

# Call to Action Study Guide





## Using This Study Guide

**YOU ARE ENCOURAGED** to discuss the questions throughout this guide with other United Methodists. Use this guide with a Sunday school class, with your church council, in a small group or Bible study, with the annual conference Cabinet and staff, among General and Jurisdictional Conference delegates, with clergy colleagues, and with others who want to address the adaptive spiritual challenges and opportunities for The United Methodist Church.

**AS YOU GATHER** with a group of people for study, decide how many sessions you will dedicate for study. Chapters 1 -- 6 can be discussed individually or in three sessions that cover two chapters each, or you may choose to cover three chapters in each of the two sessions. There are suggested questions listed in each chapter and additional questions on page 25. Discuss the questions related to the particular chapters you are studying. You are also welcome to add your own questions to the study.

**YOU ARE ENCOURAGED** to be creative in adapting this guide to best serve the needs of your group and setting. The goal is to engage disciples, to enter into holy conversation about our life together, and to discover and decide how we will engage and invest in the Call to Action.

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# Call to Action Study Guide



## We Are Called to Action

FOR THE SAKE OF A NEW WORLD, we see a new church.

WE SEE A NEW CHURCH. It is a church that is clear about its mission and confident about its future; a church that is always reaching out, inviting, alive, agile, and resilient. We see a church that is hope-filled, passionate, nimble, called by God, and courageous. It is a church that is passionately committed to the mission and vision of the Wesleyan movement. This church takes risks to serve the poor, reach new people, and search continuously for creative ways to help each person grow in grace, love, and holiness.

TODAY WE CALL YOU TO ACTION, to join with United Methodist sisters and brothers from around the world in the adventure of becoming a New Church. The most important steps will not result from legislative action at General Conference or in annual conferences. Instead, they will require different actions and patterns of leadership by bishops, clergy, and laity. These changes must be grounded deeply in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. These changes have already begun, and the Call to Action is already starting to be employed in many congregations and conferences. WE CALL YOU TO:

- ❖ GROW VITAL CONGREGATIONS that will make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world;
- ❖ DEMONSTRATE COURAGEOUS TURNAROUND LEADERSHIP that leads the church toward deep Holy Spirit change;
- ❖ TAKE RISKS; experiment in ministry as we go to the margins of society to minister with the poor, immigrants, prisoners, and the homeless, as well as with the non-religious and nominally religious people in our communities;
- ❖ UNITE AS ONE; develop deeper trust so that together we face our adaptive spiritual challenges;
- ❖ SET VISIONARY GOALS and support one another as we eagerly experiment, innovate, embrace change, and regularly account for our ministries.

— The Council of Bishops,  
The United Methodist Church  
December 2011

# 1 A Call to Make Disciples for the Transformation of the World

*I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.*

*—Philippians 3:12*



THE APOSTLE PAUL writes to the Philippians to encourage them, and his words echo through the centuries to our ears today. “Press on toward God’s call.” Today’s Call

to Action is as urgent as:

- ❖ God’s call to Moses,
- ❖ Mordecai’s call to Esther,
- ❖ Jeremiah’s call to the exiled Israelites,
- ❖ Jesus’ call to his disciples, and
- ❖ John Wesley’s call to a new society called Methodists.

The call is the same in every instance: “I need you for such a time as this.”

For times such as this, in a world besieged by war and poverty, environmental calamity and economic uncertainty, hunger and conflict – and, yes, in places, even hopelessness – God calls us to be a forward-leaning people. We are not to turn away from the fierce oncoming wind. God’s challenge to us as the people of The United Methodist Church is to LEAN INTO IT.

How do we know where to lean when winds are swirling all around us? How do we know in which direction to lean? We look to the mission of The United Methodist Church and what it calls us to do – make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

God’s plan for us in this hour could not be clearer or more crucial. We

are to be a people united by pressing on to be in relationship with and meet the needs of growing numbers of non-religious and nominally religious people. God calls us to press on to connect with the people in our commu-

nities and in our lives. God calls us to offer Christ to those whose hope may be shaken by the great challenges of our time. We are called to share with them the hope we are given through God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

God calls us to join the seekers and spiritually hungry in a celebration of the jubilant word that Jesus has made ALL of us his own. Pressing on is the essence of who we are as United Methodists.

