

Evangelism

Share the Good News



G U I D E L I N E S

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Share the Good News

Bryan Tener

with thanks to prior author Heather Lear

Discipleship Ministries

EVANGELISM

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“A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

Thank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Wesley said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: “There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ producing love to all humankind.”

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus, and helping those in their communities that were hurting the most. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children, moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople suite of resources (www.seeallthepeople.org) designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

For Such a Time as This

Thank you for saying yes to the call of leading your congregation in the area of evangelism! There is no aspect of the church that has more importance, and it should involve the entire body. Unfortunately, over the years, evangelism has moved from a central focus in the church to being one of many programs. In some congregations, it is simply seen as the job of the pastor. Not only that, but after a series of social and denominational disruptions, sharing the hope found in God's love, compassion, and justice is as important as ever.

The good news is that neither you nor your committee carries the sole responsibility for making new disciples. This is the entire church's privilege and task. You and your team are more like a catalyst than a committee. Think of your ministry as inspiring, promoting, and encouraging the ministry of evangelism throughout the entire life of the church. As a leader, your role is to help shape a congregation that will reach out, welcome, and invite others to commit their lives to Jesus Christ and then help to equip and empower them to live as Christian disciples.

In this context, the importance of your role as the chair of evangelism cannot be overstated. Perhaps the words Mordecai spoke to Queen Esther capture the sentiment best, "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esth 4:14b NIV).

The Aim and Definition of Evangelism

Before you begin the process of setting goals and measures for evangelism ministry, you need to have a clear idea of what evangelism is and its ultimate aim. The rest of this section provides a definition of *evangelism*. The aim of the ministry of evangelism, simply stated, is to relate people to God so that they will begin a relationship with Jesus Christ. And yet, evangelism does not end with a person's decision to begin a relationship with Jesus Christ. Effective evangelism leads new Christians into a process of ongoing discipleship and spiritual formation. Ultimately, disciples become actively involved with helping to make other disciples. Evangelism without connection to disciple formation often results in church members who quickly become inactive. A healthy culture of discipleship at your church should result in a natural, congregational aptitude in evangelism. With this aim in mind, let us focus on what *evangelism* is.

Tell Good News

Evangelism has become a problematic term for some in the 21st century. Scare tactics, coercion, and “bad news that has an escape clause” have become synonymous with *evangelism* in some people’s minds. In reading the Gospels (the word *gospel* means “good news”), we do not see any of these approaches used by Jesus. Evangelism is good news. It is not a program about membership recruitment or increasing budgets. Evangelism is the good news of God’s healing and saving love in Jesus Christ.

What was the good news that Jesus shared? The first proclamation of the good news is found in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 4:18-19), where Jesus recites a lesson from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me.
He has sent me to preach good news to the poor,
to proclaim release to the prisoners
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to liberate the oppressed,
and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.

The “year of the Lord’s favor,” also called *Jubilee*, represents a time of complete forgiveness of past burdens and a fresh start. This passage underscores care and concern for the poor and marginalized people in society. The good news promises relief and release.

Repentance

The early church emphasized two key elements of the good news: (1) repentance (turning away from evil and turning to good—through salvation in Jesus Christ) and the announcement of the kingdom of God (God’s reign on the earth).

Action Step:

Discuss the following with your pastor, leaders, and congregation:

- How do we talk to people about repentance?
- The invitation to repent or turn away from evil is still relevant today. Just as in addiction recovery programs, admitting that one is, or has been, participating in evil is the first step toward healing. How do we teach people to resist evil and live better lives?
- What testimony of repentance can we share individually with others from our personal walk with Jesus Christ?
- Read the following Scripture passages: Gal 5:22-23 (the fruit of the Spirit); Matt 5 (the Beatitudes); 1 Cor 13 (the love chapter). List several characteristics of Christian behavior found in them. These passages help us realize the need to repent and embrace a God-directed life. Discuss ways in which your congregation teaches and demonstrates these characteristics.

The Kingdom (Reign) of God

How do you talk to people about the reign of God? The announcement of the kingdom of God is another key point of the good news. Many churches and traditions emphasize conversion—“in order to get into heaven after one dies”—as the point of Christian faith.

By contrast, Jesus Christ’s foundational message is, “Change your hearts and lives! Here comes the kingdom of heaven!” (Matt 4:17). His emphasis is on conversion that leads to intentional change in behavior, thought, and action. These changes indicate that a person chooses to live daily as a new citizen in God’s reign (*kingdom*). You may also read resources, including other ministry areas that use *kin-dom* or *kindom* to showcase the beloved community that develops when citizens welcome each other in full humanity into a life guided by the good news.

