

the
faithful
path...
for now

LIVING OUT GOD'S CALL IN A
CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Beth M. Crissman

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina

The Faithful Path...for Now: Living Out God's Call in a Changing Landscape
by Beth M. Crissman

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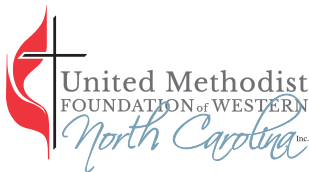


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about the *author*

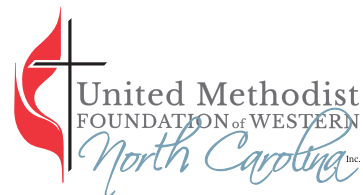
Rev. Beth M. Crissman is an ordained elder in the Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church where she currently serves as a District Superintendent and as Director of Peace Building Ministries for the Conference. In addition to serving as lead pastor for multiple congregations, Beth, and her husband Rev. Kelly Crissman, served as the founders and executive directors of Plowpoint, a non-profit organization which trained teams of clergy and laity throughout the United Methodist Church for the transformation of leaders, churches, and communities.



Beth is the author of five books: *Longing to Belong*, *Feeding and Leading of Shepherds*, *Stepping in the Stream*, along with Rev. Dr. Nancy Rankin, *Choosing the Faithful Path*, and *The Faithful Path for Now*.

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a message from *the Foundation*



The Foundation's partnership in presenting *The Faithful Path...for Now* reflects a commitment to adaptive leadership in a season of change. It also flows from a newly crafted strategic vision informed by the needs and aspirations of those we serve.

In a world that grows more complex by the day, how do we, as followers of Christ, rise to the moment? This question is at the heart of the journey you are about to begin.

In that spirit, the Foundation welcomes you to *The Faithful Path...for Now*.

We pray your experience will be a time of renewal and innovation, and that you will find clarity around your mission in a changing landscape.

It is a blessing to count you as a partner in our mission to build the Church for generations to come.

May God bless your journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David A. Snipes".

David A. Snipes
President & CEO
United Methodist Foundation of Western North Carolina





INTRODUCTION

the faithful path... *for now*

In 2015, when Rev. Dr. Nancy Rankin and I first wrote and published *Choosing the Faithful Path*, we were responding as district superintendents and as clergy leaders to the need for a biblically based assessment study that would help churches respond to the question: “Are we faithfully fulfilling Christ’s Call and Commission for our church?” As local church and denominational leaders, we also realized that this assessment was critically important for churches reaching a particular “fork in the road” when significant changes were needed for the church to not only survive but to thrive in increasingly challenging circumstances.

Since 2015, much has changed in our churches, our communities, our nation, and world. With the global corona virus pandemic, racial tensions, political unrest, and within The United Methodist Church disaffiliations and growing divisions, much has impacted our congregations’ ability to be a faithful and constant witness in a rapidly changing context.

In 2006, I also wrote and published *Stepping in the Stream*, a comprehensive bible study for leaders to discern together God’s vision for their ministry, rooted in the practice of the spiritual disciplines. The overall process included community assessments, demographic studies, discovering spiritual gifts, and

developing specific strategies to put God's vision into action. In reflecting on these two similar, but somewhat different studies, I have discovered that what we, as church leaders, need now to determine God's right path forward has also changed. We need less of an extensive study to determine our "vision" for the next ten years and more of a spiritually rooted and focused process that can be engaged repeatedly, in part or in whole, as challenges and opportunities continue to emerge around us.

The Faithful Path...for Now

incorporates aspects of both *Choosing the Faithful Path* and *Stepping in the Stream* as a new resource to assess our congregations' ability, willingness and commitment to fulfill God's Call and Commission for the church in our current context today. Paragraph 213 in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2020-2024* states:

"Every congregation is located in a community in some type of transition, [therefore] every local church is

encouraged to study their congregation's potential." *The Faithful Path...for Now* incorporates the necessary components of the assessment encouraged in paragraph 213. However, the primary purpose and design of this new resource exceeds an assessment study. This is not a study for churches "in trouble." This is a study for any congregation who finds themselves in a changing landscape with the needs of their neighbors changing and a changing capacity to respond. And, if we are honest, this includes all our churches.

My hope is that in engaging this biblically based, spiritually rooted process, we, as leaders, will listen intently to God, one another, and our neighbors to determine our right next steps for ministry now. Additionally, we will likely need to ask these same questions again in the coming years as the needs of our neighbors and our ability to respond continue to change. Rooted in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaging our Wesleyan heritage, we are encouraged to assume a posture of asking the "right questions" and to listen intently to God, one another, and our neighbors for the "right answers" to guide us in choosing the faithful path forward.



Throughout *The Faithful Path for Now*, we include references to *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (2020/2024 updated edition) as an additional resource to align our faithful ministry as United Methodist congregations. Whereas our primary alignment, or plumbline, is always Scripture, *The Book of Discipline* since 1778 has been an expression of our tradition that also aligns with and emanates from Scripture. As stated in paragraph 102 of *The Book of Discipline* entitled “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task:”

“We share with many Christian communions a recognition of the authority of Scripture in matters of faith, the confession, that our justification as sinners is by grace through faith, and the sober realization that the church is in need of continual reformation and renewal.”



Therefore, our reference to *The Book of Discipline* is another way of expressing our alignment with both Scripture and our tradition as United Methodists to live out our biblical commitment to being reformed and renewed as the church. In doing so, as stated in the conclusion of this section of *The Book of Discipline*, we can embody the “practical divinity” that is a distinctive hallmark of our life and ministry as a people called Methodist.

In Chapter One, we will explore the importance of practicing the spiritual disciplines to ensure that we are in a posture conducive to seeking God’s will for our congregation. To help you get into the stream and stay in the stream of God’s will during this study, each chapter begins with a suggested hymn, a scripture reading, and an opening prayer.

In the Appendix, a Worship Planning Guide is also included. The pastor and leadership may also choose to engage the fuller congregation in the study content through a sermon series, thereby inviting others to join the leaders of the church in the discernment process.

To be most effective, this should be engaged as a communal study. Therefore, whenever possible, we are also encouraged to gather as a group to break bread together, both through a shared simple meal and as often as we can by partaking in the Lord's Supper. An abbreviated communion liturgy is also included in the Appendix for our use as needed.

And lastly, but importantly, we are encouraged to engage in holy conversation, or what John Wesley referred to as **Christian Conferencing**, with one another and our neighbors, trusting that in listening intently to one another we will hear God speak as well. To help guide our holy conferencing, there are questions at the end of each chapter to explore together followed by worksheets to identify specific ways we can strengthen the life and ministry of our congregation to more faithfully fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church. By the completion of the study, we should be able to combine the worksheets, compiling the "next steps" from each chapter's work to develop a comprehensive plan for moving forward.

As we begin this journey of discovery and discernment, may God bless you and your faithful efforts to choose God's faithful path forward...for now.

Journeying in prayer with you,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Beth", with a large, stylized initial "B" and a long, sweeping underline.

Beth Crissman

A photograph of a church service. In the foreground, the backs of several people's heads are visible as they sit in pews. Many of them are holding lit candles high in the air. In the background, a woman with red hair is singing, and a man is playing a guitar. On the right, a woman is standing and singing with her arms raised. The scene is lit with warm, soft light, creating a reverent atmosphere.

CHAPTER 1

our *unchanging call* in a shifting landscape

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #368

My Hope is Built on nothing less
than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand;
all other ground is sinking sand.

When darkness veils his lovely face,
I rest on his unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
my anchor holds within the veil.

(Refrain)

His oath, his covenant, his blood
supports me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
he then is all my hope and stay.

(Refrain)

When he shall come with trumpet sound,
O may I then in him be found!
Dressed in his righteousness alone,
faultless to stand before the throne!

(Refrain)

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

MATTHEW 7:21-28 (NLT)

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you who behave lawlessly.’

²⁴ “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell — and great was its fall!”

²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these words, the crowds were astounded at his teaching.



Means of Grace: Prayer

Loving and gracious God: You are steadfast and true. You are our Rock and the foundation on which our church is built.

As we begin this study together, guide and direct us by the power of your Holy Spirit so that your wisdom will be our wisdom, your insights will be our insights.

As we discern together our right next steps as a congregation, guide our feet, determine our path, so that in moving forward we will bring glory and honor to you as we faithfully fulfill our call as your church. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Our Unchanging Call in a Shifting Landscape

As briefly stated in the introduction, much has changed in our churches and communities over the past several years. Everyone reading this has experienced the shift in the landscape for our ministries due to a global pandemic, political unrest, rising racial tensions, and for us within the United Methodist Church, disaffiliations and significant changes in our *Book of Discipline* ending over fifty years of discrimination in the life and practices of our church. These somewhat seismic shifts have impacted our communities and our congregations, changing how our congregations look inside and how we reach outside our walls to extend the never changing love of God in Jesus Christ to our neighbors. And although we know that God's love for us has not changed, how we are called to extend that love to others may have.