**What do you experience in the world and the church that calls for urgent action?**





# 2 A Call for Spiritual Renewal

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God.*

*Romans 12:1-2*



THE CALL TO ACTION is an urgent spiritual call to the church to surrender and recommit ourselves to Christ and the ministry of grace. Almost all biblical call stories

begin with a call to surrender to and obey God. The founder of Methodism experienced a similar call. Wesley's Aldersgate experience, in which his heart was "strangely warmed," was

shaped by his experience with the Moravians, who were ready to surrender their lives during a raging storm. Following this experience, Wesley went to Aldersgate Street and experienced grace when he surrendered himself completely to God.

Wesley later taught that God's grace is unearned and begins with surrender, but we should not wait idly to continue to experience grace. When we engage in the means of grace, God works,





often invisibly, in disciples – hastening, strengthening, and confirming faith so that God’s grace pervades in and through their lives.

The means of grace are a practice of daily surrender and obedience to God. We are called to these same means of grace today. They include regular spiritual disciplines, daily works of piety, and works of mercy.

### **Works of Piety include:**

Reading, meditating on, and studying the Scriptures; prayer; confessing sin; fasting; regularly attending worship; healthy living; sharing our faith with others; regularly sharing in the sacraments; Christian conferencing (accountability to one another); and Bible study.

**What is the role of the congregation, conference, and denomination in helping United Methodists practice personal piety and the means of grace?**

### **Works of Mercy include:**

Doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, giving generously to the needs of others, seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance, Wesley challenged Methodists to end slavery), and addressing the needs of the poor.

Practicing the means of grace engages us in core values of United Methodism, personal and social holiness in which United Methodists transform souls, communities, and injustice. Discipleship is more than becoming a member. We will not meet the pressing winds of our age if we first do not surrender, change, and practice spiritual disciplines.



# 3 A Call for More Turnaround Spiritual Leaders

*Perhaps you have come to [this position] for just such a time as this.*

—Esther 4:14



IN THE BOOK of Esther, Mordecai, at the risk of his own life, courageously calls Queen Esther to lean into the stiff winds of oppression and save

God's people. Esther was a common woman and a Jew who rose to prominence and was asked to take great risks to speak up for God's people. Her boldness saved the people. Our greatest call as The United Methodist Church is to lean into the stiff winds, make appropriate sacrifices, and give our best for God and the world.

God calls us as well. Yet it seems

that today, when the world needs us most, we are most challenged.

❖ Membership decline in The United Methodist Church began in 1972. While we are growing in Africa and the Philippines, membership continues to decline today in Europe and the United States.

❖ A decline in worship attendance in The United Methodist Church began in 2002. Today, this decline is experienced most in Europe and the

United States.

❖ The decline in offerings in The United Methodist Church began in 2008. Today, this decline is experienced most in Europe and the United States

**What should we sacrifice to embrace God's unfolding mission for the Church?**

**We need a cadre of mutually committed, collaborative, turnaround leaders who:**

- ❶ **MAKE** a compelling case for daring, disciplined, and sustained actions and
- ❷ **DEMONSTRATE** strong leadership to change what we emphasize, and de-emphasize many treasured approaches and programs



and forego familiar rhetoric that, though valued, does not lead to effectiveness in achieving different and desired outcomes. This is not a time for leaders who are ambivalent, reluctant, or unwilling to walk forward with humility and courage.

— Call to Action Steering Team Report





and will be felt by every community we serve.

❖ The next anticipated significant decline is in the field of mission giving and mission engagement. When God and the world need us most, we struggle with vitality in our congregations and conferences.

Esther risked everything — her privileged status in the palace, her wealth, and even her life — to save the people. She was willing to sacrifice everything to be a part of God's unfolding plan.

The eroding number of disciples and resources of The United Methodist Church point to deep spiritual and systemic issues. It calls for forward-leaning spiritual leadership and change.

This is the faithful type of leadership that Esther and Mordecai demonstrated. It is the leadership that many of our vital congregations and conferences are demonstrating.

