

 GUIDELINES

church council

*Connecting Vision
and Ministry
in Your Church*

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General Board of Discipleship

CHURCH COUNCIL

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Some paragraph numbers for and language in the Book of Discipline may have changed in the 2008 revision, which was published after these Guidelines were printed. We regret any inconvenience.

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Welcome

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.

Called to Spiritual Leadership

Each person is called to ministry by virtue of his or her baptism, and that ministry takes place in all aspects of daily life, in and outside the church. 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?

First, *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, as a disciple, are to share with others as they look to you to be a model and guide.

Second, it means that you always keep your eye on the main reasons for any ministry—to help others grow to a mature faith in God that moves them to action on behalf of others, especially "the least" (see Matthew 25:31-46). This is an aspect of "disciple making," which is the ultimate goal of all that we do in the church.

CULTIVATING VISION AND MISSION

As a spiritual leader, a primary function you carry is to help those you lead to see as clearly as possible what God is calling your church to be and to do. Ideally, your church council first forms this vision and then forms plans and goals for how to fulfill that vision. As a leader, you will help your team remain focused and accountable to honor the vision and goals to which the church is committed. You will help your team create and evaluate suggestions, plans, and activities against the measure: *Does this move us closer to our church's vision to bring others to God in this place and time?*

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING

While there are appropriate and useful businesslike practices that apply to church life, Christian practices distinguish the church as the church. In the United Methodist tradition, how we meet and work together is important. “Christian Conferencing” involves listening not only to one another, but also listening intently for the will of God in any given task or conversation. This makes prayer essential in the midst of “business as usual.” As Christians, we are called to “speak the truth in love.” This is a special way to speak in which we treat one another as if each of us were Christ among us. As a spiritual leader in your ministry area, you have the privilege and opportunity to teach and model these practices. By remembering that each of us is beloved of God and discerning the presence of God in all that the church does, every task becomes worshipful work.

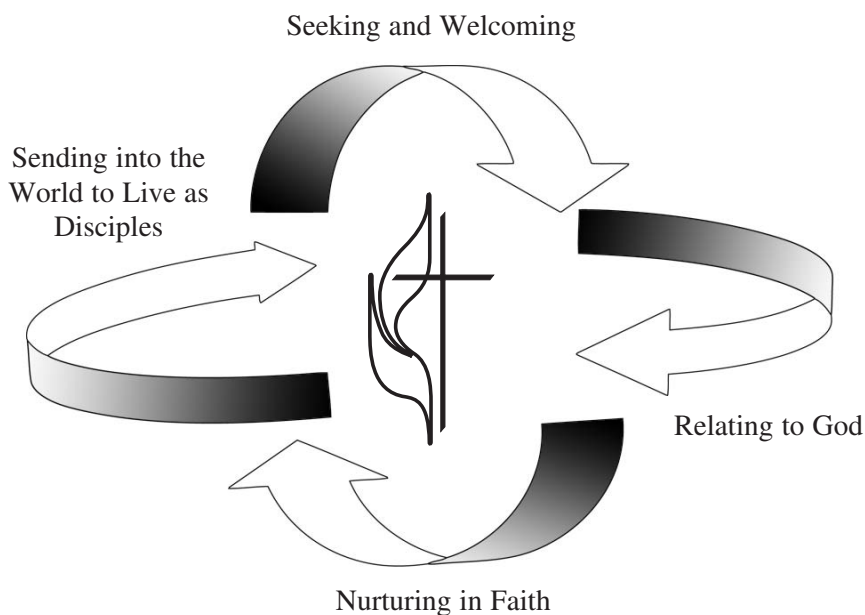
THE MISSION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church, which means in part that every local church is interrelated through the structure and organization of districts, conferences, jurisdictions, and central conferences 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 ¶¶125–138).

Our Church is more than a structure; it is a living organism. The *Discipline* describes our mission to proclaim the gospel and to welcome people into the body of Christ, to lead people to a commitment to God through Jesus Christ, to nurture them in Christian living by various means of grace, and to send persons into the world as agents of Jesus Christ (¶122). Thus, through you—and many other Christians—this very relational mission continues.

(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.)

The Core Process of the Congregation



The Church Council

The **church council** shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life. It shall envision, plan, implement, and annually evaluate the mission and ministry of the church. The church council shall be amenable to and function as the administrative agency of the charge conference” (§244, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*). Thus begins the description of the core leadership body of your local congregation—the church council (see also §252.1).

While these paragraphs focus on the work of the church council, you will find the context for this work in earlier sections of the *Discipline, Part III, The Ministry of All Christians*, begins by stating: “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs” (§120). In *Part V, Organization and Administration*, you will find paragraphs that further delineate ministry in a local church setting. “The function of the local church, under the guidance

of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God” (§202).

Within the context of the Church’s mission and the purpose of the local church, the church council has primary responsibility for creating and sustaining the congregation’s plan for discipleship. This responsibility has several aspects: (1) work with the pastor to build a shared vision for discipleship; (2) plan ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness that help the congregation live its God-given vision; (3) ensure that these ministries are aligned with the mission of disciple making; (4) allocate human and material resources for implementing the ministry plan; (5) provide an administrative infrastructure; (6) evaluate the effectiveness of the ministry plan; and (7) act as the administrative agency of the charge conference.

Leadership Tip

This Guideline is addressed to the church council chairperson. The other booklets in the Guidelines series address the responsibilities of other church leaders. It is helpful if the council chairperson has a working knowledge of the other leaders’ ministry areas, so consider having a complete set of Guidelines available for your own reference. At-large members on the council may gain important insight by reading this Guideline as well to understand more fully the connection between their ministry area and the overall mission and vision of the congregation.

A Biblical/Theological Grounding

First, please understand the work of the church council as an essential function of discipleship. As a leader in your church, you are using your gifts as one who has been baptized into the ministry of all Christians and who has been called to specific leadership in your congregation. The council’s work is designed to encourage and support the formation of Christian faith and discipleship in your congregation.

As council chairperson, you can help members of the council function more effectively by developing a shared understanding of what Christian discipleship means in your congregation. Our heritage as United Methodists includes the Wesleyan understanding of God’s sanctifying grace. Wesley referred to the life of discipleship as sanctification, as Christian perfection, and as holiness of heart and life. Using Scripture, you can explore discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition with the members of the council. Other resources that may be helpful are included in the back of this Guideline. Pertinent biblical texts include:

- Matthew 5–7 (The Sermon on the Mount)
- Matthew 16:24–26 (Jesus’ call to deny self)
- John 3:1–20 (God’s self-giving love for the world)
- Mark 12:28–31 (The Great Commandment)
- Micah 6:6–8 (God’s call to justice)
- Matthew 28:18–20 (The Great Commission)

Second, a church council is greater than the sum of its parts. Think of the council as a ministry team with you as team leader. Each team member brings gifts and serves in a particular role on the team. Knit together as Christian community and empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit, the team can accomplish much more than any individual.

As you build your team, reflect together on the importance of covenant throughout the Bible. The Scriptures attest again and again to the covenantal relationship between God and humankind. Covenant is fundamental to a biblical understanding of what it means to be in faithful relationship with God and one another. Your church council is a contemporary manifestation of this eternal truth.