Understanding the Landscape Shift

According to a 2022 study by the Pew Research Center (a leading research institute which studies and forecasts religious trends in the United States), “since the 1990s large numbers of Americans have left Christianity to join the growing ranks of U.S. adults who describe their religious identity as atheists, agnostic, or ‘nothing in particular.’” According to Pew’s study of several decades of religious trends, the percentage of Americans (including children) who identified as Christian in 2020 was 64%. However, by following currently trending patterns, this number is projected to decline somewhere between 35- 54% of total Americans by 2070, depending on specific shifts in and out of the church.¹

¹ “Modeling the Future of Religion in America,” <https://pewrsr.ch/3qADCA4>

Another study by the Gallup Poll in 2020 reveals that only 47% of U.S. adults reported belonging to any faith community, including churches, synagogues, or mosques. This report indicated that for the first time since 1937, when Gallup first began measuring church membership trends, church membership numbers had dropped below fifty percent.²

Of important note is that these studies were not yet factoring the full impact of the pandemic and divisions of the past several years, thus not measuring their effect on church membership, attendance and giving. Additionally, within the United Methodist Church since 2020, our churches have also experienced the effects of harmful disaffiliation conversations and resulting loss of some members and finances.

“

*For any local church to stay **viable** and **vital**, we must be willing to make significant changes to respond faithfully to our changing communities.*

”

Compounding these trends is what Lovett Weems, Senior Consultant for Lewis Center for Church Leadership and Distinguished Professor of Church Leadership at Wesley Theological Seminary, first referred to in 2011 as the coming “death tsunami.” Weems reported that based on demographics of the U.S. population, our nation will experience a much higher death rate between 2020 and 2050 than any other period of history since the 1940s due to the aging generations leading up to and including Baby Boomers.³ The impact of this trend on our congregations will be most acutely felt since these generations represent the largest percentage of our faithful church attenders and givers. As a result, many, if not most of our congregations are facing

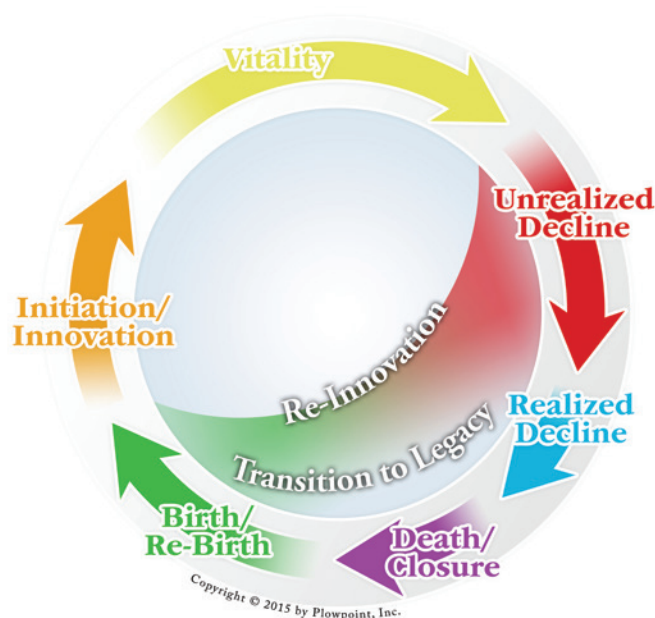
² Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>

³ Lovett H. Weems, Jr., “The Coming Death Tsunami,” <https://ministrymatters.com/all/entry/1868/the-coming-death-tsunami>

declining attendance and dwindling finances, impacting our ability to sustain and grow ministry both within and outside our walls.

Beyond the demographic trends, part of our decline can also be attributed to our inability or unwillingness to change. For any local church to stay viable and vital, we must be willing to make significant changes to respond faithfully to our changing communities. In contrast, when our churches fail to innovate and change, settling for what is, or even worse, longing for what has been, our churches inevitably decline as illustrated in the diagram shown here. A larger image is on the last page of this chapter.

As for humans, churches experience a life cycle including conception, birth, growth, vitality, equilibrium, decline, and even death. And yet, as people of the resurrection, we know that there is life after death, and the same is true for our churches. Every church will cycle through the various stages of health in our ministry from seasons of innovation, when new ministries are being launched, to vitality, when we are “clicking on all cylinders.” And every church will inevitably experience seasons of decline, at first unrealized then realized.



However, the key is in recognizing when the decline is setting in, and dedicating sufficient attention and efforts to determine how we can best re-imagine and re-innovate our ministries to respond to the needs of our neighbors more effectively. When we are able to re-innovate, we reboot our life cycle, birthing new opportunities and new ministries that bring new life to our church and to our communities.

Even considering declining church “statistics,” our Call and Commission as the church is greater than ever. In the face of escalating political polarizations, rising racism, and persistent violence and poverty that plague our communities, we are called as the church today to be instruments of God’s healing and grace for the growing needs of our neighbors.

Standing Firm on Our Unchanging Call

Although our context continues to change, the Call and Commission of the Church has not changed. The landscape during Jesus' ministry was also experiencing seismic political, social and religious shifts. However, Jesus knew that the expectations for his ministry should not be established on the shifting landscape but rather on the will of God and the Kingdom which he had come to establish. Therefore, as we begin to discover and discern God's faithful path forward for our church, we should align our ministries explicitly with the clear expectations which Jesus established.

As Jesus was ending his earthly ministry, he was also preparing his disciples and us to continue his ministry on his behalf. In doing so, he set his expectations through three specific teachings in the gospel of Matthew: Chapter 22, Chapter 25, and Chapter 28. Together, these expectations can be heard as the **Call and Commission of the Church**.

One way to think about the Call and Commission of the Church is God's "plumb line" to which all our ministries are to be aligned. These three sets of expectations are the basic requirements of what it means for us to be the Church, the Body of Christ, sent to carry out the ministry of Christ in our communities. We do this by:

- Loving God, ourselves, and our neighbors (Matthew 22:37-39)
- Embodying the love of our neighbors by meeting the real needs of real people (Matthew 25:35-40)
- Going, growing, befriending, teaching, and sending disciples of Jesus Christ to continue his ministry in the world (Matthew 28:19-20).



Some of us may remember the “NOW” framework introduced several decades ago in The United Methodist Church which sought to provide a model for how we live out our Call and Commission through:

- Nurture ministries of worship, discipleship formation, and congregational care.
- Outreach ministries of missional engagement and connectional ministries to meet the needs of our neighbors and transform our communities.
- Witness ministries of radical welcome, hospitality, welcome and inclusion of all people.



Although we are reintroducing NOW as a framework for use in this study, we are not suggesting that our churches reclaim or reshape ministries based on this model. We are simply offering this as a guide to ensure that we engage in a comprehensive assessment of nurture, outreach and witness ministries needed to fulfill our Call and Commission.

In Matthew 22, what is often referred to as the Great Commandment, Jesus is asked by one of the religious leaders what the most important commandment was in the law of Moses. Jesus replied:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment.” A second is equally important: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

—MATTHEW 22:37-40 (NLT)

Despite the religious leader’s attempt to trap Jesus into classifying importance of the Law, Jesus responded by establishing a clear plumb line for his ministry and ours by summarizing all ten of the commandments with these two. By doing this, Jesus provided a sound biblical foundation for our life and ministry as believers. Therefore, as we discern together what we should (and should not) do in our ministry as the church, Jesus’ teaching here provides a

clear set of expectations that all our ministries should reflect our love of God and our love for our neighbors. More specifically, if there is anything that does not reflect and extend God's love to everyone, then we should not be about it in our ministries in the church. This includes not only what we do, but how we do it. In his letter to the church at Corinth, who were struggling in how to live faithfully as believers, Paul clearly aligned their life and ministry with the love of Christ being central (First Corinthians 13). As he was concluding his letter of instruction to the church, he said:

Be on guard. Stand true to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong. And everything you do must be done with love.

—1 CORINTHIANS 16:13-14 (NLT)

In Chapter Two, we will explore how our love of God, ourselves, and our neighbors is expressed through our worship life and communal life, both within and outside our walls. These reflect how we **Nurture** one another and **Witness** faithfully by welcoming and embracing others.

In Matthew 25, Jesus clarifies even further the practical means by which this love of Christ is embodied through ministries of mercy and justice. In this scripture, Jesus spends significant time teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven and what will define faithfulness in his coming Kingdom. One of the ways in which Jesus does this is by telling us what will be on the “final exam” where we will be judged based on our faithful witness to living out the Great Commandment of loving our neighbors. Jesus describes our faithfulness when he says:

For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me... I assure you, when you did this to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!

—MATTHEW 25:35-36,40 (NLT)

In Chapter Three, we will assess how we, as a church, are embodying the love of Christ by meeting the real needs of real people within our communities, as Jesus describes here in Matthew 25. We will explore together who are our neighbors and what are their needs. Additionally, we will ask about our unique

ability, as a church, to respond to the needs of the community around us. These ministries represent our Outreach strategies in the church.