**What church leader do you know today who has been a turnaround leader?**

**What did he or she do to turn a church, conference, or ministry around?**



# 4 A Call to Grow More Vital Congregations

*That day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done... All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

— Acts 2:41-47



RECENTLY, The United Methodist Church released a sweeping study of the denomination. It is being called one of the most in-depth studies by an outside

group of any denomination, ever

(<http://umcCalltoAction.org>). The study sought to do something critical: understand what vital congregations do to make themselves vital. The study measured Acts 2 vitality in three ways:

- 1 Congregational growth over a five-year period of time,
- 2 Significant engagement of members in ministry and the mission of the church, and
- 3 Outward focus by

making new disciples and giving generously to the needs of others.

The study reviewed the statistics of 33,000 United Methodist churches in the United States over a five-year period of time and found that approximately 5,000 were highly vital. Think

of it for a moment. Only 15 percent of our congregations in the United States were found to be “highly vital.”

The study found that we as United Methodists, in congregations large and small, fledgling and thriving, urban and rural, face a common obstacle. That obstacle is our denomination’s “adaptive spiritual challenge.”

This “adaptive spiritual challenge” is the WHY behind our discouraging numbers and decline. We are

## Vital congregations:

- **Attract** and make new disciples, grow over time.
- **Engage** disciples in ministry and mission.
- **Engage** in the community.

Where do you see vitality in your congregation?



not bearing fruit that lives up to our potential, or God's intentions for us.

This adaptive spiritual challenge is defined in five key ways:

❶ We have deep division and mistrust at all levels of the church. That division and mistrust keeps us from moving as one to respond to the needs of the communities around us. Our

institutional concerns and lack of faith in one another inhibit us from leaning fully into the oncoming challenges.

❷ We are averse to what the report called metrics. We are not comfortable with setting goals and measuring the fruits of our work in answer to God's call. This aversion renders us unsure

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# Vital Congregations *continued*



of our progress. It keeps us doing the things that are not working.

③ We do not have enough turnaround leaders, leaders who courageously face the challenges and inspire people toward greater goals. We need leaders who press on toward the goal that is before us.

④ We are not connecting with the nominally and non-religious people in our communities. We do not know or understand the emerging culture; rather, we choose to connect with people who think like us, act like us, and look like us.

⑤ We are not growing and supporting vital congregations. Our denominational resources and attention will

need to be refocused on the congregation as the central mission body of the church. It has the greatest potential to make new disciples and engage disciples in the transformation of the world.

**Vital congregations have lay and clergy turnaround leaders.**

**How will you help your congregation to be more vital?**

According to the Call to Action Report, we are challenged “to redirect the flow of attention, energy, and resources to an intense concentration to foster and sustain an increase in the number of vital congregations making disciples of Jesus

Christ for the transformation of the world.”

Our denomination’s “adaptive spiritual challenge” is quite different from the challenges with which many of us are more familiar – our “technical” problems.





What time are we going to hold Sunday morning worship is a technical problem. The adaptive spiritual challenge inherent in this question is, How do we attract and offer meaningful worship experiences to the non-religious and nominally religious people in our community? We must lean into our adaptive spiritual challenges so that congregations become more vital in attracting new disciples, growing over time, and engaging disciples in ministry and mission.

We tend to avoid or deny our adaptive spiritual challenges because they are harder to define and take longer to address. They force us to face our weaknesses and vulnerabilities. The results, however, are worth the effort and time required. Addressing adaptive challenges invites us to transformation.

Transformation of the world begins with us.

The great challenge before us is to grow more vital congregations.

According to the Call to Action, a vital congregation is “a community of believers under the Lordship of Christ.” It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached. It is defined by its fruits, evidenced in its worship, teaching, and participation in the redemption of the world.

A vital congregation bears witness to the saving love of Jesus Christ, and shows signs of increased engagement, attendance, growth, and missional outreach over time. Vital churches come in all sizes, are found in all geographic locations, and reflect a variety of racial/ethnic identities.

**In your experience, what traits best identify a turnaround leader?**

**How might you provide turnaround leadership?**



# 16 Drivers of Vital Congregations

## Children & youth



**1** Vital churches have more small groups for all ages.



**2** Vital churches have more programs for children.

**3** Vital churches have more programs for youth.



## Lay leadership

**4** Vital churches focus on increasing the effectiveness of lay leaders. (Laity understand their role and carry these roles out effectively.)