Include Bible study in your council meetings to listen for God’s call to covenant with God and with one another. These, and the above passages, can help you begin listening and discerning:

- Genesis 12:1–9 (God calls Abram and Sarai)
- Exodus 20:1–17 (The Ten Commandments)
- Luke 5:1–11; 27–32; 6:12–16 (Jesus calls disciples)
- John 15:1–11 (The vine and the branches)
- Acts 15 (The Council at Jerusalem)
- 1 Corinthians 12 (The body of Christ with spiritual gifts)

Record insights and ideas that emerge from your study. Consider using these insights and ideas to create a formal or informal covenant that describes how the church council wants to conduct its work and serve the congregation. There is a process for creating a covenant on page 34 of this Guideline. If you plan to use the Orientation Process for the Church Council found on pages 28–35, you can either add the Scripture study (page 8) to your orientation or eliminate writing a covenant when you use the Bible study in another council meeting. You can use the covenant as a benchmark for assessing the quality of your council meetings and the growth in relationships among council members. (The Orientation Process for the Church Council is also on the CD-Rom that accompanies the complete set of Guidelines.)

What Does a Church Council Do?

The church council exists to create and supervise the strategic plan for your local congregation so that the congregation fulfills its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. This twofold function includes both leadership and management. Leadership is the visionary “big picture” work that assesses critically where your congregation is at the present moment, where God is calling it to be in the future, and what resources will be required to move from your current reality into the desired future. Management is the essential “detail work” that must be accomplished on a daily basis to make the congregation effective.

LEADERSHIP AND VISION

The mission of the church, as already stated, is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (§120). That mission is the same for every congregation. What that mission looks like and how it is fulfilled depends on each congregation’s context. When we talk about what mission “looks like,” we are talking about vision. Mission is global; vision is local. Vision is a complex and wonderful way to help people find their place in the community of faith and the work of God.

Vision also needs to be shared. Vision is not the equivalent of someone’s favorite program or activity. Vision is not the result of majority rule or domineering personalities. Vision comes from God through the voices of God’s people. As a team of congregational leaders, the church council provides leadership for the congregation by working with the pastor to build a shared vision for discipleship and ministry. You build a shared vision by listening to God, to one another, and to people in the congregation and community. Through deep listening you begin to notice the recurring themes in what people are saying. These themes are crucial for identifying God’s call in your midst.

Your council can listen to God by practicing spiritual disciplines together. These disciplines—called “means of grace” by John Wesley—include practices that deepen our love of God and practices that strengthen our love of other people. Core practices that help us deepen our love of God include prayer, Bible study and devotional reading, fasting, and worship. Core practices that help us deepen our love of other people include feeding the hungry, befriending the lonely, caring for the sick, sharing our resources, and working for peace and justice.

Your council can listen to people in the congregation and community in many ways. One way is to schedule one-on-one interviews with individuals

in the congregation or community. If your congregation is large, identify various groups within the congregation, such as parents of teenagers, single adults, or persons who have joined your church within the last two years. You can interview several people from each group. You can also use this process for interviewing people in the community. Depending on your context, you may interview people in local schools, offices, hospitals, or shops.

Your council listens to one another when you show respect, listen carefully, and ask questions to understand one another's perspective. Listening may not lead to agreement, but it strengthens community and honors difference within the unity of the body of Christ.

Leadership Tip

If you are new at interviewing, ask someone to be your partner. Decide who will ask questions and who will take notes. Use open-ended questions, such as "Tell me about your experience in this congregation." After several interviews, review what you have heard and look for patterns and themes. Use this information as you plan.

Leadership, Nurture, Outreach, and Witness

The strategic plan for discipleship through your congregation serves as a road map for mission and ministry. One way to organize a congregation's discipleship plan is to identify ways in which you **nurture** children, youth, and adults in the Christian faith; to describe **outreach** opportunities for the congregation to respond to the needs of the local and global community; and to include strategies for the congregation's **witness** to the love and grace of God. While this is not the only way to develop your strategic plan, it is a simple way to analyze and classify the various ministries of your congregation.

Nurture ministries include worship, Sunday school and other small groups, and other settings for spiritual formation. These ministries assist persons of all ages in developing and deepening their relationship with God. They provide opportunities for people to grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ. They also provide a supportive, caring community for people who face a variety of issues on a daily basis. These ministries may focus primarily on the Bible, worship, prayer, or other aspects of the Christian faith, or they may focus primarily on issues of daily life, such as divorce, grief, addiction, or parenting. These ministries may focus on a particular age group, such as elementary children, or they may be intergenerational in nature.

Outreach ministries include responding to the needs of others. When asked what the greatest commandment was, Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord

your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” He then went on to say, “The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31). Nurture ministries help us love God. Outreach ministries help us love others. They are faith in action. These ministries assist persons of all ages in developing and deepening their relationship with the larger human community.

Witness ministries provide a vehicle for proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ to a broken and hurting world. These ministries enable people to pay attention to the active presence of God in their lives and to develop language for talking about their experience of God. These ministries also assist people in listening to the stories of others who need to hear a word of hope, love, and grace. These ministries may include your congregation’s plans for evangelism; lay speaking ministries; and communication through your bulletin, newsletter, and/or website.

LEADERSHIP AND ALIGNMENT

Part of your leadership role is to insure that the plans developed through the ministry areas of the church are aligned with the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Every decision of the council should reflect the ways in which it supports and promotes the transformational work of “making disciples.”

Only a few congregations—those with limitless gifts and resources—can do everything well. Most congregations must establish priorities. The church council strives to engage in those ministries that most effectively form Christian disciples. To do so, your council needs to be clear about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, as stated above. Remember that discipleship involves both individuals and the congregation. God’s call is not just to individuals but also to the church as the body of Christ. Conversation, prayer, and Bible study can help you think about what Christian discipleship looks like in your context. You can talk together about the needs of the community and the spiritual gifts resident in your congregation and how God is calling you to use your spiritual gifts to respond to your community’s needs.

Think About It

Alignment is about maximizing leverage. Leverage is a way to understand what actions lead to the most significant improvement in effectiveness and impact. Talk about what one or two things in your congregation have had or might have the most impact on people’s lives. Consider how other ministries in the church “feed into” those significant offerings. How do those things “feed into” other ministries? In other words, how are the various ministries of your congregation working together toward the mission of the church, rather than competing with one another? (An effective tool is the CVI. See Resources.)

As you work on aligning the ministries of your congregation, you may discover that a part of the council's role is to eliminate programs and activities that do not focus adequately on the church's mission or are replicated in other places in the community. This does not mean that these programs and activities are necessarily ineffective, but they may not be well focused or they may not lead to disciple making. If your congregation is duplicating ministries of other congregations and community organizations and you have other gifts for ministry, you may be called to add to what is currently available by beginning a new ministry rather than duplicating an existing one.

MANAGEMENT, IMPLEMENTATION, AND THE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

Regardless of the brilliance of a strategic plan, unless it moves from concept to reality it is little more than wasted time. Plans must yield results. As your church council discerns together God's vision for your congregation, you must create clear, concise goals and objectives for the short and long term. For the purpose of planning, a **goal** is a guiding purpose—the reason you need to do something—and **objectives** are those specific things you can accomplish to achieve the goal. One example of a goal is “to create a biblically literate community of faith.” Objectives in support of this goal might be “to offer four Bible study classes each quarter” or “to encourage personal reading of the Bible each week at the conclusion of worship.” The goal is a large, not-easily-completed priority of the congregation, while the objectives are easily measurable activities that promote the goal.