Finally, as Jesus was passing the baton of ministry to his disciples, he knew that his ministry must be generative, with his ministry passed, or generated, from one believer to the next by going, befriending, teaching, and sending.

Therefore, his final words to his disciples were:

Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

—MATTHEW 28:19-20 (NLT)

Jesus knew his ministry could not end with him, and he knows that our ministry should never end with us either. However, for this to happen, we must ensure that we are living out a discipleship model within our congregations where we are actively befriending others and connecting them to God and to the community of faith, then teaching, equipping, empowering, and sending them as instruments of God's transforming love into our communities. In doing so, the generative ministry of Christ's love continues.

In Chapter Four, we will assess how well we are making disciples who make disciples by exploring how faithfully we are befriending, teaching, equipping, and sending passionate believers who are committed to continue the ministry of Christ in our world. Again, these represent ministries of **Nurture** and **Witness**.

“

...we have been called and commissioned to a common purpose of fulfilling the will of God, which requires our doing what God wants us to do, and not necessarily what we want to do.

”

As faithful disciples who live out our calling in The United Methodist Church, we also live out the Call and Commission according to our Wesleyan heritage as embodied in the United Methodist connection. Paragraphs 201-204 in *The Book of Discipline* outline how we demonstrate our fulfillment of the Call and Commission through our commitment to:

- Preach the Word faithfully
- Administer the sacraments regularly
- Actively lead people to accept and profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- Edify believers to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ
- Minister to the needs of people in our community through our members
- Cooperate with other churches to meet the needs of our neighbors.

These are listed as the minimal expectations of what is required for us to be an authentic church in alignment with the expectations which Jesus set forth. When we struggle to meet these minimal expectations, we are also struggling to fulfill the **Call and Commission of the Church**. When this occurs in our ministry, we are called to determine faithfully what next steps we need to take to either re-innovate or to develop new partnerships.

Getting In, and Staying In, the Stream of God's Will

To discover our faithful path forward as a church, we must begin by asking the right questions to discover and align with God's will, not our own. As the church, we have been called and commissioned to a common purpose of fulfilling the will of God which requires our doing what God wants us to do and not necessarily what we want to do. There is a distinct difference between implementing our good ideas and seeking the will of God. The former relies on our own prowess, whereas the latter relies on the power of God.

The transition from implementing our own good ideas to discerning God's will involves an intentional process of seeking to know and understand God's desires for us. This transition also requires the church to let go of what we have always done and known.



To seek and understand God's will for our church, we must first learn to listen and think a new way — to listen with our ears, our eyes, our hearts, and our minds open. But most importantly, we must be willing to receive direction. When traveling on an unfamiliar route, nothing is more frustrating (and at times frightening) than a lack of clear direction and signage. Likewise, it is very frustrating when we want to do God's will, but we are unclear on which path to take.

On the journey of discernment of God's right path for our church, we must learn to listen intently to God, also trusting that God speaks at times through each other and through the neighbors God has sent us to serve. Therefore, to follow and fulfill God's will for our church, we must practice the spiritual disciplines to open ourselves to know and understand our right path forward.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will direct your paths.

—PROVERBS 3:5-6 (NLT)

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was convinced that a life of faith lived in obedience must be grounded in the spiritual disciplines to know and understand the will of God. Wesley described these disciplines as means of grace, ordinary practices, to place ourselves in the right posture for God to break through to us and in us. These spiritual practices include searching the scriptures, prayer, public worship, the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian Conferencing.

The primary way in which we understand the nature of God's will is to read scripture daily. From Genesis to Revelation, the character and nature of God is revealed, best embodied in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. It is within scripture that God calls and commissions us as the church, and it is through the narrative of the life and ministry of Jesus that we understand how God's mission is fulfilled.

As Paul describes to Timothy, scripture is our plumb line by which all things in our ministries are measured:

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It straightens us out and teaches us to do what is right. It is God's way of preparing us in every way, fully equipped for every good thing God wants us to do.

—2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17 (NLT)

Prayer is another channel through which God speaks to us and through which we can speak to God as we seek to know and fulfill God's purpose for us. Prayer offers a primary means through which we stay connected and near to God. And yet, without this line of communication, we are at risk of becoming disconnected from God and misdirected on our journey.

In the first chapter of the book of Acts, at a pivotal point on the disciples' journey after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the disciples were faced with a crucial decision, the replacement of Judas. Even though the disciples had been together for three years and likely knew others in their immediate community well, they did not depend on their own understanding or opinions for this pivotal decision. Instead, they prayed together, seeking God's guidance.

Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. "O Lord," they said, "you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas."

—ACTS 1:24-25 (NLT)

To discern the will of God, prayer, especially when praying through the scriptures, can be a powerful vessel through which God speaks to us, opening ourselves for God's will to be made known.

Additionally, public worship is a vessel through which God's unlimited, unmerited love is poured out on us and through which we are bound to one another in God's love. Our ministries on behalf of Jesus are defined by our corporate worship of Jesus. In other words, our worship together reminds us "why" we do "what" we do through all our other ministries. Coming into God's presence through worship opens our hearts to God and unites us as God's people in adoration and praise. To be faithful as the church, we must put our

faith into action through service. However, the only way we can ensure that our actions extend from our love and praise of God is by first grounding our life and ministry in our worship of Jesus Christ together.

One specific act of worship that is also essential to remaining in the stream of God's will is observing the Lord's Supper, or communion. Again, in the book of Acts we read that as the early church was forming as a community and discerning what God was calling them to do, they came together as often as they could to share in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:43-47).

For many of us, we can hardly imagine celebrating communion more than once a month. And yet, as it was for the early church, the Lord's Supper is a powerful reminder of who we are and whose we are, being nourished and prepared to go out and serve in Christ's name. In our communion liturgy, toward the end of the Prayer of Great Thanksgiving, we hear:

Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast with him at his heavenly banquet.

As Christ's church, we are sent to re-present the One who died and rose again to offer healing and hope for our broken and hurting world. But unless we are reminded regularly of Christ's redemptive death and resurrection, we tend to fall back into the brokenness and hopelessness of the world around us. Through this sacrament, we are called to be his One Body, his hands and feet, for the world that still desperately needs him.



Fasting, often one of the least practiced disciplines, is an important means through which we can also experience the grace and presence of God by making room for God to break in to us. By intentionally drawing away from something else for a period, we choose to draw nearer to the heart of God. Whether we set aside food for a day each week or electronics for a time each day, fasting is a way of diverting our desire for earthly things to setting our minds and affections on heavenly things to lean more closely into the will of God.

The purpose of fasting, as a spiritual discipline, is less about self-denial and more about focusing on God. Fasting, like all other disciplines, is for the explicit purpose to draw us closer to the likeness of Christ and to understand more clearly the will of God.

Lastly, but importantly, we are invited and called to practice Christian Conferencing as a means of listening to God and each other, believing and trusting that God's will is revealed through these holy conversations. Christian conferencing is more than just talking to each other. It also requires coming together for support and accountability on the journey as we seek to be faithful as individuals and as a community.



John Wesley, in 1743, describes the practice of Christian Conferencing in *The Nature, Design and General Rules of the United Societies*. The early Methodists, as they were seeking to understand how to live out their faith in a rapidly changing societal context, met weekly to:

1. Receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor.
2. Inquire how their souls prosper.
3. Advise, reprove, comfort, and exhort, as occasion may require.
4. Inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved.

As leaders of the church, on this journey of discernment, we need mutual support and accountability to keep us true to our calling. When we engage in Christian Conferencing, or holy conversations, we are committed to speaking the truth and actively listening to one another in love, for the purpose of edifying each other and our shared mission and ministry so that God's purpose is fulfilled among us.

To determine our faithful path forward, we must be seeking the scriptures for wisdom, praying for clarity, opening our hearts in worship, being nourished through the Lord's Supper, opening our spirits through fasting, and listening to God, one another, and our neighbors through Christian Conferencing.

When we practice these spiritual disciplines, or what John Wesley referred to as following the ordinances of God, then we will know how to “do no harm” and “do all the good we can” by living out God’s will through our churches.

When we choose to step in, and stay in, the stream of God’s will, we commit to lay aside our own agendas to flow in the agenda of God. Through the practice of the spiritual disciplines, we begin to trust that God’s will can and will be made known to us. Together, in community, we begin to see it, to know it, usually not all at once, but rather revealed slowly, steadily, surely, one faithful step forward at a time.

Practical Tools for Discerning the Path Forward

This shared journey is both spiritual and very practical. In addition to practicing the spiritual disciplines, we must also employ practical tools to help us develop an applicable plan in the process. Therefore, in the following chapters, we will be assessing thoroughly the ministry strategies which we employ to fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church. At the end of each of the following chapters, we will engage in an assessment process where we:

- **Reflect** on which ministry strategies are currently producing fruit, which strategies are **not** producing fruit, and which strategies are missing or need to be changed.
- **Adjust** ministry strategies that need to be changed to become more fruitful in this particular ministry area.
- **Do** or plan how to implement the newly identified strategies in this ministry area moving forward.