Salvation with heaven as the only goal has a distant, future orientation. To emphasize a single, future benefit can leave new Christians wondering what should be happening to and through them in the present. By contrast, salvation, understood as process, invites us to be participants in God’s kingdom and reign in an active, present orientation. The focus is on how to live in this new reality, right now.

Throughout Jesus’ earthly ministry, he compelled and expected his disciples to reach out to others. He expected his disciples to partner with God to expand the reign of God and the beloved community. Each of the Gospel writers—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—describes how Jesus sent out his disciples to make other disciples. The best-known example is the Great Commission found in Matthew 28:18-20:

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

Obedying the Great Commission is not one option among many for a congregation; it is at the very heart of the Christian enterprise. Christianity is a missionary, evangelizing faith.

From Membership to Discipleship

For decades, we have emphasized and put countless dollars and energy into attracting people to our churches. We have been guilty of equating church membership with discipleship. While we believe that the local church is the best vessel for discipleship, having people join our churches is not our ultimate goal. Membership may be an outcome of discipleship, but that is not evangelism’s exclusive aim. Growing congregations receive new people on profession of their faith, not just transfers from other churches.

As our denominational mission states, the reason we work to help make disciples is to bring about the transformation of the world. Effective congregations develop a disciple-making system that welcomes and invites, equips, and sends disciples forth in ministry. Evangelism can take place at any stage of a disciple-making system, and with any age group. Rise to the challenge of building relationships with those from whom the church or faith has become irrelevant.

Your Ministry of Evangelism

As a leader of the evangelism ministry of your church, you have various responsibilities. Each task serves to deepen the congregation's commitment to its mission.

1. Promote evangelism as a core value of each ministry of the church.
2. Envision what God's will for the congregation's evangelism ministry is and set outcomes that are consistent with that vision.
3. Develop a plan for an overall evangelism strategy and system that reaches out to people, welcomes them into the congregation, relates them to God, and equips and empowers them for ministry across generations.
4. Serve as team leader for those assigned to work with you: guiding the work of the team, helping them to work from a biblical and theological foundation, creating work space in which Christian faith formation happens, planning agendas, presiding at meetings, and representing the ministry of evangelism in meetings of the church council and charge conference.
5. Work with the pastor, team, and other church leaders in assessing your congregation's goals and measures pertaining to evangelism (paying particular attention to professions of faith) and attendance trends, as well as the way in which new people are received into the congregation and empowered for ministry. Implement and evaluate your plan. Revise as necessary.

Build the Evangelism Ministry Team

Evangelism is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. Start building your team with prayer. The Nominations and Leadership Development Committee may help to identify team members, though you may need to recruit or add members to complete your team. Your pastor can assist with suggestions. Consider natural giftedness and diversity as you recruit. At your first meeting, determine a time of day when team members will be in prayer for one another and for the development of a common vision for the congregation's evangelistic ministry.

Build a team of people committed to the ministry of evangelism. Depending on the size of the congregation and the group structure that may already be in place, the team may vary in number. Aim for a group of no fewer than five and no more than a dozen. Your team should represent a cross section of the congregation, and if possible be representative of the community of which your church is part. If your church does not currently have an Evangelism Team, you might want to include as members the lay leader, lay servants (speakers) in the congregation, at least one youth, and one young adult.

Agree on a schedule and a reading list, including this Guideline. Work through the suggested Action Steps that follow with your pastor, the team, and—as much as possible—with other key church leaders and members of the congregation.

As team leader, it is important to familiarize yourself with biblical models of evangelism and faith sharing. It would be helpful to spend a few minutes at the beginning of each team meeting using one of these texts in centering and devotional time. Talk with your pastor about periodically beginning Church Council meetings or other administrative team meetings with one of these verses as well. Some of these texts include:

- Matthew 9:35–10:23 (call of the disciples)
- Luke 4:16-21 (Jesus' sermon in the synagogue)
- Luke 8:26-39 (Jesus' expulsion of unclean spirits)
- Luke 10:1-20 (mission of the seventy)
- Luke 10:25-37 (parable of the good Samaritan)
- Luke 15 (parables of the lost sheep, coin, and son)
- John 1:35-51 (call of Jesus' first disciples)
- John 20:19-31 (post-resurrection appearance of Jesus)

As your team reads each passage, consider the following questions:

- How is evangelism practiced in this passage or story?
- What does the passage teach about evangelism?
- In what ways does our congregation practice evangelism as highlighted in this passage?
- In what ways could we improve our ministry of evangelism to align with this biblical witness?
- What personal stories of evangelism does this passage inspire or bring to mind?