Effective church councils will establish goals, identify objectives, and then recruit the appropriate people to manage the various activities. Once goals and objectives are clear, the church council can identify which gifts, skills, and experience will be needed to meet the objectives. In addition, the church council can establish a time frame for accomplishing goals and objectives, standards for evaluating effectiveness of the activities, what resources will be needed, and how the congregation can build on the work in the future.

Since goals represent essential priorities for your congregation, you may develop objectives for various ministry areas, such as what needs to be done in worship, in Sunday school and other small groups, in service to the community, and so forth. Developing objectives for the various ministry areas helps connect all the work of the congregation with the vision for mission and ministry. It also contributes to alignment for major impact. When every ministry area of the congregation works together, it is more likely that goals will be accomplished.

An effective plan for discipleship depends on spiritual leadership. Working together with the committees on nominations and leadership development (the *Discipline*, ¶258.1) and staff/pastor-parish relations (¶258.2), the church council needs to develop a plan for leadership recruitment, training, and support. These committees are administrative groups, yet there is a clear connection among administration, management, and congregational leadership. Your efforts to equip spiritual leaders should include both lay and clergy leaders.

MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

There is no one right model for organizing the congregation's administrative structure. Your church council effectively manages its resources when you consistently evaluate the internal and external needs of the community and congregation—as well as the gifts, passions, and growth of congregational leaders. Matching gifts and passions to people's needs strengthens your vision for ministry. Structures can then be fluid and flexible to accommodate changing needs, while staying grounded in the work of God through Jesus Christ.

Your council should be structured to reflect your vision for discipleship. The structure will include how you describe ministry areas and what leadership is needed to accomplish the ministry. Traditionally, ministry areas have been described in terms of worship, Christian education, spiritual formation, evangelism, stewardship, missions, and so forth. These ministry areas may have a chairperson and a team that focuses on this particular ministry. Often the chairpersons are members of the church council. In some smaller congregations, ministry has been described in the three broad categories named above—nurture, outreach, and witness (NOW).

In the last several years, many congregations have experimented with new ways to describe ministry and to define leadership. The church council terminology has been replaced by other terms, such as leadership team or discipleship team. Ministry areas may be described in categories such as “Loving God, Loving Neighbor” or “Learning Together, Serving Together, and Worshiping Together.” The terminology is important only as it represents your understanding of God's call to the congregation. In whatever form, your council will need to determine how it will be organized, how often it will meet, how it will set priorities, how it will evaluate the congregation's plan for discipleship, and how it will allocate your congregation's resources.

Depending on the size of the congregation, you may separate oversight of NOW ministries from administrative ministries. These two groups have traditionally been referred to as the administrative board and the council on

ministries. More recently, these two groups have been combined into an administrative council or church council. If your congregation chooses to separate these ministry activities, the trustees, the staff/pastor-parish relations committee, and/or the finance committee will handle administration. Representatives from these administrative groups also serve on the church council in order to align ministries and to focus on the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ (the *Discipline*, ¶252.5).

MANAGEMENT AND EVALUATION

Successful planning does not simply entail achieving goals and objectives but also evaluating the impact and effectiveness as well. Your church is engaged in transforming lives and forming Christian disciples. The measures of success have as much to do with qualitative measures (how people are transformed by worship) as with quantitative measures (how many people attend worship and how attendance changes over time).

An important role of your church council is to monitor and evaluate the impact of the ministry on people's lives. How is the ministry of your congregation changing the way people think and behave? What practices of spiritual formation and devotion are people experiencing? What are the outward and visible fruits of the individual and corporate life of faith? How are the settings and opportunities that you have implemented accomplishing the goals you have set? Unless you can answer these questions, you cannot plan adequately for the future and improve the current situation. Without evaluation, a church's ministry and program may not offer a truly transforming effect. Evaluation takes place at least annually when your congregation meets for charge conference. You can also plan evaluation once a quarter, twice a year, or include evaluation as a part of every meeting. When the focus of evaluation is clearly on your strategies for ministry, rather than people, you can learn much from routinely checking on how well you are accomplishing your goals for ministry.

MANAGEMENT AND THE CHARGE CONFERENCE

The ultimate authority for directing the mission and ministry of a local congregation is the charge conference. Charge conferences (¶¶246–251) are called—at least once each year—to formalize the planning and decision making of the congregation. In the *Book of Discipline*, the church council is designated to be the primary administrative agency for the charge conference. The charge conference is conducted by a district superintendent—or duly appointed presiding elder—to approve plans for ministry and to elect the leadership to the respective working groups, boards, teams, and committees. The entire church council is part of the charge conference, emphasizing once more the essential nature of the council's work.

The Role of the Council Chairperson

As the church council chairperson, you are a partner in ministry with your pastoral leadership, the lay leader of your congregation, and other members of the council. With your pastor and other leaders you oversee the congregation's plan for making disciples. As council chairperson you hold the "big picture" view of the work and life of the congregation. As such, you are fundamentally the "chief discipleship officer" of the congregation. (This description is also appropriate for administrative board and council on ministry chairpersons in alternative structures.)

Seven Core Responsibilities

You may be wondering exactly how to fulfill this role. This short list is a beginning point for defining the work of the church council chairperson. In each setting the demands will be unique, but these responsibilities lay a sound foundation for your task.

1. Strive to be a spiritual leader—focus on ministry rather than on administration.
2. Maintain a close and intentional working relationship with the pastor(s) and lay leadership of the congregation.
3. Stay focused on the primary task and vision of the congregation.
4. Lead the visioning and strategic planning process within the church.
5. Actively guide the work of the council—preparing agendas, conducting meetings, communicating with members, and monitoring the progress of the members.
6. Actively participate in developing learning/training experiences for the council.
7. Understand the polity and doctrine of The United Methodist Church; become familiar with its resources and organization.

STRIVE TO BE A SPIRITUAL LEADER

As council chairperson, you are first and foremost a **spiritual leader**. You have the critical task of reminding everyone that the work of the church is holy, worshipful work. If anyone comes to the table with a personal agenda, you will need to clarify that it is the work of the group to seek and perform God's will rather than its own will. The work of the church is to honor and glorify God by creating settings where children, youth, and adults can enter into a life-changing relationship with God.

Think About It

How deep is the well from which you draw? Are you able to help others understand the importance of strong spiritual discipline for the creation of effective faith-forming communities? When the ministry of the church council is deeply rooted in the spiritual disciplines, then your focus is on the will of God and your community becomes a center for renewal and growth.

A critical criterion is to ensure that you are actively engaged in a discipline of spiritual growth and devotion. A simple, age-old truth holds that you cannot lead where you will not go. The church needs faithful leaders who continuously pursue their own spiritual development. The ability to stay focused on the critical work of the church demands a healthy relationship with God. Council chairpersons need to exemplify the kind of faith that builds and strengthens the entire community. As the chairperson, you have the opportunity to make each meeting of the council an experience of faithful discipleship.