This is an ongoing journey of discovery, and it’s a journey we must engage in repeatedly throughout the life and ministry of our church. Whenever our context changes, or when our stage in the life cycle changes, our specific path forward will change as well. Therefore, we must repeatedly and periodically pause on the journey to realign with God’s will so we can faithfully determine what we are able, willing, and committed to do to fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church...for now.

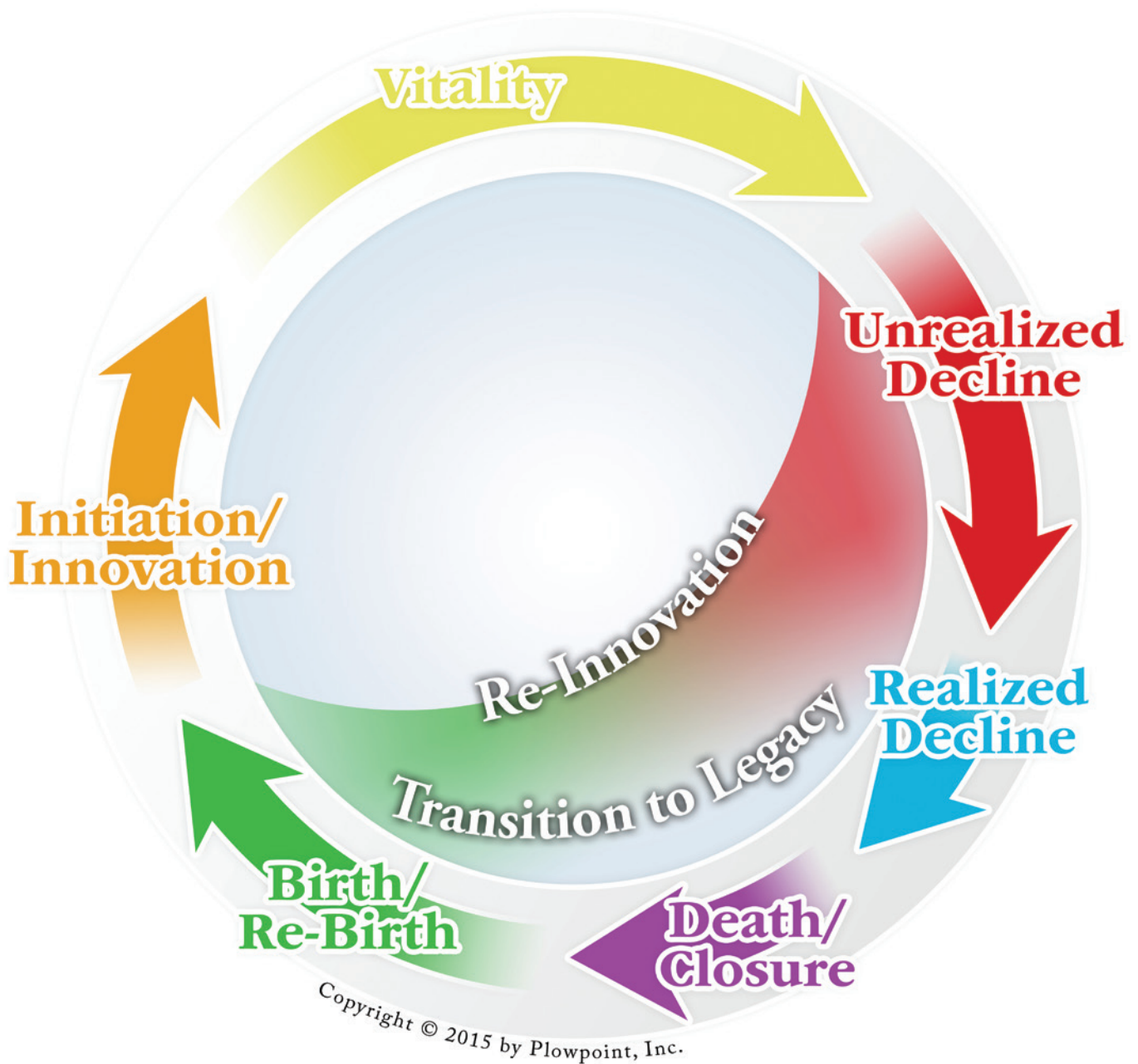
Means of Grace: Christian Conferencing

1. What specific “landscape shifts” have directly and/or indirectly impacted our congregation over the past few years?
2. As we look at the Life-cycle of Congregations where would we honestly say we are in this cycle?
3. What might we need to address to reboot the cycle towards re-innovation?
4. How have we set our course for ministry in the past?
 - By aligning with God’s will?
 - By trying to please ourselves and others?
 - Or by stumbling and limping along the way?
5. How are we, as leaders of the church, engaging in the practice of the spiritual disciplines (means of grace) to better align with God’s will for our congregation?

Right Next Step for Now...

1. Read the following texts and make notes (individually and collectively) of how God might be speaking to our church through these scriptures. How is God directing our path, or correcting our course, and how are we to move forward?
 - Matthew 22:33-40
 - Matthew 25:31-46
 - Matthew 28:18-20
2. Determine how we, as leaders, will engage in the spiritual disciplines (means of grace) during this study and discernment process.
3. Covenant with one another to support and hold one another accountable in these practices.

life cycle of a church



*From "The Faithful Path for Now" and "Choosing the Faithful Path".
Permission Granted to copy and share with your church.*

Our *Unchanging* Call in a Shifting Landscape

To Fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church

Reflect

Where would we honestly say we are in the life-cycle of the church?

Reflect

How have we set our course for ministry in the past?

Reflect

How are we engaging in the practice of the spiritual disciplines (means of grace) to better align with God's will for our congregation?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and DO to reboot the cycle towards re-innovation?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and DO to align with God's will?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and DO to engage in the practice of the spiritual disciplines to better align with God's will for our congregation?

Right Next Steps for...

Moving Forward: _____

Engaging in Spiritual Disciplines: _____

Making a Covenant: _____



CHAPTER 2

for the love of *God and others*

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #384

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,
joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy humble dwelling;
all thy faithful mercies crown!
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation;
enter every trembling heart.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into every troubled breast!
Let us all in thee inherit;
let us find that second rest.
Take away our bent to sinning;
Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

Come, Almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return and never,
nevermore thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

1 JOHN 4:16-21 (NLT)

¹⁶ So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.

¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us.

²⁰ Those who say, "I love God," and hate a brother or sister are liars, for those who do not love a brother or sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

²¹ The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.



Means of Grace: Prayer

Loving God: Your love abounds and surrounds us every day in the gifts of creation, family, friends, and your church. But the greatest demonstration of your love for us is the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent to teach us and show us how to love.

Thank you for your unfailing and unconditional mercy and for loving us even when our actions and attitudes are unlovable. Open our hearts and minds to understand and know how to embody this unconditional love through our own lives and ministries. In the name of Jesus Christ, Lover of our souls, we pray. Amen.

For the Love of God and Others

To determine our faithful path forward, we must begin by reflecting on what is core or central to our ministry. If we were to ask someone outside of our church for one word that would describe our congregation, what would they say?

If someone were to ask for one word that describes God, that word would be LOVE. In First John 4:16, John describes God clearly and succinctly:

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

The life and ministry of Jesus can also be summarized in the same one word: LOVE. This was most powerfully communicated in his final days on earth as he journeyed to the cross. And on the night before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus passed on this ministry of love to his disciples and to us when he said:

So, now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

—JOHN 13:34-35 (NLT)

In preparation for assuming leadership in this ministry of love on earth, the disciples likely had many questions and fears, wondering what they were to do now and how they were to do it. Jesus gave them this final lesson when he essentially said, “I will simplify this as much as I can: Love each other.”

Our life of faith can at times seem so complicated and filled with many rules and commands. In fact, the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ time were often known for clinging to the “letter of the Law” and focusing on how, when and if people fulfilled it. The Law was God’s gift to the people, establishing boundaries to protect our relationships with God and with another. In other words, the Law was given to help us love God and others.



However, as we sometimes do today, the religious leaders in Jesus' time often focused too much on what people should not do instead of doing all they could do to show their love for God and others. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was often challenged by the religious leaders and was questioned about if and how he was fulfilling the Law.

In Matthew 22, Jesus is repeatedly confronted by the religious leaders about what should or should not be done, often to trick Jesus into "breaking the Law." At the pinnacle of this ongoing dual, the leaders asked him: "Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the Law of Moses?" Jesus answered (quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5, the very heart of the Law of Moses):

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbors as yourself."

Again, Jesus simplified it: **Love God. Love Your Neighbor. Love Yourself.**

John Wesley, in providing expectations and boundaries to guide the life and ministry of the early Methodists, established the General Rules. These have often been summarized into three simple rules which require:

"First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind... Secondly, by doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have the opportunity, doing good of every possible sort... Thirdly, by attending upon the ordinances of God (through the practice of the means of grace)."