Holistic Evangelism

The practices and understanding of evangelism vary widely across the denomination. Some churches understand evangelism as sharing a set of beliefs and accepting tenets of the faith rationally—a *head* style of ministry. Some congregations view evangelism as growing in one's personal relationship with Jesus—a *heart* style. Still other congregations believe evangelism is loving our neighbors in tangible ways—a *hands* style. Rarely do congregations employ and integrate all three equally as effectively.

While individuals may excel in one style over another, holistic evangelism systems involve the entire congregation and integrate all three aspects—head, heart, and hands—not only in what we do at church, but in our everyday lives. Most of us are quite proficient in the art of compartmentalization, and our religious life is one of the compartments. We talk about God at church. We serve God at

Action Step

What are the areas of strength and focus in your congregation? Does your congregation tend to focus more on the head, heart, or hands of faith? Which area could use some more attention?

church. We might read our Bibles or pray at home, but that might be the extent of our spiritual practices. We may not think about living out our faith in all the other arenas where we invest time and energy, bringing our discipleship into the marketplace and wider community. Yes, church is where we learn and are reminded of who we are and how we fit into God's larger story; where we practice articulating our individual faith stories, and where others help us to discern our gifts and calling in God's kingdom. But that cannot be where our practice of faith stops.

Our denominational mission statement is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We invite people into a lifetime of growing in love of God and neighbor, so that they may join in God's world-transforming work. This work of transformation happens only when people know who they are, who God is, and how to live in loving relationships. Those loving relationships develop naturally into a beloved community.

The Power of Story

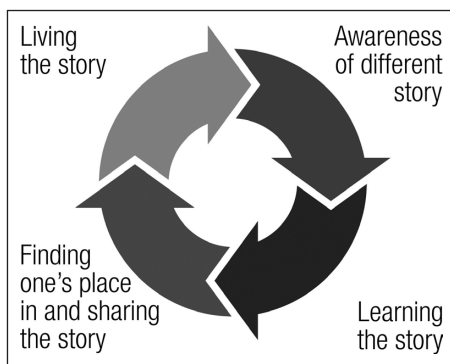
As disciples of Jesus Christ, we believe that there is a different and greater story that guides our life than the one offered to us by the world. God is actively working in the lives of people all around us, whether they realize it or not. Our task is to help them see God's hand and understand that their lives have great purpose and meaning as their stories intersect with God's story. The influence of laity who live out their faith in the secular world are some of the most powerful influences in helping the intersection of God's story and our lives become more obvious.

In today's culture, we cannot assume that people will know or hear God's story by some other means. The church needs to reclaim its tradition of educating its people to be bearers of that story in their everyday lives. The graphic below illustrates the cycle of how one enters and grows in God's story in order to live as Christ's hands and feet in the world. This cycle never ends, as the more we grow in our faith and knowledge of God, the more we understand our need for and dependence on God.

Awareness of a Different Story

Every day, we are bombarded by advertisements and messages telling us what gives a person value and worth. The dream that consumerism tries to sell is about achieving and having more than previous generations: that we will be happy if we just have a little more, buy that

next great thing. God tells a different story. Our level of education, job title, wealth, social status, racial-ethnic background, and on and on and on, does not determine our value to God. God loves us and begins working in our lives, offering to be in relationship with us, even before we realize it. We call this *prevenient grace*. It is God who awakens us to this



different story, but as the church and Christians, we have the privilege of helping others to see God's hand and share God's story.

Learning the Story

In the past, some churches in the US relied upon the surrounding culture to assist in faith formation and basic Christian teaching and principles. They also assumed that faith formation activities that took place as part of the dominant culture would be reasonably consistent with the culture of discipleship and theology developed in their home church. Those assumptions should no longer be made. United Methodist churches need to be intentional about teaching God's story to people of all ages. Misinformation, disinformation, and polarization have affected how churches and churchgoers may be perceived, as well as affect how church members attempt to act out their faith. Christian education and formation is not only for children; nor is it completed at the age of confirmation. We are called to grow in love of God and neighbor throughout our lives.

Where do we learn and teach the story? Worship is where theology is taught through the singing of hymns, reciting ancient creeds and prayers, the reading and proclamation of the word, and celebrating the sacraments. We learn the story through participation in classes and small groups and through prayer and personal study of Scripture. To learn God's story is to move through an intentional discipleship system, or to walk a discipleship pathway.