**5** Vital churches have lay leaders who demonstrate a vital personal faith. (This faith includes regular worship, intentional spiritual growth, personal devotional life, and giving of financial resources.)



**6** Vital churches place an emphasis on rotating lay leadership in order to involve more people over time.

**7** Vital churches call, equip, use, and support more lay leaders than non-vital churches. (Twenty percent or more of their worship attendees describe themselves as current or past leaders in their church.)



## Pastors

**8** Vital pastors coach and mentor lay leadership.



**9** Vital pastors use their influence to increase the participation of others in order to accomplish changes in the church.

**10** Vital pastors motivate the congregation to set and achieve significant goals through effective leadership.

**11** Vital pastors inspire the congregation through motivational preaching.

**12** Vital pastors, when they are serving effectively, stay for a longer period of time.



## Worship



**13** Vital churches offer a mix of contemporary (newer forms and styles of worship) and traditional services.

**14** Vital churches have preachers who tend to use more topical sermon series in traditional services.

**15** Vital churches use more contemporary music (less blended music that includes traditional tunes) in contemporary services.

**16** Vital churches use more multi-media in contemporary services (multi-media may not be as important as it is in some cultures).

# 5 A Call for Transformative Change

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.*

—Luke 4:18



TODAY, WE ARE challenged to connect with the growing numbers of non- and nominally religious people in our communities, connect with younger generations, grow and mature

disciples' faith, and recruit turnaround leaders, particularly young adult clergy leaders. Paul pressed on toward the goal against stiff winds of opposition because his heart and mind were radically transformed on the road to Damascus. What will be

The United Methodist Church's Damascus Road experience? What will be the experience that changes us so that we press on toward a Spirit-filled church that captures the hearts and imaginations of young people, ends death by malaria, houses the homeless and

orphans, quadruples our number of highly vital congregations, and baptizes the world with grace and hope. It is likely that we will need Damascus Road experiences across the connection:

- ❖ At General Conference,
- ❖ Within the Council of Bishops,
- ❖ Within the ministry of our General Agencies,
- ❖ Within our annual conferences,
- ❖ Within our clergy leaders,
- ❖ Within our laity.

A Damascus Road experience changes not only an individual but also the course of history. It is a transformative experience created through

the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul thought he was doing the work of God until he experienced Christ on the Damascus Road. John Wesley thought he was doing all the good he could, until he met Christ on Aldersgate Street. The Methodist Church thought it aligned with God, but in fact it

needed an epiphany to abolish the segregated Central Jurisdiction at the 1968 General Conference in Dallas, Texas. Throughout history, individuals, congregations, and denominations

**What are new ways we can connect with non- and nominally religious people?**

**What is your Damascus Road experience?**





have experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, which has literally set them in a new direction.

At every level of the church, deep Holy Spirit change is needed so that we lean into the stiff winds and press on toward the goal — the goal to renew our disciple-making heritage and transform lives and communities.

Deep transformative change is needed because we know from experience that adding a new program, a new agency, or more dollars to the budget does not empower us to grow the fruit God desires. The Call to Action is calling

for deep transformative change at all levels of the church. Deep transformative change can sometimes be inspired through a few strategic changes that

provide leverage for the entire system. You will see in the following legislation that the church is invited to change a few things that will leverage transformation throughout the denomination. For instance, we want to continue to embrace the four areas of focus in the

coming quadrennium — to end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and call and develop younger leaders.

**Where have  
you witnessed  
transformative  
change in the church?**

**What helped to bring  
about this change?**



# 6 A Call for Bold Leadership to Transform the World

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles,  
some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,  
to equip the saints for the work of ministry,  
for building up the body of Christ.*

—Ephesians 4:11-12

## A Call to Action to the Council of Bishops



❶ Model and lead the denomination in practicing the means of grace.

❷ Lead conferences to develop plans that include metrics and goals that measure the growth of vital congrega-

tions and the four areas of focus – end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and recruit younger clergy.

❸ Embrace and develop metrics and goals that measure a bishop's effectiveness, the growth in vital congregations, and the results in the four areas of focus.

❹ Focus conference resources on recruiting younger clergy.

❺ Lead conferences to call, equip, and support turnaround spiritual leaders.

