). Most likely something went right, and you don't want to lose sight of it. Work to replicate the successful strategies and revise the flawed processes and plans.

If the issue is personnel, the person in question may realize that he or she is not quite up to the task. Other persons may not realize the need for a change in their leadership or actively resist it. Their vision for ministry may be obscured behind the need for power, attention, or relationship. Regardless of the size of the membership, having an ineffective leader who refuses to step

aside or who is never challenged to change is ultimately worse than no leader at all. Keeping a single ineffective or inappropriate leader in place may also chase away several others, so it's better to deal with the one for the sake of the many.

This small volume is not sufficient to deal with all the issues of church dynamics. Suffice to say that all leadership issues must be handled with grace and compassion, but also with courage. Where a change must be made, work to honor the contribution, but also strive to find a way to redirect those gifts where there is a better fit. Always work for a win-win situation. In the church—the body of Christ—the goal is Christian unity, not a battle of human wills.

CELEBRATE!

Thank God and others who make ministry possible and fruitful. Many people will not need a tangible reward, but most will want to know that their efforts have made a positive difference. One of the formative goals in Christian life is in finding ways that God-given gifts contribute to the Kingdom in this time and place (another reason for qualitative evaluation)!

Find natural times and places to acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments (and the attempts) the congregation has made throughout the year. Fifth Sunday fellowship meals, gatherings at the annual “rites of passage” (end or beginning of school, close of harvest season, Mother and Father’s Day, anniversaries, national holidays, and so on), and the changes in church season provide the occasion to come together in festive ways. And, of course, you can just plan something because you want to; you don’t need an excuse to express appreciation and acknowledge the faithful contributions of your members!

Continue to set new goals that sustain a sense of vitality and purpose as well as point toward a hope-filled future. Guided by God’s spirit, your small church/charge can prosper to serve this age and the next.

Resources

** Indicates our top picks

Administration in the Small Membership Church, by John H. Tyson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-687-64643-2). Describes church administration as a ministry in the small membership church.

Can These Bones Live? Bringing New Life to a Dying Church, by Kevass J. Harding (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-687-33557-2).

Charting a Course for Discipleship, by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, Jay Regenniter; rev. Delia Halverson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012. ISBN 978-0-88177-616-4).

Christian Education in the Small Membership Church, by Karen Tye (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-68765-099-6). This book invites pastors to lead their small membership churches to develop an imaginative and holistic vision of Christian Education.

Effective Small Churches in the 21st Century, by Carl Dudley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-687-09090-7). Dudley explores the key components that contribute to a small congregation's sense of unity and that motivates its members to more faithfully live out their faith.

Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations, by Beth Ann Gaede, editor. (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2002. ISBN 978-1-56699-263-3).

Evangelism in the Small Membership Church, by Royal Speidel (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007. ISBN 978-0-687-33579-4). Small membership congregations are often more effective in evangelism than megachurches.

Help! I'm a Small Church Youth Worker: Achieving Big-Time Success in a Non-Mega World, by Rich Grassel (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. ISBN 978-0-3102-3946-8).

***The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches*, by David R. Ray (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2002. ISBN 0-8298-1507-4).

Local Ministry: Story, Process, and Meaning, edited by Robin Greenwood and Caroline Pascoe (London: SPCK, 2006. ISBN 13-978-0-281-05713-9. www.spck.org.uk.)

The One Room Sunday School: curriculum for small churches). Quarterly material for ages 3–12 with teacher’s book, reproducible student material, class pak and music/story cassette.

*****Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices* (DVD), by Mark V. Purushotham (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-881775082).**

Pastoral Care in the Small Membership Church, by James L. Killen, Jr. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005. ISBN 978-0-687-34326-3). An introduction to pastoral care for pastors of small membership churches.

Releasing the Power of the Smaller Church, edited by Shawn McMullen (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing, 2007. ISBN 978-0-784-72146-9).

*****Shepherding the Small Church: A Leadership Guide for the Majority of Today’s Churches, 2nd Ed.*, by Glenn C. Daman (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publishing, 2007. ISBN 978-0-825425-004).**

Single Digit Youth Groups (1 and 2): curriculum for small church youth groups. Series designed to guide adults leading groups with less than 10 youth. See www.cokesbury.com.

Small Congregation, Big Potential: Ministry in the Small Membership Church, by Lyle E. Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004. ISBN 978-0-687-03656-1).

Spiritual Leadership in the Small Membership Church, by David Canada (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005. ISBN 978-0-687-49482-8). Helps small membership church pastors see the spiritual development of their church in ways that are directly to their own spiritual formation.

Where 20 or 30 Are Gathered: Leading Worship in the Small Church, by Christine O’Reilly and Peter Bush (Bethesda: The Alban Institute, 2006. ISBN 978-1-5669-9322-7).

Worshiping in the Small Membership Church, by Robin Knowles Wallace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008. ISBN 978-068765-101-6).

www.umvitalcongregations.com. Articles and helps in congregational vitality.