Finding One's Place in and Sharing the Story

While it is important to grow in head knowledge of God and the tenets of the faith, we grow in our discipleship by practicing our faith in the context of community. We cannot expect our congregations to articulate, integrate, and practice their faith in their everyday lives if we have not created intentional space for them to practice while gathered as a church body. It is in the body of Christ where we discover our gifts for ministry and help one another see how God has worked and continues to work in our lives. Here are some ideas for helping people name and claim their individual and communal place in God's story in the context of worship:

- If you currently have a time for joys and concerns, consider using that time to ask a different question. "Where did you see God this week?" and "Where did you offer God's grace this week?"
- Instead of giving the what, where, and when details as an announcement, share a story of witness or impact regarding an upcoming ministry or event.
- Introduce the offering by telling a story of how the money enables ministry and transformed lives.
- Plan a time for people to share their witness in response to the message. Before the service, be sure you have a couple of people ready and prepared to share.
- Record videos of people telling their God-moment stories in advance of worship and show as either an introduction or response to the Word proclaimed.

Living the Story

For decades, the entry point into the church for most people was worship. Then people would then join a Sunday school class or other group, and eventually, they would participate in serving and leading. *Belief* preceded *belonging* and *behaving* like a disciple of Jesus. People would learn the story before living the story.

This paradigm has shifted. Many people without a church home and many younger people enter the church through mission or fellowship opportunities. Young adults today are volunteering at record rates, and they care about creation and making the world a better place. They just may have not been shown that mercy and justice are also priorities of the kingdom of God. People are living the story before they are even aware that they have entered God's story and that the Holy Spirit is working in their lives. This is a significant shift, and congregations need to adjust and learn how to raise awareness of God's story for these individuals in these settings. Any activity or gathering in ministry can become an entry point into church life, and preparing your Evangelism Team to understand that shift is important.

As an Evangelism Team, your task is to ensure that each person's story is heard, claimed, and shared and to find where those stories intersect with God's story.

Our Individual Stories

Each of us has our own story of how God has worked and moved in our lives. People outside of Christianity want to know what difference Christ has made in our lives. The validity of our witness depends on the reality of our personal interaction with Jesus Christ and our personal transformation by the Holy Spirit. Many people in our congregations have never been asked to share their stories or even process what Jesus has done and meant for them individually. Does your congregation encourage people to discover and practice sharing their Christian journey with others? To witness and share testimonies? If not, perhaps an invitation to begin story-sharing could be made using three categories of experiences: Identity, Belonging, and Purpose. How has this church helped to shape my identity as a child of God? How did I discover where I belonged in this body of Christ? How has this community helped me discover and live out my purpose, moved by the Spirit?

Sharing Our Stories

There are at least three groups of Christians in the church: (1) Those who can trace the path of their Christian conversion (some can even name the exact moment of conversion), (2) those who cannot remember a time when they were not Christian, and (3) those who are still exploring and questioning their experience of God. In each of these groups, Christians will continually ask themselves questions related to identity, belonging, and purpose. Who am I? Where do I fit? How do I serve?

To help these groups articulate their faith journeys, host an event at which you invite the pastor, leaders, and congregation to answer the following questions. It's not necessary to divide the groups physically; have people choose the group of questions they wish to answer. You can also adapt these questions to fit your context and culture of discipleship.

Group 1—Those Able to Trace Their Path of Conversion

1. What was your life like before meeting Jesus Christ?
2. How did you meet and accept Jesus Christ as Savior?
3. How would you describe your life since accepting Jesus Christ?

Group 2—Those Who Cannot Remember Not Being Christian

1. What was it like to grow up in a Christian environment?
2. When did you accept the Christian faith as your own? (Perhaps you were baptized as an infant or went through confirmation but claimed Christianity as your personal faith later.)
3. How would you describe your life since affirming the Christian faith?

Group 3—Those Whose Stories Are Still Evolving

1. What drew (draws) you to participation in a Christian faith community?
2. What encourages you to continue your journey of faith in this Christian community?
3. What do you wish to learn about Christ and the life of faith?

Encourage members of each group to use the questions to create a faith journey timeline, to map out the peaks and valleys of their journeys, the places where they felt the presence of God, and the places where they struggled.

When the questions have been answered and the timelines completed, invite people to share their stories with the larger group. Encourage sharing from all three categories, and honor every story as it is told. Consider ways that these stories might be shared digitally in addition to in-person. Many social media platforms are built for just this kind of personal storysharing.

Alternative Ways to Share Stories

The following is an alternative set of exercises that can be done in a small group, a Sunday school class, or a meeting. As you begin to plan and then implement the exercises, consider how you could share these stories outside the walls of the church. There are suggestions at the end of the exercises to help you.

Components of a Good Story:

- Keep it real. Use your words to tell your story.
- Pause and reflect on what's going on in your life. Where is God at work? How's your connection with Jesus making life better?
- Focus on your experience of God in your life through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. If it happened at church, talk about where and how you met God, not just how great your church is. If it was out in nature, at the local pub, or the grocery store, wherever it may have been, share how you knew God was there and what God was up to. Look for signs like unconditional love, redemption, healing, hope. Look for the

life-giving things and share those. Where's Jesus in that experience, and where is he at work now in your life?