—PARAGRAPH 104, *THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE*

Through our General Rules, the expectations for us as the people called Methodist also reflect the expectations Jesus set: love God, love your neighbor, love yourself.

Paragraph 105 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* describes our Theological Task as a Church by saying:



“We endeavor through the power of the Holy Spirit to understand the love of God given in Jesus Christ. We seek to spread this love abroad.

- As we see more clearly who we have been,
- As we understand more fully the needs of the world,
- As we draw more effectively upon our theological heritage, we will become better equipped to fulfill our calling as the people of God.”

The ministry of the church, therefore, is a ministry of spreading the love of God given to us in Jesus Christ. And we accomplish this task by re-aligning with our biblical and Wesleyan expectations (or theological heritage), knowing ourselves and the needs of our neighbors more fully. Furthermore, we prepare for this task by living within the general rules that help us to stay in love with God and to demonstrate the love of God to others.



*...love is the true marker of how we are **living**
our lives as Christians and how we are
representing Christ in the world as the church.*



How we live out the Great Commandment faithfully in the local church is evidenced by our provision for and participation in various ministries that demonstrate this love including the following.

We demonstrate our **love of God** through:

- Our Worship life.
- Our Prayer life.
- Our Celebration of the sacraments, including baptism and communion, as demonstrations of the unlimited love of God.
- Entrusting life events to God, including marriages, funerals, rededications to Christ.
- Faithful tithing and giving of offerings over and above the tithe.

We demonstrate our **love for one another** in the church through our:

- Gathering regularly in true Christian community where all are welcome around a common table of fellowship and sharing of meals.
- Mutual care for one another, including tending to each other's needs in personal and family crises.
- Mutual support and gracious accountability along our faith journey.
- Creating and embodying a safe environment amid our differences and conflict, including honoring confidentiality, avoiding the sin of gossip, and responding to hurts and offenses by building one another up and never tearing each other down.
- Honoring and celebrating diversity and differences, including addressing the sin of personal and systemic racism, sexism, and oppression in whatever forms it presents itself.

We demonstrate our **love for others** through our:

- Ministries of radical welcome and hospitality extended to **all** people, regardless of their age, ethnicity, race, religious background, sexual identity, or socioeconomic status.
- Intentionally inviting and welcoming our neighbors, regardless of who they are, to be part of our fellowship.
- Intentionally connecting with our neighbors when they come.
- Ensuring that our facilities and ministries are welcoming and accessible to all people, including those with differing abilities.
- Ensuring the safety and sacredness of all our ministries, including compliance with Safe Sanctuaries policies and other safety and accessibility practices.

If, as we sing, they will know we are Christians by our love, then love is the true marker of how we are living our lives as Christians and how we are representing Christ in the world as the church. This core indicator of who and whose we are should be reflected in all aspects of our lives and ministries.

We express our love of God through our worship life. We express our love for one another through ministries that nurture and foster a community of acceptance, forgiveness, accountability, and mercy where all people are loved and respected. And we demonstrate our love for our neighbors through ministries of radical welcome, acceptance and embrace for all people,

regardless of who they are, what they have (or have not) done, and by honoring the differences, including abilities among us, thus ensuring the safety and sacredness of all.

When our churches are communities of passionate and authentic worship, and when we extend radical welcome and support for those known, and unknown, to us then we are fulfilling Jesus' new commandment: Love one another. And when we truly love one another, as John reminds us, then we can truly say we love God.

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. How does our worship reflect our love of God (and not simply our love for good music or a good sermon)?
2. How are we expressing our love for one another, even when we disagree? How are we caring for one another, supporting one another, and holding one another accountable on our faith journey?
3. How are we expressing love and acceptance of our neighbors? How often do strangers feel welcome when they come to our church, especially those who may be of differing abilities, socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, sexual identities, theological or faith traditions?

Reflect

1. How well are we expressing our **love of God through our Worship, Prayer, and Sacramental Life**?
 - Is our worship passionate and authentic to who we are?
 - Does our worship focus more on Christ or on ourselves?
 - How are we engaging laity in our worship life, including children and youth?

- How are we nurturing the prayer life of the congregation and one another?
- How often and how passionately are we participating in the sacraments?
- How are we celebrating life events, dedicating them to God, including weddings, funerals, rededications, covenant renewals?
- How faithful are we through our tithes and offerings as expressions of our love and trust of God?

Reflect: What are we doing well in these areas? What are we not?

Adjust: What changes might we need to make?

Do: What right next steps can we take to put these changes into action?

2. How well are we expressing our **love for one another through ministries of mutual Acceptance, Support, and Accountability?**

- How and when do we gather in true Christian community to share a common meal where all are welcome at the table and where there is room for everyone?
- How do we care for one another, including everyone in our congregation, such as providing support in personal and family crises, without judgment?
- How are we intentionally praying for one another?
- How are we providing mutual support and accountability on our faith journey, building one another up but never tearing one another down?
- How are we embodying a community of radical forgiveness, committed to reconciliation among us, refusing to participate in gossip, and responding to hurts and offenses at the most local level?
- How are we embracing and celebrating the differences among us, including addressing the systemic sins of racism, sexism, and oppression in whatever forms it presents itself?

Reflect: What are we doing well in these areas? What are we not?

Adjust: What changes might we need to make?

Do: What right next steps can we take to put these changes into action?

3. How well are we expressing **love for our neighbors through ministries of Radical Welcome and Hospitality?**

- How are we welcoming new people into our space? Do our church grounds, our sanctuary, our buildings communicate “welcome” to those who come?
- Are our facilities and services accessible and understandable to all people who come, including new people and people with differing abilities or needs?
- How well are we, as members of the congregation, welcoming people as they come to us? Do we have a welcome team who are specifically looking for and connecting with new people in our midst?
- Are we honestly and intentionally welcoming ALL people, regardless of their age, race, ethnicity, faith tradition (or lack of faith tradition), sexual identity, differing abilities, or socioeconomic status?
- Are we creating an environment that fosters a growing community among us?
- Are we ensuring the safety and sacredness of all our ministries through compliance with Safe Sanctuaries and protecting the most vulnerable around us?

Reflect: What are we doing well in these areas? What are we not?

Adjust: What changes might we need to make?

Do: What right next steps can we take to put these changes into action?

Right Next Steps for Now...

Identify at least one new or modified strategy to implement in these areas:

- Passionate and authentic worship
- Mutual support and accountability
- Radical welcome and hospitality

For the Love of *God and Others*

**To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church**

Reflect

How well are we expressing our
LOVE of GOD through WORSHIP,
PRAYER and SACRAMENTAL LIFE?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and DO
to be more fruitful in our WORSHIP,
PRAYER and SACRAMENTAL LIFE?

Reflect

How well are we demonstrating
LOVE AND CARE for one another?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to be more fruitful in our LOVE
AND CARE for one another?

Reflect

How well are we extending
RADICAL HOSPITALITY to others?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to be more fruitful in our
RADICAL HOSPITALITY for others?

Right Next Steps for...

Worship Life: _____

Compassionate Care: _____

Radical Hospitality: _____



CHAPTER 3

for the love of *our neighbors*

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #568

Christ For The World We Sing,
the world to Christ we bring,
with loving zeal;
the poor, and them that mourn,
the faint and overborne,
sin-sick and sorrow-worn,
whom Christ doth heal.

Christ for the world we sing,
the world to Christ we bring,
with fervent prayer;
the wayward and the lost,
by restless passions tossed,
redeemed at countless cost,
from dark despair.

Christ for the world we sing,
the world to Christ we bring,
with one accord;
with us the work to share,
with us reproach to dare,
with us the cross to bear,
for Christ our Lord.

Christ for the world we sing,
the world to Christ we bring,
with joyful song;
the newborn souls, whose days,
reclaimed from error's ways,
inspired with hope and praise,
to Christ belong.

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

LUKE 10:29-37 (NLT)

²⁹ But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.’

³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?”

³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”



Means of Grace: Prayer

Loving and caring God: From the beginning of time, you created us in your image and called us to be your people, united by your grace and love. You have called us to welcome strangers and reach out to our neighbors, including those ignored, avoided, or even despised by others.

Open our hearts and minds to see, to know, and to understand our neighbors and their needs. And give us hearts to love them, accept them, and care for them as you love, accept and care for us. In the name of our loving and caring Savior, Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

For the Love of Our Neighbors

In the last two chapters, we have been exploring Jesus' final teachings in the gospel of Matthew that provide the foundation for the Call and Commission of the Church. These three teachings are the "plumb line" by which our effectiveness and fruitfulness in ministry should be measured.

Many of Jesus' teachings in Matthew focus on the Kingdom of God. Matthew's gospel tells how Jesus came to establish his Kingdom through his life and ministry and how his Kingdom will be fully realized with his glorious return. However, we also hear in Matthew that as Jesus' disciples, we are called and commissioned to do the work of his Kingdom on earth now to prepare for Christ's return and full reign.