MAINTAIN STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PASTOR(S) AND LAY LEADERSHIP

Be intentional in establishing close communication with the pastor, the lay leader, and any other key leaders of your congregation. Your position makes it imperative that you know what is going on in the church. As the church council chairperson, you are entitled to attend the meetings of all boards and committees (unless a closed meeting is specially called) as well as attend annual conference (the *Discipline*, ¶251.3). Your knowledge of the entire congregational system should be second only to the pastor's. Your knowledge contributes to the ongoing planning and effectiveness of the council as a whole.

Set regular times to meet with the pastor(s) and lay leader(s) of your congregation. Use this as a time to listen to the thinking of these key leaders, and then share your understanding of where things stand with the council. Be sure that you share a common understanding of the current reality, the desired reality, and the short-term and long-term processes in place for performing the mission and ministry of the church.

Also, remember to make this time holy—a time to pray and reflect on the work that God has entrusted into your care. Be diligent to create a strong feeling of partnership with the pastor(s) and lay leader(s). Stay focused on the fact that you are spiritual leaders. By proactively pursuing an open relationship with the clergy and lay leaders of the congregation, you create a wonderful working environment and model effective leadership for the entire council. This style of leadership supports healthy relationships and can reduce stress and frustration along the way.

STAY FOCUSED ON THE PRIMARY TASK

The primary task of the church is what it must do in order to fulfill its mission. While **vision** is what mission “looks like,” the **primary task** is how mission “happens.” The *Book of Discipline* describes the church’s primary task in several ways; helpful paragraphs include ¶122 and ¶243. The work of reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus Christ, leading people to a relationship with God in Jesus Christ, nurturing and strengthening them in their faith, and sending people out into the world to live transformed and transforming lives defines who we are. All of our work—our study, our worship, our service, and our fellowship—needs to align to this primary task.

As council chairperson, you sit in a unique position to view how the work of the council aligns with the primary task. You ask the critical question of every other church leader on the council: “How do your ministries support our primary task?” Sometimes churches have dealt with the primary task as separate ministries in the congregation and have failed to recognize how each aspect of the primary task forms a unified whole. For example, many churches have viewed evangelism as the work of reaching out and receiving. Worship related people to God. Christian education and fellowship nurtured and strengthened people in their faith, and mission work moved us into the world in service to others. While these statements are true, there is little recognition of the connections between worship and evangelism, Christian education and mission, or mission and worship.

Viewing your congregation as an organic system can help you understand that all four aspects of the primary task are interconnected, and effective ministry requires that we include all four aspects in everything we do. Evangelism is reaching out and receiving and more. You are in a position to clarify how evangelism reaches and receives, relates people to God, nurtures and strengthens their faith, and transforms their lives. The same is true of worship, Christian education, mission, stewardship, finance, membership, or any other work that you engage in as the church.

Looking at discipleship holistically helps leaders understand that what happens in one area of ministry affects the entire congregation. New worship services and/or increased attendance in worship are wonderful. These changes may also affect how and when Bible study and other opportunities for Christian education can be scheduled; how much parking is needed at any one time; how many greeters, musicians and choir members, liturgists, and other worship leaders are needed; and when you will offer childcare. All these changes have implications for your human, physical, and financial resources. From a systems perspective, worship, as an example, cannot be viewed in isolation from the rest of the congregation’s plan for discipleship.

Likewise, you may have an effective plan for inviting newcomers to your church and for providing worship and small groups that support their relationships with God. Yet if your congregation does not effectively provide opportunities for service and mission, your congregation is not as strong as it needs to be. The primary task reminds us that the concept of discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition includes not only personal transformation but also healing and reconciliation of the hurt, brokenness, and alienation brought about by unjust social structures, marginalization, hate, and greed.

LEAD VISIONING AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

The bulk of the important work in the church council is not in the management of your current reality but in planning for the future. Where do you need to be in three, five, or seven years? How will you move into the future? What do you need to learn to be more effective? Who are the people you will need to be ready to serve?

The ongoing, day-to-day work of the church demands so much time and effort that we sometimes neglect the larger, long-term issues. There is a growing awareness, however, that we neglect the long-term in favor of the short-term at our own peril. The future of our congregations is as pressing a concern for our churches as anything in the present. The fundamental problem is that we have so filled the time of our church councils with short-term issues that there is no time for visioning and strategic planning. Maintenance and administration absorb the valuable resources needed for planning and working toward a new future.

Individual committee chairpersons and team leaders are responsible for the management of current plans. As chairperson of the council, your task is to focus the group beyond the immediate work to the “vision horizon” where the potential for new ministries and work will appear. Unless the church council stays focused on the future, you will continue to do only what you have done in the past. As our world changes, the church must seek new, appropriate ways to fulfill our mission faithfully. Create meeting settings in which you do not merely report on what is and what was vitally important. The most effective church councils deal both with the “now” and the “not yet.” It is crucial to give adequate time in every meeting to attend to dreaming about the future as well as to the ongoing work of ministry, money, and maintenance.

GUIDE THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL

As the council chairperson, you have responsibility for preparing agendas for the council meetings, conducting the meetings, communicating with council members, and being aware of what is happening in the congregation.

When preparing for a council meeting, it is important to clarify what needs to be accomplished at the meeting. Get input from your pastor(s), the lay leader(s), and the other council members about what needs to happen at each meeting. The church council meeting is an arena to listen to God, make decisions, take action, provide information that cannot be handled any other way, and continue planning. Think about the decisions, learning, and feedback you must consider to move ahead in ministry. Determine which items are priorities, how much time each item will take, and who is responsible for each item. If another person is responsible for leading a specific part of the council meeting, be sure that he or she knows what is expected. Send the agenda to council members prior to the meetings if possible. (Don't forget e-mail!)

Leadership Tip

Ask a council member to serve as recorder for your meetings. Send a record of decisions made and actions to be taken (by whom and by when) to council members within ten days of your meeting. Prior to your next meeting, review these notes and contact each person who was assigned any responsibility. Determine what progress has been made, what support persons need, and what the next steps are.

In order to conduct work in a worshipful manner, consider describing your agenda by using faith language. Your agenda might include Call to Community; Call to Christian Conversation; and Call to Service. The Call to Community part of your meeting includes biblical reflection, worship, and prayer. This may set the context for your meeting or engage council members in dreaming about your congregation's future. The Call to Christian Conversation refers to the discussion and decision making about your plans for discipleship that emerge from your biblical reflection and prayer. This portion of the meeting reminds everyone that your work is holy work, enacted in the name of Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. The Call to Serve is both a call to action and a sending forth. It reminds council members that conversation leads to concrete action and specific behavior. It also reminds you that what happens inside a church building takes place for the benefit of the world outside the church building.

DEVELOP LEARNING/TRAINING EXPERIENCES

Effective leaders are learning leaders. Conducting the work of the church council provides an occasion for the spiritual growth and development of the people who have agreed to lead others. Learning has a ripple effect. As leaders learn, they teach others. As they teach, they are inspired to learn. Learning generates its own momentum. As council chairperson, you have the opportunity to energize this process and to maintain the momentum that will lead to greater effectiveness, deeper faith, and stronger ministry.