❻ Continually improve skills and practices to strengthen the church.

❼ Set specific time during Council meetings when active bishops will:

❖ Grow in their faith.

❖ Increase skills and abilities to lead the church, particularly to lead conferences to address our adaptive spiritual challenges.

❖ Account for fruit/results in growing vital congregations, making new disciples, recruiting younger clergy, devel-

oping turnaround clergy and lay leadership, and engaging more disciples in mission.

❽ Pray for and work with other bishops, denominational leaders, conference leaders, and congregational leaders to grow unity within the church; grow trust within congregations, conferences, and the denomination; and engage in listening and

conversation with non- and nominally religious people in the community.

**Where and how have you experienced unity in the midst of differences?**

**How will we unify the Church in the midst of our theological and cultural differences?**



## A Call for Action to the General Agency Staff

- ❶ Regularly practice and model the means of grace.
- ❷ Direct financial and training resources to grow vital congregations and help conferences and congregations carry out the four areas of focus end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and recruit younger clergy.
- ❸ Serve collaboratively in and across five strategic areas:
  - ❖ Administrative and Strategic Support Services,
  - ❖ Congregational Vitality,
  - ❖ Leadership Excellence,
  - ❖ Missional Engagement,
  - ❖ Justice and Reconciliation.
- ❹ Develop and embrace metrics and goals that measure staff and resourcing effectiveness for growing vital congregations and achieving results in the four areas of focus.
- ❺ Continually improve skills and practices to strengthen the church.
- ❻ Pray for and work with bishops, conference leaders, and congregational leaders to grow the unity of the church, grow trust within congregations and the denomination, and increase the ability of the church to engage in listening and conversation with non-religious and nominally religious people in the community.

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# Bold Leadership *continued*

## Call for Action to the Annual Conference and Staff

- ❶ Regularly practice and lead congregations to practice the means of grace.
  - ❷ Direct resources to grow vital congregations with particular focus on implementing the 16 drivers of vitality and carry out the four areas of focus — end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and recruit younger clergy.
  - ❸ Organize the conference as appropriate and work collaboratively in five areas:
    - ❖ Administrative and Strategic Support Services,
    - ❖ Congregational Vitality,
    - ❖ Leadership Excellence,
    - ❖ Missional Engagement,
    - ❖ Justice and Reconciliation.
  - ❹ Develop and embrace metrics and goals that measure staff and conference resourcing effectiveness for growing vital congregations and achieving results in the four areas of focus.
  - ❺ Continually improve skills and practices to strengthen the church.
  - ❻ Pray for and work with pastors, laity, and bishops to grow the unity within the church, grow trust within the congregation and denomination, and engage in listening and conversation with non-religious and nominally religious people in the community.
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## Call for Action to Pastors

- ❶ Regularly practice and lead your congregation(s) to practice the means of grace.
- ❷ Lead your congregation to become more vital, particularly leading your congregation to implement the 16 drivers of vitality and carry out the four areas of focus — end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and recruit younger clergy.
- ❸ Develop and embrace metrics and goals that measure your and the congregation's effectiveness for becoming a highly vital congregation and results in the four areas of focus. This includes
  - but is not limited to the five denominational discipleship goals:
    - ❖ Disciples make new disciples – professions of faith;
    - ❖ Disciples worship – worship attendance;
    - ❖ Disciples grow and mature in their faith – number of small faith-development groups;
    - ❖ Disciples engage in mission – number of members engaged in community and worldwide mission;
    - ❖ Disciples give generously to mission – the amount of money given to mission.





④ Grow your leadership skills to lead the congregation to implement the 16 drivers of vitality and achieve the five denominational goals with increasing effectiveness.

⑤ Pray for and work with your laity, superintendent, and bishop to grow the unity within the congregation, conference and denomination; grow trust within the congregation and

denomination; and engage in listening and conversation with non- and nominally religious people in the community.

⑥ Encourage and mentor turnaround leaders to serve within the congregation and the community and foster an environment in which others can hear and respond to the call to pastoral ministry.

## Call to Action to Laity

① Regularly practice and lead others to practice the means of grace.

② Serve within your congregation so that it becomes more vital, particularly leading/serving within your congregation to implement the 16 drivers of vitality and carry out the four areas of focus – end deaths by malaria, eliminate poverty, start new faith communities, and recruit younger clergy.