Exercise 1: Dinner Time!

- Step 1: Remember a wonderful meal, you know, the kind where you take a bite and then just have to take a deep breath in, close your eyes, and savor it. Think about the flavors, the smells, who was there, and what was happening in your life before, during, or after.
- Step 2: Team up with a partner and take turns sharing your meal stories.

Exercise 2: Poster Board Stories

- Step 1: Take a breather and think about something you've struggled with and where you see God in the middle of it.
- Step 2: Grab a big piece of posterboard, newsprint, or paper. On one side, sum up your struggle in a few words. On the other, tell the world where God has taken you and where God is now. After you've finished, hang the posterboard on the wall.
- Step 3: Check out one another's posterboard stories. Celebrate and move on to the next one.
- And remember, storytelling isn't just for church; it's for forming connections, opening up the self to others, and building community, whether you're offering a sermon in worship, relaxing at the coffee shop, or just hanging out at the dog park.

For the Storyteller:

- Keep it real; share your own life stories.
- Paint a vivid picture with your words. Let people smell, taste, and see what you did.
- Don't get all philosophical; just tell your story.
- Share the whole journey, not just the highlight reel.

For the Listener:

- Listen actively, as if the storyteller is revealing something sacred.
- Be welcoming. Think about how you like to be treated.
- Ask open questions if there's a pause, to help the story flow.
- Offer to dive deeper or connect with others who share the same passions.

Ways to Share Stories:

- Organize a month-long campaign for the church and adapt the following to your context:
- Invite people to pair up and discuss a question in which people are able to share a story as their answer.
- Organize one-on-one storytelling sessions in your church, during Sunday school, coffee/fellowship time, or at the beginning of a meeting as a centering time.

- Create a board where people can create and share their stories with one another.
- Extend your storytelling beyond the church to build connections with neighbors and friends by recording people sharing their stories and then sharing them on social media.

Your Congregation's Story

Like individuals, congregations have a story that connects to God's story and bears witness to Jesus Christ. It is important for the congregation to be able to articulate the various ways it is bearing witness to the kingdom of God.

Action Step

Invite the congregation to rehearse its history in ministry since its inception (coordinate this activity with the church historian). If your church has a long history, consider beginning your timeline at the earliest memory of one of your leaders

Gather a roll of butcher paper or tape newsprint together end-to-end to create a work surface. Draw a timeline on the paper beginning with the birth of the church leading to the present. Ask the pastor, leaders, and members of the congregation to place on the timeline key ministries, activities, and events through which the church has been sharing its Christian witness with the community. Use different color sticky notes or markers to chart when people came to the church, when their children were baptized and confirmed, and formational events in their journey as part of the congregation

After completing the timeline, discuss the story the timeline tells about your church and the noticeable trends that emerge. Are most of the events in recent history or did a majority of the highlights occur some time ago? Are there common trends of positive responses from which to build?

Your Community's Story

In 2008, General Conference added the phrase “for the transformation of the world” to our denominational mission statement—“to make disciples of Jesus Christ”—for a reason. The purpose of making disciples is for the kingdom of earth to look more like the kingdom of heaven, to create a beloved community. Yet congregations continue to wait for their neighbors to come to them. We have viewed increased church attendance as the outcome and the goal, instead of a means to an end. Along with opening the doors *into* our churches, the doors need to be opened out to the world beyond the walls of the building. The church is not the building. We—the body of Christ—are the church. God is already out there working, and God invites us out into our neighborhoods to join in that work. Ask:

- What, through Christ, does your local congregation have to offer the people in the surrounding community?
- What is your relationship with the community (if any)?
- What assumptions do you hold about your neighbors and their needs? Have you invested the time to hear their stories?
- How does (or might) your congregation connect with people who have transitioned into the neighborhood?

- What are the major concerns of the people in the surrounding community? If you don't know, how will you find out?

Action Steps

1. Obtain demographic data about your community. Your conference office may have contracted services with a demographic information company such as MissionInsite. If so, you can obtain a wide array of demographic data about your immediate community through such a service. If your conference office doesn't have such data, you may contact Discipleship Ministries directly, which can supply this information (see the Resources section for details). From these findings, you will be able to determine the numbers, age groups, education levels, interest in church, hopes and dreams, and more, of the people in your community. How do the strengths of your church match the people and needs in your community?
2. Identify the members considered inactive or marginal. Why are they inactive? Who has the responsibility to reach out to and perhaps reconcile with them on behalf of the church? The percentage of marginal members should be low if a viable discipleship system is in place and active in your local church. Coordinate this activity with the Committee on Nominations and Leader Development.