People need knowledge and skills not only in specialized areas of ministry but also in basic teamwork, leadership, communication, and conflict management. Knowing how to lead a meeting, create an agenda, brainstorm, prioritize work, arrive at consensus, and do a host of other practical tasks can greatly improve the leadership effectiveness of a local church. As council chair, you have an obligation to help other church leaders receive the training and support they require to be effective.

Adults learn best when the topic is relevant and applicable to their daily lives. They also appreciate the opportunity to share their experience and to decide what, when, and how they will learn. While traditional learning has been primarily verbal or logical, adults also learn through movement; music, contemplation, art, and dialogue; contemplating significant issues; creating or viewing pictures, charts, and other illustrations; and talking with other people.

UNDERSTAND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

As council chair, you will want to familiarize yourself with *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*. The *Discipline* is full of information that you need to know to lead the church. *Parts I-IV* provide a historical, theological, and doctrinal context for our identity as United Methodists. The *Book of Discipline* defines our core beliefs and practices and explains our understanding of what it means to be a Christian disciple. Our mission and purpose is defined, as well as a full explanation of our primary task.

Chapter 1 of *Part V* is essential reading for the council chairperson. These critical paragraphs define the structure and organization of the local church. Throughout the remainder of the *Discipline* is important information that will help you lead the congregation effectively in its program ministries. There is a listing of helpful resources at the back of this Guideline that will help you understand The United Methodist Church and where to turn when you need assistance.

Your Partners in Ministry

You have ultimate responsibility for creating and implementing a strategy plan that enables your congregation to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. You will work with several administrative groups to ensure that the congregation effectively uses its physical, financial, and human resources.

Six Essential Partners

As council chairperson, you will work with a variety of other congregational leaders. Your pastor(s), lay leader(s), and you serve as the core leadership for the congregation. Together you help the church council develop a plan for identifying, equipping, and deploying leaders in the congregation. You will find a description of the essential groups below.

PASTOR(S)

Pastors work in four primary arenas, traditionally described as Word, Sacrament, Service, and Order. Pastors live out these responsibilities as worship leader, preacher, and teacher; administrative leader; “keeper” of the vision; equipper of laity; and community minister. Through worship, administration, leader development, and team building, your pastor(s) will work with you to develop and implement your congregation’s plan for making disciples of Jesus Christ. Along with the lay leader, you and the pastor(s) form the core leadership team for the congregation.

LAY LEADER(S)

Lay leader(s) serve as advocates and models of faithful Christian discipleship. These key leaders understand what it means to be a part of the ministry of all Christians and that all persons are called by God to ministry. Sometimes people associate ministry with ordination; but from a biblical perspective, ministry is the work of the “saints”—those individuals who have experienced the love and grace of God in their lives and who seek to follow Jesus Christ in all that they do. (See Ephesians 4 for an inspiring illustration of what it means to “equip the saints for ministry.”)

The lay leader(s) serves as a member of the church council (the *Discipline*, ¶252.5). One role that the lay leader can play is in helping the council—and, by extension, the congregation—identify the needs of the community and discern the spiritual gifts resident in the congregation for responding to those needs. The lay leader can be a helpful partner as you identify leadership needed to implement your plan for discipleship.

STAFF/PASTOR-PARISH RELATIONS

The staff/pastor-parish relations committee functions somewhat like an office of human resources. This required administrative group confers with your district superintendent on all matters related to the pastor appointed to your congregation. The group helps develop job descriptions for any full-time or part-time staff that may be employed by the congregation, and they participate in the annual evaluation of both pastor(s) and staff.

The relationship between staff and ministry is critical to the health and vitality of your congregation. You and the chairperson of the S/PPRC work together to support healthy teams (whether pastor(s) and employed staff or pastor(s) and volunteers) that are focused on the mission of making disciples. Specifically, the church council makes recommendations to the charge conference concerning the pastoral and staff salaries and acts on recommendations from the S/PPRC on pastoral housing and other pastoral support needs (§252.4.d and .e). You may find it helpful to schedule regular meetings with the chairperson of the S/PPRC in order to facilitate the work of S/PPRC and the council.

TRUSTEES

The board of trustees is another administrative committee required by the *Discipline*. All of the members of the board of trustees are elected by the charge conference. The chair of trustees—elected from within the board—is a member of the church council. The board of trustees is vested with the authority to manage the property and facilities of the congregation, handle routine maintenance, ensure the safety and accessibility of the physical plant and grounds, and modify or purchase equipment or the building in accordance with the *Discipline* and any legal requirements.

Along with the church council, the board of trustees has the legal obligation to see that the congregation operates within local codes and state laws governing such entities as churches. The board of trustees is required to monitor and manage the insurance requirements of the congregation in the areas of fire, theft, public liability, and fidelity, among others. It is important that the church be insured to cover staff and volunteers in the event of legal actions. The trustees are authorized to receive gifts, subject to direction by the charge conference. The board of trustees serves as consultant to the church council on legal matters, insurance, and anything otherwise related to the physical property of the church and is required to submit an annual report to the charge conference. Trustees are also responsible for a yearly church accessibility audit. For more information, consult the *Book of Discipline* (§§258.3, 2524-2550), *Trustees* Guideline, your conference office, or the General Council on Finance and Administration.

FINANCE

Another key administrative group is the committee on finance. The chair of this committee, the church treasurer, and the financial secretary are members of the church council. This committee is responsible for creating a budget for the ministry of the congregation and for developing a plan to raise adequate funds in support of the congregation's needs, both routine and special. The financial secretary records income to the church, while disbursements are made and recorded by the treasurer. Periodic reports are prepared by the treasurer and submitted to the church council for approval. The finance committee serves as the consultant to the church council on financial matters. For more information, consult the *Book of Discipline* (§258.4), the *Finance* Guideline, your conference office, or the General Council on Finance and Administration.

DISTRICT, ANNUAL CONFERENCE, AND DENOMINATIONAL LEADERS

One other important function of the church council is to relate to the larger connectional church—the district, annual conference, and denomination. The primary task of the annual conference is to recruit and develop leaders for the local congregations. General agencies develop resources for local congregations (for example, this Guideline is the result of collaboration between The United Methodist Publishing House and the General Board of Discipleship) and carry out other responsibilities that support local churches (for example, the General Board of Global Ministries manages our mission efforts here and abroad, and the General Board of Church and Society carries out General Conference mandates in the areas of peace, justice, and social concerns). Many districts provide programs and support to local churches. Local churches may establish a “sister” or “partner” relationship with specific missionaries, projects, Advance Special ministries, or congregations or institutions in the conferences outside the United States.

Since the local church is the “strategic base” for ministry (the *Discipline*, §202), districts, annual conferences, and general agencies know that their purpose is to provide resources and support for local congregations. They also extend the ministry of any one local congregation by connecting resources and serving the needs of regional and global communities. Denominational and annual conference structures partner with local congregations in mission and outreach by providing health care, education, leadership development, publishing, worship, and spiritual formation for persons who might not have access to these services outside of the global connections of The United Methodist Church.