③ Grow your leadership and/or servant skills to serve with increasing effectiveness so that the congregation implements the 16 drivers of vitality and becomes more vital.

④ Embrace and develop metrics and goals that measure your congregation's effectiveness for growing vital congregations and results in the four areas of focus. This includes but is not limited to the five denominational discipleship goals:

❖ Disciples make new disciples – professions of faith;

❖ Disciples worship – worship attendance;

❖ Disciples grow and mature in their faith – number of small faith-development groups;

❖ Disciples engage in mission — number of members engaged in community and worldwide mission;

❖ Disciples give generously to mission – the amount of money given to mission.

⑤ Pray for and work with your pastor(s), superintendent, and bishop to grow the unity within the congregation, conference, and denomination; grow trust within the congregation and denomination; and engage in listening and conversation with non-religious and nominally religious people in the community.



# 7 A Call to the General Conference for Transformational Changes

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## More freedom for Annual Conferences

**1** LEGISLATION from the Connectional Table that will give annual conferences freedom to organize their structures for greater fruitfulness. A similar provision was provided years ago to congregations by the General Conference as we recognized the value of diversity in the size, context, culture, and ministry of congregations. This legislation will provide conferences with the same opportunity to establish work areas that best fit their situations.

## Revise guaranteed appointments

**2** LEGISLATION from the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry to adjust clergy appointment security, sometimes called guaranteed appointment. We recognize that, financially, the church is unable to sustain all current clergy in full-time appointments. It is anticipated that

the number of United Methodist congregations will continue to decline for a season in the United States. The church needs leaders that are eager and able to work in new ways, in new settings, and with new people. We need leaders who possess the passion and gifts to turn churches around and move from decline to growth and vitality. The church should support grace-filled ways for ineffective pastors to transition to other employment and for effective, vital clergy to be appointed to churches for as long as necessary so that they can best facilitate the needed transformation. Using good process and limiting clergy appointment guarantees will help us appoint pastors who aid the growth of vital congregations.

## Create one board

**3** LEGISLATION from the Connectional Table to strengthen our General Church ministry and ability to focus our attention by merging nine boards into one to align resources, reduce bureaucracy, and be good





# b

stewards of apportionment dollars. Since the merger that formed The United Methodist Church forty years ago, we have created a governance structure that includes thirteen different incorporated agencies. These thirteen agencies reflected the compromises sought to address concerns growing out of the mergers in 1939 and 1968 as well as support the mission of a stable mainline denomination. When the thirteen agencies were created, congregations and conferences sought agencies to create resources for them and to do mission for them.

Today we are called to be a more dynamic church, responsive to emerging needs and more nimble and creative with the use of available money and time. Given changes in access to communications and cross-cultural exchanges, more of our mission is being done through congregations and annual conferences. The pace and needs of the work require faster networking, learning, and adapting best practices and greater collaboration across all ministry areas to make best use of our

collective resources to accomplish our mission.

Consolidating several program and administrative agencies will give us a more responsive, nimble, and

**Would you be willing to de-emphasize some things we have treasured in the past to achieve a more transformative ministry?**

**What would you be willing to de-emphasize?**

integrated structure that will increase our fruitfulness. Leadership, mission, congregational development, justice, and financial administration decisions are best made at the same table. We need much greater and more timely collaboration and coordination among our general agencies. Establishing one board with an integrated staff structure to implement the con-

nectional and mission ministry of the church will make more effective and efficient use of available resources, more quickly respond to emerging needs in the mission fields, provide better collaboration, and eliminate the tendency to move into silos for the mission, administration, and programming life of the church. This legislation also provides for four of the agencies

*Continued on next page*

# General Conference *continued*



that do not receive apportionment dollars or receive less than 20 percent from apportionments to continue as individual agencies. These agencies include: the General Board of Pensions and Health Benefits, The United Methodist Publishing House, General Commission on United Methodist Men, and the Women's Division. UMMen currently receives up to 20 percent of its budget from the World Service Fund.

## Create Executive Secretary position

**4** LEGISLATION from the Connectional Table that creates an Executive General Secretary to lead the ministry and staff of the newly proposed Center for Connectional Mission and Ministry. The Executive General Secretary will work to ensure collaboration among all staff, progress toward our mission, and accomplishment of our goals.