Changing Communities and Diversity

Is the makeup of your congregation a reflection of your community? As congregations study the demographics of their communities, many look very different than they did 30–40 years ago. Whether there has been rapid growth, decline, or changes in the demographics of your community, the way you approach ministry and engagement should be informed by the way your community looks and interacts now. There is a temptation to revisit and put a great deal of effort into trying to do things that worked well in the past. Most likely, these efforts will lead to frustration and burnout when all the hard work yields little fruit. Make sure you talk to your neighbors. Build relationships with local education and community leaders. Hear their vision and dreams. Spend some time talking to the people in the businesses and houses that are closest to your church. Does the community see itself reflected in your membership and ministry offerings? Where does the community meet and really share what's going on? In personal meetings or online? It is crucial not to make assumptions about who is beyond your walls. Vital congregations regularly plan ministry and outreach by doing their homework to see if their assumptions and perceptions of their neighbors are correct and how their community will be blessed by their efforts.

Assess Current Reality and Set Goals

Assess the strengths and weaknesses of your current ministry efforts. How does your church reach out to and welcome people into

Action Steps

Alternative action steps that focus on listening; listening to God, to congregation, and the community can be found online at <https://www.thelisteningchurch.com/plan>. See the Resources section for a link to the downloadable PDF. Download this plan and use it as a guide as you begin the process of listening.

the life of the church? How effective are these activities? What are the results in both quantity (numbers) and quality (evidence of changed lives)? Goals can provide you with a process that helps you cultivate an evangelistic church culture. Here are some sample goals and measures for individuals, congregations, and pastors.

Sample Evangelism Goals and Measures for Individuals

Goal	Quantitative Measure	Qualitative Measure
Increase Bible knowledge and growth in discipleship	Track participation in a read-through-the-Bible plan per year, Bible basics, or Christianity 101 course	Note the ways in which biblical knowledge influences your daily life; note the increased connections you make between your story and God's story
Actively invite nonmembers to attend a church function — number of times per month	Track the number of people invited and attendees	Note the ways in which relationships with visitors and neighbors are deepening; note the stories of others you have learned
Actively share your faith with others	Track the number of people to whom you witness and whose stories you have heard	Note the ways in which your story and the stories of others influence your walk of faith
Participate in community outreach and build relationships with people in your neighborhood	Track the number of times and places in which you volunteer in the community, participate in VIM or other mission outreach efforts	Note any ways in which the quality of life in the community is improving, in both physical need and harmony in relationships
Pray for opportunities to point to God's activity in non-Christians' lives and for their response to God's grace	Track the number of non-Christians you actively pray for; consider using a prayer journal	Note the deepening of your spiritual understanding and the responses of others to prayer
Bear Christian fruit (see Galatians 5:22-23)		Celebrate your increased practice of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness [generosity], faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control

Sample Evangelism Goals and Measures for Congregations

Goal	Quantitative Measure	Qualitative Measure
Increase biblical literacy of people in the church	Track the number of people who participate per year in ongoing spiritual formation and Bible study	Note the ways in which biblical knowledge and connection are used in conversation and ministry settings
Increase the number of invitations members extend to others to attend a church function	Track the number of visitors who attend by invitation	Gather stories from members and visitors of deepening relationships and trust
Increase instruction in faith sharing and opportunities to practice sharing faith in community.	Track the number of people who participate in faith-sharing instruction and corporate time spent on testimony and sharing God stories.	Record faith stories and testimonies shared. With permission, these could be shared on your church website or social media page.
Increase participation in community outreach among members	Track the number of people who volunteer in the community, participate in VIM, or other mission outreach efforts.	Ask members who participate in outreach to share the ways it has changed or deepened their faith and understanding
Increase the number of members praying for the salvation of non-Christians	Track the number of people actively involved in intercessory prayer for non-Christians	Ask members engaged in intercessory prayer to share their experiences and the stories of lives touched

Sample Evangelism Goals and Measures for Pastors

Goal	Quantitative Measure	Qualitative Measure
Preach at least one evangelistically focused sermon every ____ weeks.	Track the number of evangelistic sermons preached each quarter.	Ask members to share responses to the evangelism-themed sermons. Ask the pastor to share evidence seen of lives changed
Participate in at least one outreach experience in the community every ____ weeks and build relationships with community leaders.	Track the number of outreach experiences you participated in each quarter.	Report on evidence of deeper trust and cooperation with community leaders. Note your own deepening faith and understanding and its influence on your pastoral leadership

(Sample Evangelism Goals and Measures for Pastors, cont'd)

Goal	Quantitative Measure	Qualitative Measure
Assess all ministry areas with leaders to determine effectiveness in evangelism every ____ months.	Track the number of assessments completed within the specified time.	Track the responses produced at each assessment and adjust and revise ministries as needed.
Plan at least one outreach event per quarter with church leaders.	Track the number of outreach events conducted per quarter.	Invite leaders, participants and those served to share stories of the impact of outreach events

Extend Hospitality

Local churches are places where we can reconnect to God and one another. Community and fellowship are essential to our discipleship, but we always need to be ready to welcome others into the community we so deeply value. Biblical hospitality is about welcoming the stranger. We love and welcome others because we have been loved and welcomed by God.