Getting Started

There are several simple steps that you can take to get started in your new role. These steps include:

1. Read and reflect on these Guidelines.
2. Meet with your pastor to pray for your church and to discuss your pastor's vision for ministry.
3. Talk to your predecessors in the position or to council chairpersons in neighboring congregations for insights into their experience.
4. Convene an orientation meeting of the church council to clarify roles and expectations and to create your covenant.
5. Examine the current ministries of your congregation, noting any questions you may have.
6. Participate in learning and training events offered by your annual conference, district, general church agency, or other organizations.

Six Key Steps

READ THESE GUIDELINES

These Guidelines are designed to help you get organized to provide quality leadership for your congregation. They are not meant to be prescriptive but to inspire creative thinking on your part. How might you use these Guidelines to fashion your leadership? What new and provocative ideas do you find here? As you read through these Guidelines, make notes on the things you want to try.

Set the Guidelines aside for a few days, then come back to them for a second reading. This will offer confirmation for some of your thinking, clarify questions you may have, and reveal ideas that you may have missed the first time. When you read the second time, note any questions you still have.

Some leaders find it helpful to include the Guidelines in their devotional time. Not that the Guidelines are devotional, but reflecting on the content in an attitude of prayer, meditation, and biblical study helps in reading them in a deeper way.

Your work is interconnected to the work of many other boards, committees, teams, and working groups. It is advisable to familiarize yourself with the other Guidelines. It is well worth the cost to purchase an entire set of Guidelines to have on hand in the church office or library. Spend time leafing through the set and highlighting helpful information from each.

MEET WITH YOUR PASTOR

Your primary partner in ministry will be your pastor. When effective, your relationship with your pastor serves as a model for leadership in the community of faith. Commitment and enthusiasm for ministry grow out of strong, caring relationships. As soon as you accept the role of council chairperson, schedule a meeting with your pastor. Use this meeting as a time to listen to your pastor's hopes and dreams for the congregation and to share your hopes and dreams. Tell the pastor what strengths you bring to this role and what support you need in order to be as effective as possible. Ask the pastor how you can support her or him. Pray together for the ministry of your congregation, for the needs of your community, and for wisdom and guidance as you work together.

You will want to meet with your pastor on a routine basis throughout the year. In some cases, you may want to meet once or twice a month. It will be helpful to meet at least once a quarter (every three months). These meetings do not need to be long. The only agenda should be touching base about how things are going in the congregation, ensuring that the work of the council is on track, and supporting one another as spiritual leaders.

TALK TO YOUR PREDECESSORS

Although every experience is unique, there is immense benefit in talking to others who have walked the path before you. Previous leaders have experience, wisdom, and knowledge that could be invaluable to you as the new chairperson.

Leadership Tip

One way to mentor new leaders is to have a chairperson and a cochairperson of the church council. You may want to start as the cochairperson of the council. For a specified period of time, the current chairperson will help you learn how the council works and how you can be an effective spiritual leader. After the specified period of time, you will become the chairperson of the council. You can then begin mentoring a new cochairperson as you lead the work of the council.

Having former leaders mentor new leaders can be a wonderful way to bridge the gaps within a congregation and provide consistency and momentum to the ministry of the church. If mentoring is not feasible or possible, you can find guidance and counsel from council chairpersons, both past and present, in neighboring congregations. By talking with and observing others, you will learn both what you want to do and what you want to avoid. Talking with others also helps build a network that may result in ongoing nurture and support.

ORIENT THE COUNCIL TO ITS WORK

Early in the year, before any planning is done or agendas are created, convene an informal gathering of the church council members. If possible, meet away from the church building in a relaxed, informal setting. Use this time to become acquainted and to begin building a sense of team. Provide opportunities for everyone to share their hopes and dreams for the church, to talk about their passion for ministry, and to clarify their roles in the leadership of your congregation. There is a sample orientation agenda on pages 29–36.

Begin with Bible study and prayer. Give thanks to God for the ministry that you share, and seek God’s guidance for the work that is before you. Talk about what it means to be a spiritual leader and what you need to grow as spiritual leaders. Communicate that the work of the council will be worshipful work focused on Christian discipleship. Pray for one another. Begin developing your covenant by identifying expectations for effective participation in council meetings. Pray for your congregation.

At the first meeting of the new council, review what you heard from council members at the orientation. Invite leaders to share any insights they have had since the orientation. Make revisions to your covenant as needed. You may also want to talk about what it means to be a ministry team. Discuss the differences between committees and teams. Identify advantages and impediments to working as a team.

Leadership Tip

If you need a tool or process to help the council members think about the larger issues of mission and meaning in The United Methodist Church, use the suggestions for biblical reflection on pages 7–8 or refer to “An Orientation Process for the Church Council: Making a Home With God” pages 29–36 and on the CD-ROM. In addition, an orientation workshop is included on the CD-ROM with the full set of Guidelines, as one way to help church leaders understand their roles and responsibilities.

EXAMINE CURRENT MINISTRIES

Knowledge about the history of the congregation and surrounding community is available in many places. The obvious first step is to talk with members of the congregation. There may also be a formal or informal church historian. Written histories and photographs help tell the story of the original vision of the congregation’s founders. Neighbors to the church property can provide another essential perspective. You may find that the most important work you do in your first few weeks is to wander through the community and ask people what they know about the church. Conversations

with pastors, lay leaders, people in the congregation, and people in the community provide helpful perceptions of current reality.

You can also ask people in the congregation and community what their dreams for the future are. Develop a set of initial questions, and then as you talk with people, ask other questions to get a clearer idea of what they are saying and what they mean. Rather than focusing on church programs, ask questions that focus on people—their needs, their interests, and their hopes.

Review the current structure for ministry and administration in your congregation. Get a list of all the leaders' names and contact information. Review minutes from the previous year to locate goals that were set, strategies that were developed, and ideas for the future direction of the congregation. Look for information that helps you understand the purpose of each ministry area, the leadership of each ministry area, and the current strategies employed by each ministry area.

LEARN ALL YOU CAN

As council chairperson, there are four spheres of knowledge that influence the work you do: technical knowledge, spiritual knowledge, process knowledge, and people knowledge.

- **Technical knowledge** is knowledge about how the church works; what the committees, teams, and other leaders do; and your own personal expertise.
- **Spiritual knowledge** is your knowledge of God and Jesus Christ and your faith commitment. Your spiritual journey and life of discipleship are grounded in your spiritual knowledge.
- **Process knowledge** is your knowledge of how to get things done—how to lead meetings, organize resources, engage in visioning and planning processes, and monitor the “big picture.”
- **People knowledge** involves working with others, resolving conflict, motivating coleaders, and sharing what you know with others.

As the chairperson of the church council, you will be drawing constantly on all four spheres of knowledge. Improvement as a leader requires a balanced approach to learning in all four spheres. Learning around the functional ministries of the church—worship, stewardship, evangelism, Christian education, and so on—will increase your ability to coordinate your plan for discipleship holistically. Spiritual learning through Bible study and Christian conversation will broaden your base for creating a worshipful work environment. Learning in leadership, systems, continuous improvement, visioning, and planning will

provide a stronger structure for the council. Finally, learning the dynamics of people skills—motivation, conflict resolution, spiritual gifts, and leadership styles—will help you create better working relationships.