“

Jesus says our faithfulness will be measured on what we do to show God's love by serving our neighbors in need.

”

In Matthew 22:37-39, Jesus goes to the heart of ministry when he teaches us that first and foremost, we must love God, love ourselves, and love our neighbors. In other words, Jesus tells us **why** we exist as a Church: **to love**. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus further teaches us how we will be generative in his ministry of God's love on earth when he commissions us to go and **make disciples**, thus multiplying his ministry through the Church.

In Matthew 25:31-40, Jesus makes it clear **what we are to do** as we embody God's love for others. He says that ultimately our faithfulness will be measured not by how much money we have in the bank or how many people we have in our pews. Instead, Jesus says our faithfulness and effectiveness will be measured on what we do to show God's love by serving our neighbors in need.

Studies on Matthew 25 have spent much time debating to whom Jesus is referring when he says he expects us to serve his “brothers and sisters.” Other Christians? Jews? However, the main point of Jesus’ teaching here is not who we are (or are not) to serve but that he is calling us to serve our neighbors regardless of who they are or where they are including “the least of these.” If someone is hungry, we feed them. If they are thirsty, we give them something to drink. We are to clothe the naked, take in the stranger, care for the sick, and visit the imprisoned. And Jesus says that if we deny or ignore these needs around us, then we are ultimately denying and ignoring Jesus.

Since the beginning of the Methodist movement, we have been a Church committed to changing the lives of others by tending to their spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. The early Methodists served their neighbors in real and tangible ways, making a sustainable kingdom impact in communities through ministries of education, health care, social justice, and many others.

Paragraph 122 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* further describes what we must do to carry out our mission and to bring about this kingdom transformation. It states that in addition to seeking out and bringing people in, leading them to commit to Christ, and nurturing them to become faithful disciples of Christ, we must also:

send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel.

In other words, we are commissioned to make disciples for the transformation of the world in preparation for Christ’s Kingdom reign on earth as it is in heaven. And the only way to bring about this kingdom transformation is to serve our neighbors in need.

But to know how to do this faithfully within our own communities, we must begin by asking...



Who Are Our Neighbors?

In Luke's telling of the Great Commandment to love God, love your neighbors, love yourself, someone asked Jesus this same question (Luke 10:25-29). As for many of the listeners in Luke's time, we may expect (or at least hope) to hear the comfortable response, to hear Jesus say that we are to love and serve people we already know, people who look like us, who talk like us, who agree with us, and don't have any real needs from us. However, Jesus shocked his listeners by responding to the question with the story of the good Samaritan, a "neighbor" who was typically ignored, despised, and avoided by the listeners. And if that wasn't enough of a shock (that a Samaritan would even be included in the story), it was the Samaritan, the one thought to be unclean, unholy, untouchable, who went out of his way to reach out and care for the "other." In other words, Jesus answered the question in a similar manner to his teaching in Matthew 25, reminding us that we are to minister to and with all people, even those unlike us or those we don't like, to ensure their needs are met.



As a people called Methodists, our historical roots also echo this commitment. In eighteenth century England, the Methodist movement began with John and Charles Wesley reaching out and ministering with "other" people, including coal miners and the poor. They left the comfort and familiarity of the pulpit to preach and minister in the fields and towns, breaking barriers and reaching those often ignored and forgotten.

When others wanted to separate "personal holiness" from "social holiness," John Wesley tolerated no such distinction. In our doctrinal heritage in paragraph 102 of *The Book of Discipline* we are reminded:

For Wesley, there is no religion but social religion; no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world.

In other words, being part of the church only for our own growth or edification is never enough. Instead, we are to grow personally in our faith so that we are ready, able, and willing to serve our neighbors near and far. Sometimes, however, the challenge is in knowing who our neighbors are, especially when the community around us changes. Again, our commitment as United Methodists is that we will intentionally change as our communities change to meet the changing needs emerging in and around us.

Paragraph 212 of *The Book of Discipline* again reminds us:

Since many of the communities in which the local church is located are experiencing transition, special attention must be given to forms of ministry required in such communities. The local church is required to respond to the changes that are occurring in its surrounding community and to organize its mission and ministries accordingly.

To do this faithfully, paragraph 212 further instructs us:

When the communities where the church is located experience transition especially identified as economic and/or ethnic, the local church shall engage in deliberate analysis of the community change and alter its program to meet the needs and cultural patterns of the new residents. The local church shall make every effort to remain in the community and develop effective ministries to those who are newcomers, whether of a cultural, economic, or ethnic group different from the original or present members.

As reflected in the above statement, to minister faithfully to our neighbors, we must regularly assess if there has been a change in the composition or demographics of the surrounding area and the needs that are reflected within those demographics and in the community itself. Over the past several years, considering the global pandemic, rising political, racial, and cultural tension, and changing economics, many communities are experiencing significant shifts in both their demographics and emerging needs of those living there. Therefore, even if we have engaged in a community assessment several years ago, we likely need to do so again.

Many of our churches have access, often free access, to comprehensive community assessment tools through the conference, other denominational,

or government and educational resources. Some of these include (but are not limited to) MissionInsite, U.S. Census Bureau data, including Narrative Profiles, and Opportunity Insights, including the Opportunity Atlas, through Harvard University. These resources and others provide quick and easy access to rich and varied objective information regarding our changing communities and the needs of our neighbors.

In addition to the objective data sources discussed above, we should also engage in the “best” assessment tool, having real conversation and engagement with our neighbors. In Second Kings, we hear the story of the prophet Elisha who, when sent by God to minister to the people around him, repeatedly asked his neighbors directly, “What can I do to help you?” (2 Kings 4). And even when Jesus knew the needs of those seeking his healing, he still would ask them, “What do you want me to do for you?” as part of identifying and responding to the real needs of others.

“

We are called to be instruments of healing and reconciliation among others through the love of God...

”

Another aspect of listening deeply to our neighbors is our willingness to be in ministry with and among our neighbors. Too often in the past, our community ministries have been shaped by our going out to minister “to” a group of people or our expecting them to come to us so we can “serve them.” In contrast, to develop an abiding and transformative relationship with our neighbors that reflects the love and grace of God, we are called and sent, as Jesus was sent, to be in ministry in our communities, embodying an incarnational ministry of presence with our neighbors, instead of ministering “to” them.

One of the keys to our being in ministry **with** our communities is the realization that we are not called or sent to “fix” our neighbors. We are called to be instruments of healing and reconciliation among others through the

love of God manifested in and through us. And to do this faithfully, we must remember that we, too, are often “wounded healers.”

Author and theologian, Henri Nouwen, says:

“Ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation.”

—HENRI NOUWEN, *WOUNDED HEALER*

From our own experiences of woundedness and need, we are often called to minister to the needs of others through our shared experience of loss, hurt, and healing. Additionally, there are times and places when we find ourselves in the middle of communal hurt and loss, including collective trauma.

Collective, or community trauma is a traumatic event impacting a group of people within a community, or depending on the event, an entire community. Community trauma can result from local or regional weather-related disasters, such as hurricanes, flooding, wildfires, or earthquakes. Other community impacts include mass shootings or other mass violence, including civil unrest, genocide and wars, and, as we all experienced within the last several years, health-related events, including pandemics.

How individuals experience community trauma will vary based on the personal impact, previous trauma experience, and an individual’s available resources and support networks. Therefore, another key element in our responding to the neighbors within our own or in neighboring communities experiencing collective trauma, we must overcome the urge to ask: “What’s wrong with them?” Instead, we are to come along beside others, asking with genuine curiosity: “What happened to them?” so that we can respond faithfully to their needs, helping our neighbors, over time, to discover “what is strong in them.”



As the church, we are called to be in ministry with those experiencing the deep loss, grief and harm caused by these events through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness. However, another distinctive aspect of traumatic community events is that when our churches are in the areas being impacted, members of our congregation, or even our entire congregation, might also be impacted, as we experienced during the COVID pandemic and for some communities, weather-related



disasters. In these situations, we obviously need to tend faithfully to the needs of those within our congregations, including ourselves as leaders. Again, there is no shame in our receiving needed help and support so that we, too, can be restored. Then, as we are able as wounded healers, we will be able and ready to tend faithfully to the needs of others, ministering from a place of deeper compassion and empathy, extending to others what was given to us.

In summary, according to our calling as Christians and as Methodists, we are to tend faithfully to the needs of our neighbors, regardless of who they are, where they are, or their individual or collective needs. Therefore, one of our key faithful next steps is to stop and ask, with genuine curiosity, who are our neighbors, what do they need, and what is our ability to respond?

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. In general, what changes have we seen both within our congregation and our community over the past few years?
2. How open are we, as a congregation, to experiencing changes that would result in our more closely reflecting the demographics of our community?
3. How willing are we to meet the needs of our neighbors by being present in our communities and ministering with and among them?