## Revise role of Council of Bishop's president

**5** LEGISLATION from the Council of Bishops to provide for a set-aside President of the Council to help reform the Council and dedicate its energies on the core adaptive spiritual

challenges. This role will organize the work of the Council of Bishops to focus on growing vital congregations, aligning resources to grow vital congregations, working toward the unity of the church, providing a leader to connect

with other denominations and other faith groups, and continuing to cultivate a culture of spirituality, leadership, and accountability within the Council of Bishops. A full-time Council of Bishops president is particularly important given the recommendation to move the work of the General Council on Christian Unity and Inter-

religious Concerns (GCCUIC) under the direction of the Council of Bishops.

## Funds for growth

**6** A resolution from the Connectional Table to permit the mid-quadrennium reallocation of money from the General Church World Service and General Administration funds for a sum up to \$60 million for purposes related to the challenge of creating and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations, the first \$5 million of which will be set aside for Central Conference theological education and the second \$5 million to develop young adult leadership.

**Which of these legislative actions do you believe holds the most promise for transformation?**

**What is your prayer for General Conference?**



# 8 A Call to Action in Context



*As [God] has sent me, so I send you.*

*John 20:21*



The United Methodist Church continues to be a spiritual influence in the world for the gospel. Vital congregations are essential to its ministry. But what makes a congregation vital, and what do vital congregations do? While the true testimony of a congregation lies in the stories told by those whose lives have been transformed, there is also other information that clearly shows the movement of the Spirit in vital congregations around the world. The United Methodist Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table commissioned a study by Towers Watson to better identify the key activities of vital congregations.

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

The study further examined these churches and found they shared at least sixteen ministries/strategies in common. The study called them “drivers of vitality,” and indicated that if churches worked on all sixteen, they would move toward vitality or become more vital. The sixteen ministries/strategies can be grouped into four areas: youth and children, lay leaders, pastors, and worship.

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



## *Be doers of the word.*

*James 1:22*



### **Our Mission**

THE MISSION of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world as described

in Matthew 28:18-20 (The Great Commission) and Matthew 22:36-40 (The Great Commandment).

### **We Are Called to Action**

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH is called to be a world leader in developing existing churches and starting new vital congregations so that we make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

### **Vital Congregations**

VITAL CONGREGATIONS are Spirit-filled, forward-leaning communities of believers that welcome all people. (Galatians 3:28)

- ❖ MAKE disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20.)
- ❖ SERVE like Christ through justice and mercy ministries (Micah 6:8; Luke 4:17-21)

- ❖ DEVELOP inviting and inspiring worship services
- ❖ WORK with disciples in mission and outreach
- ❖ EMPOWER lay leadership
- ❖ SUPPORT inspired clergy leadership
- ❖ CREATE small groups and strong children's programs and youth ministry
- ❖ ENGAGE in world transformation through the creation of vital disciples

### **Vital Disciples**

A VITAL DISCIPLE is a changed follower of Jesus as described in Matthew 22:36-40 (The Great Commandment).

- ❖ WORSHIP sincerely
- ❖ GROW their faith
- ❖ ENGAGE in mission
- ❖ GIVE to mission
- ❖ MAKE new disciples



## A Call to Action Summary Questions

1. *What Scripture, quotation, or sentence challenged or surprised you in this guide?*

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2. *Which of the recommended actions can you embrace?*

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3. *What will you do to make this a reality in your congregation or conference?*

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4. *Which of the recommendations concern you? Why?*

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5. *What will your church or conference do differently to address our adaptive spiritual challenges?*

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6. *How will you serve differently to help grow vital congregations?*

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*We would like to receive your responses to any and all questions throughout the guide.*

*Visit <http://umcCalltoAction.org> to provide input for the future of our*

*United Methodist Church.*



## Help Your Congregation Become Vital

visit [www.umVitalCongregations.org](http://www.umVitalCongregations.org) to learn:



WHAT is a vital congregation



THE DRIVERS of vitality



UNITED METHODIST worldwide congregational goals



HOW to set and achieve discipleship goals



HOW to implement the drivers of vitality



RESOURCES for your congregation to become vital

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