Take advantage of the many learning opportunities offered within your annual conference and the general church or in your immediate area. Sometimes annual conferences provide scholarships for participating in national or regional events. You can find information about events sponsored by your district, conference, or the denomination by talking with your pastor or district superintendent. You can also go to the websites for these agencies. (You can find general church web addresses in the back of this Guideline. Through www.umc.org you can find your annual conference's website too.)

An Orientation Process for the Church Council

Use the following process for orienting members to the work of the church council. The process is designed as an all-day session (basically 9:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M.). If you choose to use this format, you may want to hold the orientation away from the church building. Retreat centers, camps, or parks provide relaxing settings for worship, work, and team building. Whatever location you choose, try to ensure that your group will have some privacy for conversation. You will also need enough room for movement and for posting papers on the wall.

If this schedule isn't feasible for your congregation, you can hold two shorter meetings. At the first meeting, complete items 1–6 on the schedule below. At the second meeting, complete items 7–12. You can also incorporate different steps of this process into the ongoing meetings of the council, especially if you meet monthly. A final alternative is to use the workshop outline that is included on the CD-ROM for use with the full set of Guidelines.

Making a Home with God

Schedule for a Day-Long Orientation:

1. Community Storytelling (30 minutes)
2. Reflect on Scripture: 1 Peter 1:22; 2:2-3, 5 (30 minutes)
3. Create a Definition of Discipleship (30 minutes)
4. Break (15 minutes)
5. Small Group Exercise in Knowing, Doing, and Experiencing (45 minutes)
6. Congregational Context (45 minutes)
7. Lunch (45 minutes)
8. Congregational Leadership Exercise (30 minutes)
9. Sharing Hopes and Dreams (30 minutes)
10. Creating a Covenant (30 minutes)
11. Break (15 minutes)
12. Closing Worship, Holy Communion, and Blessing the Council (20 minutes)

1. Community Storytelling (30 minutes)

- a) Ask participants to get in line according to the year they became involved in the congregation. The line should begin with the person

who has been in the congregation for the longest time period and end with the newest person in the congregation. Once your line is formed, ask the two ends to meet, so that you are now in a circle.

- b) Tell participants to count off: one, two, one, two, and so forth. Then ask the individuals who are ones to turn to the persons (twos) on their left and share what they believe is your congregation's greatest strength currently. After about 2 minutes, in the same pairs ask the twos to repeat this process by sharing with the ones.
- c) Next, invite all twos to turn to the persons on their left (ones) and tell about a person or an event from the congregation that has been influential in their life and why the person or event was/is influential. Repeat the process in the same pairs.
- d) Have the twos remain in place. Ask the ones to move to their right three people. (Don't count the twos in this process.) Then have the ones turn to the two on their left and tell about when they first got involved in your congregation and what attracted them to the congregation. After 2 minutes, have the same pairs repeat the process with the twos sharing.
- e) Invite the ones to turn to the two on their right and share one hope or dream for your congregation's future. After a couple of minutes, have the same pairs repeat the process with the twos sharing.
- f) Ask the total group if there were any themes or recurrent images, phrases, or experiences that they heard. Talk about anything that surprised people or anything that confirmed or challenged perceptions of the congregation.

Note: The above storytelling is designed to help people get acquainted and to begin building a sense of community. Stories represent individuals' experience and perception. This is not a time for debate or judgment related to what is shared.

2. Reflection on Scripture: 1 Peter 1:22; 2:2-3, 5 (30 minutes)

- a) Let the participants know that you will be reading the above passage three different times. Each reading will be preceded by a question for reflection and followed by a time of silence. Before you read the passage for the first time, ask people to listen for words, phrases, or images that "jump out" at them as they listen to you read the passage. Allow 3-5 minutes of silence for thinking.

- b) Prior to reading the passage for the second time, invite participants to listen for what God is saying to them personally through the passage. Read the passage again and provide 3–5 minutes for silent reflection.
- c) Invite group members to turn to one or two other people and share some of their reflections so far.
- d) Prior to reading the passage for the final time, invite people to listen for what God is saying to your congregation through the passage. Read the passage and allow several minutes for silence.
- e) Invite the same groups of two or three to share thoughts that emerged from the third reading and time of reflection.
- f) Ask the total group if there are insights or ideas that anyone would like to share with everyone, particularly related to the third reading.

3. Create a Definition of Discipleship (30 minutes)

- a) Divide the group into smaller groups of four people per group. Give each small group two sheets of newsprint and colored markers.
- b) Ask each small group to consider what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. They can use the prior biblical reflection and conversation to get them started.
- c) After about 10 minutes, ask each small group to draft a definition of discipleship based on their small group conversation. Have someone in each small group write the definition on a sheet of newsprint.
- d) After another 5–7 minutes, have each small group share their definition. As a total group, look for common ideas. Allow time for asking questions to gain understanding. As time allows, combine the small groups' definitions into one definition, using the common ideas. Write the new definition on a sheet of newsprint and post it on a wall where everyone can see it.

Note: Assure the council that this is a working definition. As you work throughout the year to develop and implement your congregation's plan for discipleship, you will learn new things that may lead to a revision of your definition. This exercise is a starting point for your work together.

4. Break (15 minutes)

5. Small Group Exercise in Knowing, Doing, and Experiencing (45 minutes)

- a) Divide the group into three small groups. Give each small group several sheets of newsprint and colored markers. Using the definition of discipleship that was just written, ask one small group to think about what people in your congregation need to know if they are going to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. (*Know* refers to content and information, such as The Lord’s Prayer, the books of the Bible, and the history of The United Methodist Church.) Ask another small group to think about what people in your congregation need to be able to do if they are going to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. (*Do* refers to skills and abilities, such as praying, talking about their faith, and studying the Bible.) Ask the third small group to think about what people in your congregation need to experience in order to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. (*Experience* refers to emotions, values, attitudes, and the congregational “culture.” Examples include experiencing God’s love, belonging to a caring community, giving and receiving forgiveness, and welcoming all people into the community of faith.)
- b) Invite each small group to spend about 15 minutes identifying the knowledge, skills, and experiences they want congregational participants to have. Each group should make a list related to their category and write the list on newsprint.
- c) Have each small group share their list with the total group. Allow time for questions and clarification.
- d) Once all three small groups have shared their lists, ask if there are other ideas that this conversation has prompted. Add those ideas where indicated.
- e) Talk together about how the current ministries in your congregation help people develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed for Christian discipleship. For each ministry or setting that is named, invite the total group to respond by singing, “Rejoice, give thanks, and sing.”
- f) Talk together about any gaps or places that need to be strengthened for people in your congregation to develop the knowledge, skills, and experiences you have identified as needed for Christian discipleship.

For each gap or place to be strengthened, ask the total group to respond by singing, “Hear our prayer, O Lord.”