Reflect

1. Gather key demographic and needs based data to assess our neighbors within a three-mile radius of our church (or an appropriate distance that reflects our community). Review this data and Reflect on the following:
 - What are the key demographic trends in our community? Has the population grown or decreased over the past 5-10 years? What are the growth projections for the next 5-10 years?
 - What is the age distribution in our community? What age group is projected to increase? Decrease?
 - What are the ethnic group distributions in our community? Which groups are projected to increase? Decrease?
 - What is the primary language spoken in our community?
 - What is the education level and literacy rate of those around our church?
 - What is the prevalence of single parent households? Of families living in poverty?
 - How many within our community are struggling with substance use disorders or other mental health struggles?
 - What physical needs are noted, including food or home insecurity? Childcare needs? Elder care needs?
 - How many in our community report being actively engaged in church? How many are unchurched or have no religious affiliation? What spiritual needs are noted, including hopelessness, despair, or previous pain or rejection by the church?
 - What other spiritual, emotional, relational, or physical needs do we see reflected in our neighbors?
2. Actively engage in genuinely curious conversation with our neighbors to ask them directly, “How can we as the church be in ministry with you? What needs do you currently have that we can help meet?” then Reflect on the following:
 - Who are our neighbors who are willing to engage with us?
 - What are the needs of our closest neighbors, including those within our congregation?
 - What are our neighbors telling us directly about how we can best be in relationship and ministry with them?

3. After spending some time with the data we have gathered and what we have learned, **reflect** on how well we are responding to the needs of our neighbors by asking:
- How well does our congregation and our leadership reflect the demographics around us?
 - How open are we to our congregation and leadership more accurately reflecting the demographics of our neighbors, especially related to welcoming people of different socioeconomic, racial or ethnic backgrounds, different sexual identities, or differing abilities?
 - What are we doing to meet the spiritual needs of our neighbors, including our ability and willingness to connect with those who have been harmed or disconnected from the church or who have no church or faith background?
 - What are we doing to meet the emotional or relational needs of our neighbors, including struggles within their families, with loneliness and isolation, substance use disorders, or other mental health struggles?
 - What are we doing to meet the physical and tangible needs of our neighbors, including basic needs such as food, clothing, safe and secure housing, access to healthcare, quality education?
 - What community or collective trauma do we see in our immediate or neighboring communities?
 - How are we prepared to respond to spiritual, emotional, and tangible (physical) needs of others due to a traumatic event in our community (such as weather-related disaster, civil unrest, or public health crisis)?
 - What are we Able, Willing, and Committed to do to meet these needs?

Right Next Steps for Now...

Identify at least one new or modified strategy to implement to meet the following needs of your neighbors:

- Spiritual needs and connection to a faith community
- Emotional and relational needs
- Physical and tangible needs of daily living

For the Love of *Our Neighbors*

To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church

Reflect

How well are we responding to the
SPIRITUAL NEEDS of our neighbors?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully respond
to their SPIRITUAL NEEDS?

Reflect

How well are we responding
to the EMOTIONAL NEEDS of
our neighbors?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully respond
to their EMOTIONAL NEEDS?

Reflect

How well are we responding to the
PHYSICAL NEEDS of our neighbors?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully respond
to their PHYSICAL NEEDS?

Right Next Steps for...

Spiritual Needs: _____

Emotional Needs: _____

Physical Needs: _____



Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #561

Go, Make of All Disciples

We hear the call, O Lord,
That comes from you, our Father,
In your eternal Word.
Inspire our ways of learning
Through earnest, fervent prayer,
And let our daily living
Reveal you ev'rywhere.

“Go make of all disciples.”
Baptising in the name
Of Father, Son, and Spirit
From age to age the same.
We call each new disciple
To follow you, O Lord,
Redeeming soul and body
By water and the Word.

“Go make of all disciples.”
We at your feet would stay
Until each life's vocation
Accents your holy way.
We cultivate the nature
God plants in ev'ry heart,
Revealing in our witness
The Master Teacher's art.

“Go make of all disciples.”
We welcome your command;
“Lo, I am with you always.”
We take your guiding hand.
The task looms large before us
We follow without fear.
In heav'n and earth your power
Shall bring God's kingdom here.

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

LUKE 10:1-7 (NLT)

¹After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ²He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³Go on your way; I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.



⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you. ⁷Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Means of Grace: Prayer

Loving and sending God: You sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to teach and nurture us to become co-laborers in the field so that others will come into a loving relationship with you.

Open our hearts and minds to know and understand what it means for us to be ones sent in your name. Give us the courage to go, teach, nurture, and witness to others about your love and grace. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Generative Disciple-Making

What is the mission of the church? Over the past several decades, churches across all denominations have spent significant time and energy creating mission statements that will accurately reflect who we are and what God has called us to do. However, in doing this, we have forgotten the common mission that ALL churches have been given.

Paragraph 120 of *The Book of Discipline* reminds us:

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.

All churches, including every local church, have been commissioned to our common mission that Jesus gave us in Matthew 28:19-20. Through these final words spoken to his disciples, Jesus commissions all of us, all believers, all churches, to continue his ministry on earth through our faithfulness in the world. Here in Matthew, Jesus is passing the baton of ministry to us as he concludes his earthly ministry. But he also knew that for this to continue until the end of the age, we must embrace a generative model of ministry through which we are continually making disciples who make disciples.

The word commission means to give a command or charge, to act in a prescribed manner. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands and charges us to spread the good news as demonstrated in specific actions, including to:

- GO
- MAKE DISCIPLES
- BAPTIZE
- TEACH.

So, the first thing Jesus commanded us to do in this mission is to GO! Jesus did not say, “If



you build it, they will come.” For many years, we have been convinced in the church that if we build a nice facility or if we offer flashy services or programs that people will automatically come to our churches. However, our experiences over the past several years have demonstrated this is often not true. “Build it (or offer it) and they will come” might have been a great tagline for a movie, but it was not what Jesus said. The Great Commission is contingent on going out into the community, not on our waiting for people to come.

“

For many people, the most effective means by which they will connect with a faith community is outside the walls of the church. Therefore, Jesus says, GO to them.

”

As ones who are commissioned by Jesus, we are sent to GO to our neighbors, both locally and globally. In Chapter Two, we examined our ability and willingness to invite and welcome our neighbors, even strangers, when they come to our church. However, Matthew 28 goes beyond our welcoming others when they come to us. The very definition of being ones who are SENT requires that we GO outside the walls of our church to befriend and connect with others offering to them the good news of Jesus Christ.

As we discussed in Chapter One, an increasingly large number of people in our communities have no religious affiliation. Others within our community have been hurt or rejected by the church in years past. Therefore, we must be sensitive and attuned to the needs of our neighbors, including possible discomfort, or at least unfamiliarity, with our churches. For many people, the most effective means by which they will connect with a faith community is outside the walls of the church. Therefore, Jesus says, GO to them.

In recent years, Fresh Expressions has become a powerful movement within United Methodist congregations to connect with people in our communities

in other settings, including coffee shops, breweries, parks, hiking trails, and bowling alleys, just to name a few. According to Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church:

Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) is a distinctly Wesleyan Spirit-led movement of new Christian communities that serve the present age. We cultivate communities of love and grace for people neglected by the church. The four values of these new faith communities are inclusive, accessible, transformative, and connectional.

www.UMCdiscipleship.org/articles/introducing-fresh-expressions-united-methodist-fxum

Through Fresh Expressions, congregations are **Going** where people are and connecting with them to share the good news in non-threatening, accessible ways. Other churches have also discovered that one of the most effective means to **Go** and connect with others is by serving our neighbors in need. Through serving our neighbors, others connect when they see the church in action, being the hands and feet of Christ in their community.



Some congregations have also found that once they “go” and connect with others, these newly connected individuals might at some point choose to come with them to a conventional church service or offering. Others may not. Remember, the point is not to have them come to our church. The purpose is for us to **Go** to them so that disciples can be made.

In addition to going, Jesus also commands us to **Make Disciples**. However, the key to making a disciple is that we must first be one. Only faithful disciples can make disciples. Therefore, we must understand what it truly means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

A disciple is one who accepts and spreads the teachings of another. Therefore, a disciple of Jesus Christ accepts and spreads the teachings of Jesus, including living out his teachings within and outside the walls of the church seven days a week. This includes how we relate to others and how we utilize our resources, including our time, our money, and our spiritual gifts.

Our faithful discipleship also relates to how we live and are seen as a church within the community including how we utilize the resources of the church such as our members, our finances, and our facilities. We will explore more fully stewardship as a mark of faithful discipleship in Chapter Five.

Paragraphs 135-137 of *The Book of Discipline* state that our call to Christian discipleship is marked by an interdependent and interactive relationship between a deep and dynamic relationship with God (which is our privilege) and our relationship with Christ through ministry in the world (which is our obligation). For this to happen, paragraph 136 says:

This process requires careful and intentional nurture for the disciple to reach perfection in the Christian life...and to engage fully in the ministry of all Christians.

In other words, to be a disciple and to make disciples requires an ongoing commitment to be nurtured and to nurture others, to continue our own spiritual growth and to ensure the spiritual growth of others. This is never fully accomplished, and we are not “done yet” until we have all reached Christian perfection.