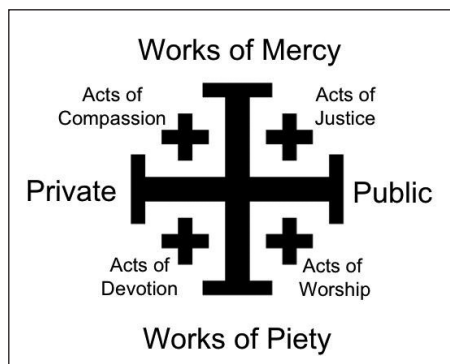
Friendliness is an expressed value and trait of most congregations. Hospitality calls us to enter into relationship and concern about another more deeply than surface friendliness. Important questions to ask your congregation are: Are we friendly, or are we in the practice of making friends? Are all people really welcome? How do we know if all feel welcome or not? Are there groups of people who would actually not be welcomed in our church?

As you think about what a new person might experience when he or she walks through the doors of your church, consider having your committee and/or church leadership team complete a “Hospitality Assessment for Local Churches,” available at www.umofficialresources.com/Guidelines).

Nurture and Equip People for Christian Discipleship

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, embodied a discipleship plan that integrated invitation, formation, and service to and with the community. He brought the message of God's saving grace to the people wherever they gathered (in fields and street corners, coffee houses, and pubs). Those who responded with renewed faith were invited to join a class meeting where they trained and practiced giving witness to their faith, were held accountable for growing in discipleship, and were taught to practice the means of grace. Wesley emphasized the importance of balancing personal holiness and social holiness, so that the transformation experienced in people's heads and hands was also lived out in their everyday lives.

The diagram illustrates a holistic approach to discipleship that incorporates both public and private works of mercy and works of piety.



Make Membership More Meaningful

Studies of congregational life reveal that as many as one-half of those who join churches become inactive in their first year of membership. Find ways to incorporate new members into the life of the church at a pace and level that suits their needs, interests, and gifts. Visitors should be welcomed as guests. Members need to feel like family. Remember, however, that our mission is to make disciples, not members.

When new members are graciously and intentionally incorporated, they:

- continue to grow spiritually through small groups;
- have at least seven personal friends in the congregation;
- identify gifts and callings and exercise them;
- understand, identify with, and support the mission and vision of the congregation;
- are excited about the congregation and naturally invite friends, family members, and neighbors to become disciples of Christ.

To assist in this process, assign sponsors or fellowship friends to each new member, person, or family. These “shepherds” help introduce newcomers to other members of the congregation and Sunday school class leaders and invite them to fellowship events.

Action Step

Spend some time evaluating your church calendar and the ministry opportunities offered in your church. Make a list of all the ways people in your church practice acts of compassion, acts of justice, acts of devotion, and acts of worship. Which quadrant of the above diagram is strongest? Which quadrant could use more attention?

Some Final Words of Encouragement

Remember, evangelism isn't a church program, and it isn't solely the job of your ministry team and church staff. You have the privilege of creating an evangelistic culture in your congregation; a culture that

- reaches out and practices hospitality;
- offers people the opportunity to adopt another story, God's story, for their lives in and through Jesus Christ;
- nurtures people—through community—to learn God's story in order to find greater purpose for their lives;
- engages the world beyond the walls of the church building.

Every ministry area or administrative team in your congregation should be partnering with you in this work: How we use our buildings matters. How we build our budget matters. How we run our children's ministry matters. How we are present in the community and online matters.

What happens within the walls of the church and getting people to come to our programs is not the goal; God has gifted the church with the Holy Spirit to be a vessel in the world, and all of our effort and ministries should consider those who are not yet there and how we can connect people to God. In fact, that can be part of the “why” for your church's intentional discipleship system. Some might need a little nudging to reexamine their work and focus, and others might need a little help seeing the overlap in ministry after years of compartmentalization. With God's help, a cohesive, renewed focus will enable you to embody our mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world”!