6. Congregational Context (45 minutes)

- a) Reread 1 Peter 2:5. This passage provides a metaphor for discipleship: being built into a spiritual house. John Wesley also used the house as a metaphor for the life of faith and discipleship. He talked about the porch of repentance, the door of faith, and the house of holiness.
- b) Ask the group to imagine their congregation as a spiritual house or a house of holiness, in which all the ministries named already take place. Like any other house, your congregation is in a particular neighborhood. Think about who your neighbors are, both literally and metaphorically. Together make a list of who is “across the street” from your house. These are people in the community who may pass by the church but are not involved right now in your congregation.
- c) Now ask the group to think of people who are minimally involved with your congregation, who may be “on the porch.” These are people who may have children in your childcare center but do not participate in worship or other ministries of the church; people who come when they need food, clothing, or financial assistance; families who attend during the summer when they are in residence in your town; young people who participate in the youth group because of a friend; and others who have some relationship with the church but are not (and may never be) regularly involved in your congregation. Some of these people may be new to the faith, wondering what Christianity is all about, or hoping that the church has something for them.
- d) Next, ask the group to identify people who are “moving in” to your spiritual house. Are there people who are new to the faith, such as members of a confirmation class or adults who have made a profession of faith? Are there people who are new to your congregation or to The United Methodist Church and who wonder what this congregation values? Are there people who have dropped out of the church for some reason and are waiting for an invitation to come back? Who else would you add to this category?
- e) Finally, invite the group to think of people who are “at home with God.” These are the people who have intentionally developed their relationship with God through participation in congregational life and through practicing spiritual disciplines. These are the people whose

life experiences have strengthened their faith and trust in God and who often serve as mentors for others on the spiritual journey.

- f) Thinking of each of these groups of people, identify which of your ministries is designed especially for them. Thinking about someone's location in relationship to the "spiritual house," identify what needs to be added to the lists of knowledge, skills, and experiences. What is different for each of these groups of people? What are your congregation's strengths and opportunities for growth related to these groups of people with differing needs?
- g) Make note of any ideas related to opportunities for growth to use in later council meetings.

Note: This process is designed to help council members remember that people have varying experiences in a church setting and that one particular setting for worship, study, fellowship, or service may not be pertinent to all people. It is not intended as an invitation to judge anyone else's relationship with God. It is to build awareness of the need for multiple entry points into the congregation and into a deeper relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

7. Lunch (45 minutes; or Adjournment if you are completing your orientation in more than one session.)

8. Congregational Leadership Exercise (30 minutes)

- a) Post four sheets of newsprint on which you have written (one phrase per newsprint sheet): Across the Street, On the Porch, Moving In, At Home With God. Or you may use the four lists of people you brainstormed before lunch. If you added any categories related to this particular biblical metaphor, post a sheet of newsprint with that phrase also.
- b) Ask each council member to stand by the newsprint with the phrase that best represents the ministry that he or she will be leading in the coming year. (Even if people say their ministry involves all of the phrases, ask them to choose one for right now.) Ask each group of leaders gathered at the sheets of newsprint to talk together about why they chose that phrase. Ask each group to discuss how the various ministries represented in the group offer an opportunity for people in the congregation to grow as disciples. Have the leaders in each group talk about what they need from one another in the way of support and

encouragement. Invite them to talk about how they can work together to strengthen all the ministries.

- c) After about 10 minutes, invite the council members to choose another phrase that also relates to the ministry they will lead. Repeat the process above.
- d) After about 10 minutes, repeat the above process.

Note: If for any reason there is a sheet of newsprint with a phrase that no one selects, after the above process mention that no one selected that phrase. Invite council members to talk about what that means for their discipleship plan and ask them to think about this prior to your first council meeting.

9. Sharing Hopes and Dreams (30 minutes)

- a) Provide paper, colored markers, pens, modeling clay, old magazines, scissors, and glue.
- b) Ask council members to spend about 15 minutes reflecting on the day's conversation and on their leadership roles. Ask them to use the materials you have provided to record their hopes and dreams for your congregation and for their leadership. They may write a prayer or poem or create a journal entry. They may draw a picture, model an idea with the clay, or make a collage of pictures and words from magazines.
- c) After 15 minutes, ask each council member to share some of what they have written, drawn, or otherwise created.

10. Creating a Covenant (30 minutes)

- a) Reread 1 Peter 2:5. Invite one of the participants to read the definition of discipleship created by the group. Ask each council member to review the lists of people your congregation is called to serve (Across the Street, On the Porch, and so forth.)
- b) Ask the group to name behaviors that will assist them as a church council to lead the congregation in living as disciples of Jesus Christ. Make a list of these behaviors.
- c) Give participants a chance to ask questions for clarification. If there are ideas that can be combined, do so. If there are behaviors that some participants cannot agree to at this time, ask the group to be willing to leave that behavior out of the group covenant.

- d) Create an opening statement, such as “With God’s help, we, the Church Council of this congregation, hereby enter into covenant with one another. As we seek to lead this congregation, we promise to one another that we will: (here add the list of behaviors you have identified).”
- e) In addition to this group covenant, council members can add personal clauses for themselves. If a behavior was earlier eliminated from the group covenant and a council member feels this behavior is particularly important for his or her leadership and discipleship, encourage that person to write it as a personal addition to the group covenant.

11. Break (15 minutes)

12. Closing Worship, Holy Communion, and Blessing the Council (20 minutes)

- a) Open with prayer.
- b) Sing a hymn. Consider, “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian” (No. 402, *The United Methodist Hymnal*), “God of Grace and God of Glory” (No. 577, UMH), “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (No. 2153, *The Faith We Sing*), or “Gather Us In” (No. 2236, TFWS).
- c) Reread 1 Peter 2:5.
- d) Ask the pastor to offer the sacrament of Holy Communion as a sign of unity as the body of Christ.
- e) Use your covenant as a unison prayer.
- f) Ask council members to kneel. With your pastor, lay hands on each person, invoking the Holy Spirit and praying for God’s wisdom, grace, and guidance.
- g) Invite the pastor to offer a benediction.

Resources

** Denotes our top picks

- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2008* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008. ISBN 978-0-687-64785-9).
- ** *Charting the Course: A Workbook on Christian Discipleship*, by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, and Jay Regennitter, with John P. Gilbert (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88177-507-5).
- ** *Church Vitality Indicator*. Online assessment and discernment tool and experience. www.cvindicator.com.
- ** *Deepening Your Effectiveness: Restructuring the Local Church for Life Transformation*, by Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006. ISBN 978-0-88177-475-7).
- *Equipped for Every Good Work*, by Dan R. Dick and Barbara Miller (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001. ISBN 978-0-88177-352-1).
- *Ezekiel's Bones: Rekindling Your Congregation's Spiritual Passion*, by Bill Kemp (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88177-498-6).
- *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation: 2009–2012*, Cokesbury, 2008.
- *L3 Leadership Incubator Kit*, by Barry Carpenter, Craig Kennet Miller, and Craig Robertson (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005. ISBN 978-0-88177-462-7).
- *Leadership and Interactive Styles: Understanding Why We Behave the Way We Do in Groups*, by Dan R. Dick (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006. ISBN 978-0-88177-486-3).
- *Leadership Essentials: Practical Tools for Leading in the Church*, by Carol Cartmill and Yvonne Gentile (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. ISBN 978-0-687-33595-4).

- *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, by Gilbert R. Rendle (Bethesda: Alban Institute, 1998. ISBN 978-1-56699-187-2).
- *Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices*, (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88177-508-2).
- *Vital Signs: A Pathway to Congregational Wholeness*, by Dan R. Dick (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-88177-495-5).
- *What Every Leader Needs to Know* (series). (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004).