Resources

** Indicates our top picks

Web Resources

**Discipleship Ministries Evangelism website: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/evangelism>

**Webinar recording *Energize Your Church Through Listening*, Discipleship Ministries website: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/june-7-2022-energize-your-church-through-listening>

**Discipleship Ministries FXUM website: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions>

**Congregational Discernment and Community Engagement Plan: <https://www.thelisteningchurch.com/>

**Discipleship Ministries Evangelism website: <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/creating-a-witnessing-culture-in-a-congregation>

**Luke Edwards, substack the listening church plan homepage: <https://thelisteningchurch.substack.com/>, and listening plan: https://www.thelisteningchurch.com/_files/ugd/4c77be_1776fb19a5964529ad82a8363f994c61.pdf

Evangelism Connections: <https://www.evangelismconnections.com>. Ecumenical partnership of mainline denominations that strives to frame and provide resources for evangelism, hospitality, and church vitality in a 21st-century context.

Foundation for Evangelism: <http://foundationforevangelism.org>

MissionInsite (Ministry Demographics service): <http://missioninsite.com>. Most annual conferences have a subscription to this service and can get you information on your surrounding community.

National Association of United Methodist Evangelists: <http://www.naume.org/>
UMC Evangelism Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/UMCEvangelism>

** United Methodist Communications website: www.umcom.org.

Upper Room Ministries, www.upperroom.org

- Chrysalis: <http://chrysalis.upperroom.org> for young adults and teens
- Walk to Emmaus: <http://emmaus.upperroom.org>
- The Academy for Spiritual Formation, <http://academy.upperroom.org>

Books

Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness by Bryan Stone (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), ISBN: 9781587431944.

Is There a Future for God's Love? An Evangelical Theology by Henry H. Knight III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), ISBN: 9780687660339.

****Kingdom Come** by Reggie McNeal (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), ISBN: 9781414391878.

Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There by Leonard Sweet (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), ISBN: 9781434764744.

The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church by Reggie McNeal (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2009), ISBN: 9780470453155.

****Transforming Evangelism** by Henry H. Knight III and F. Douglas Powe Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), ISBN: 9780881774856.

****Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism**, second edition, by Martha Grace Reese (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780827238084.

****Your Church Can Thrive: Making the Connections That Build Healthy Congregations** by Harold Percy (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), ISBN: 9780687022564.

Hospitality/Welcoming Resources

****Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition** by Christine D. Pohl (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), ISBN: 9780802844316.

****The Race to Reach Out** by Douglas T. Anderson and Michael J. Coyner (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), ISBN: 9780687066681.

Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers, by Elizabeth Newman (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), ISBN: 9781587431760.

Faith Sharing

DISCIPLE Bible Study, available in four phases. Contact: Cokesbury Seminars, 800-251-8591. www.cokesbury.com; then Search DISCIPLE.

The Faith-Sharing Congregation by Roger K. Swanson and Shirley F. Clement (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1996), ISBN: 9780881771534.

The Faith-Sharing New Testament and Psalms (Nashville: Cokesbury, in cooperation with Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007), ISBN: 9780687642793.

****Holy Conversation: Talking About God in Everyday Life** by Richard Peace (Downers Grove: IVP Connect, 2006), ISBN: 9780830811199.

Witness by Ronald K. Crandall (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881774931).

Multicultural Evangelism

*****Many Faces, One Church*** by Ernest S. Lyght, Glory Dharmaraj, Jacob Dharmaraj (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), ISBN: 9780687494453.

*****The New Faces of Christianity: Believing the Bible in the Global South*** by Philip Jenkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780195368512.

New Wine, New Wineskins: How African American Congregations Can Reach New Generations by F. Douglas Powe (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), ISBN: 9781426742224.

*****The Next Christendom*** by Philip Jenkins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), ISBN: 9780199767465.

Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West by Lamin Sanneh (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), ISBN: 9780802821645.

Spanish Language Evangelism Resources

Resources for the National Hispanic Plan are online through the General Board of Global Ministries, <http://nphlm.org>

*****Módulo III: Elementos esenciales en la facilitación en la educación Christiana*** by Ada Chong, Lucrecia Cotto, Hildelisa Ordaz, Marigene Chamberlain, Saúl Trinidad, y Alma Perez (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), ISBN: 9780881774535.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, www.umc.org

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcqh.org, Madison, NJ, 973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, www.umcjustice.org, Washington, DC, 202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, www.resourceumc.org/communications, www.umns.org, Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, www.umcdiscipleship.org, Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room, <http://www.upperroom.org>

General Board of Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, Nashville, TN, 615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, www.gcorr.org, Washington, DC, 202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, Chicago, IL,
1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, Nashville, TN,
615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, www.abingdonpress.com,
www.cokesbury.com, www.ministrymatters, Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, www.uwfaith.org, New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), www.wespath.org, Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.