To become a faithful disciple and to make disciples, we also must ensure that we are guiding and nurturing people along a Christian journey that leads to faithful witness in the world. And initiation into the Christian faith begins with **Baptism**. Therefore, Jesus commissions us to **Baptize** in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

According to our historical Doctrinal Standards as stated in paragraph 104 of *The Book of Discipline*:

We believe that baptism signifies entrance into the household of faith and is a symbol of repentance and inner cleansing from sin, a representation of new birth in Christ Jesus and a mark of Christian discipleship.

Paragraph 104 continues to explain how, as United Methodists, we embrace the baptism of children as acceptable participants in Christian



Baptism. These children also become the responsibility of the Church to be nurtured and led to personal acceptance of Christ, and when they are ready, by profession of faith through which they confirm their baptism.

It is the role and responsibility of every local congregation to provide for and foster an intentional journey for each person in our fellowship which includes baptism, profession of faith in Jesus Christ, maturing discipleship, and active Christian ministry and witness in the world. To live out a life of faithful discipleship, we must be taught what it means to be a disciple. Thus, Jesus said in the Great Commission for the Church, we must also **Teach**.

All local churches, as a minimal expectation, must provide appropriate training and nurture to all people on their faith journey to make disciples for the transformation of the world. Providing adequate teaching for making disciples for ministry in the world begins with children and must continue throughout adulthood. Another way this is sometimes described is providing discipleship and nurture from the cradle to the grave. Therefore, to assess our faithfulness in making disciples and teaching them, we must review how we provide nurture and education for children, youth, and adults including active mentoring to become leaders in discipling others.

“

We go, we baptize, we teach, and we mentor, and we do this generatively and continually, as long as we are able, to bear fruit that will last well beyond ourselves.

”

In John 15, on the night before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus gathered in the Upper Room with his followers, once again passing the baton of ministry to them before the end of his earthly ministry. In this passage, Jesus offers a beautiful illustration of what it means for us, as the church, to belong to Jesus Christ and the body of Christ through which we, the branches will bear fruit to bring the Kingdom of God here on earth. To stay connected to him, Jesus says,



we must know his teachings and obey them, and by doing so, we will continue to bear fruit.

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!... You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using my name.

—JOHN 15:9-11, 16 (NLT)

Another essential aspect of our making disciples is our commitment to a generative model of ministry which includes our intentionally **Mentoring** others to become teachers and leaders in the church so that we can continue to bear fruit for generations to come. Unfortunately, this commitment is too often overlooked. When we fail to mentor others effectively and consistently, we lessen our capacity to be generative or continually productive in our ministry. As a result, too often younger generations are not equipped and empowered to lead, and many disconnect not finding their place of ministry and leadership soon enough within the church. Additionally, as our leaders and teachers age, with fewer younger members ready and available to serve, our ministries are left incapacitated.

To ensure faithful, fruitful, and sustainable ministry for years to come, our churches must intentionally and continually provide discipleship systems through which we actively go out to befriend and connect with others, we welcome and connect people into Christian fellowship, we baptize individuals, and we teach them all that Jesus has commanded us. We go, we baptize, we teach, and we mentor, and we do this generatively and continually, as long as

we are able, to bear fruit that will last well beyond ourselves.

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. How did we personally come to know Jesus Christ and connect in fellowship with the church?
2. When and where did we “go” to befriend others, embodying the good news and invitational love of Jesus?
3. Are we as a church more committed to “building or offering it,” hoping people will come to our church or are we going out to connect with others?

Reflect

To ensure that we are faithfully making disciples for the transformation of the world, let’s begin by asking ourselves:

1. How are we **GOING OUT** to reach and connect with new people through:
 - Ministries of welcome and hospitality by being a visible presence at community events?
 - Fresh Expressions or other ministries in “third spaces” including bible studies or small group meetings in local coffee shops, pubs, hiking groups, etc.?
 - Local mission projects and ongoing community ministries through which we are inviting and connecting with others?
 - Other than our pastor, who are the people carrying out this ministry?
2. How well are we **BEING DISCIPLES** as active members and leaders by:
 - Living out our membership vows of supporting the church through our:
 - Active prayer life

- Participating in weekly worship
 - Giving faithfully to the church
 - Serving Christ and our neighbors in the community?
 - Being a faithful witness, speaking positively and invitationally of our church within the broader community?
- Reflecting our belonging to Christ and the church throughout the week in our families, workplace, at school, with friends, and in public spaces?
 - Other than our pastor, who are the people carrying out this ministry?
3. How well are we **Making Disciples** through:
- Initiating people into the community of faith through **Baptism**?
 - How many baptisms of infants or children have we had over the past ten years?
 - How many baptisms of youth or adults have we had over the past ten years?
 - Welcoming people into fellowship and membership within the congregation?
 - How many people have joined the church through profession of faith over the past ten years?
 - How many people have joined the church through transfer of letter from other churches in the past ten years?
 - Other than our pastor, who are the people carrying out this ministry?
4. How well are we **Teaching** and equipping others to become faithful disciples through spiritual formation classes, bible studies, small groups, and other offerings for...
- Children (birth to 11 years old)?
 - Youth (ages 12 to 18 years old)?
 - Young Adults (ages 19-40)?
 - Middle-aged Adults (ages 41-70)?
 - Older Adults (ages 71 and older)?
 - Other than our pastor, who are the people carrying out this ministry?
5. How well are we generating ongoing disciple-making efforts through intentional mentoring of others to lead, teach and serve?

6. How well are our members and constituents (people who attend church and are not members of the church) demonstrating faithful discipleship through their stewardship of:
 - Their finances through tithing and other giving?
 - Their time and service through participation in outreach and ministry?
7. How well do we demonstrate faithful discipleship through stewardship of our finances as a church through:
 - Planning for financial sustainability for mission and ministry over the next five or ten years and even beyond our life-time?
 - Supporting the missional giving of the connectional church beyond our local congregation?
 - Minimizing (or eliminating) our indebtedness as a congregation?
8. How well is our church demonstrating faithful stewardship of our facilities through:
 - Use for ministry within the church?
 - Supporting the community through utilization of church space, either as community partners or as a potential income stream?
 - Maintaining our facilities and planning for future maintenance needs?

Reflect: What are we doing well in making disciples who make disciples?
What are we not doing well?

Adjust: What changes do we need to make to do this more faithfully?

Do: What right next steps can we take to put these changes into action?

Right Next Steps for Now...

Identify at least one new or modified strategy to more faithfully make disciples who make disciples in the following ways:

- **Going Out** to befriend and connect with others through the love of Christ
- **Being Disciples** ourselves
- **Teaching** what Jesus has commanded us
- **Mentoring** others to disciple and lead.

Generative *Disciple-Making*

To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church

Reflect

How well are we GOING to
befriend & connect with others?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully GO to
befriend and connect with others?

Reflect

How well are we BEING
DISCIPLES ourselves?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully BE
DISCIPLES ourselves?

Reflect

How well are we TEACHING
and MENTORING others?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully TEACH
and MENTOR others?

Right Next Steps for...

Going: _____

Being Disciples: _____

Teaching & Mentoring: _____

being wise and faithful *stewards*

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #399

Take My Life, and Let It Be
consecrated, Lord, to thee.
Take my moments and my days;
let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love.
Take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King.
Take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee.
Take my silver and my gold;
not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store.
Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee.

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-15 (NLT)

⁶ Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. ⁷ You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully." ⁸ And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. ⁹ As the Scriptures say,

"They share freely and give generously to the poor.
Their good deeds will be remembered forever."

¹⁰ For God is the one who provides seed for the farmer and then bread to eat. In the same way, he will provide and increase your resources and then produce a great harvest of generosity in you. ¹¹ Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God. ¹² So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God. ¹³ As a result of your ministry, they will give glory to God. For your generosity to them and to all believers will prove that you are obedient to the Good News of Christ. ¹⁴ And they will pray for you with deep affection because of the overflowing grace God has given to you. ¹⁵ Thank God for this gift too wonderful for words!

Means of Grace: Prayer

Generous and gracious Lord: You are truly the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and we can never out give you. Thank you for the promise to provide all that we need so that we can faithfully and fully give of ourselves in ministry to the world.

Break the bonds of scarcity and fear that hold us back from giving of ourselves freely. Help us to know the joy of giving when we witness how our gifts can bless others. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Being Wise and Faithful Stewards

In Chapter Four, we discussed that one of the key marks of being a disciple is how we utilize or steward what God has given us, as individuals and as a church. As faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, we demonstrate our trust in God with the entirety of our lives: our relationships, our jobs, our ministries, our time (including our futures), and even our finances.



In his second letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul was encouraging the churches to give of themselves freely to support the connectional ministry of the broader church, lending support to the Jerusalem church who had given of themselves freely to give birth to others. In this teaching, Paul challenges the pervasive paradigm of scarcity that held captive the early church and which still holds many of our churches today.

In this paradigm of scarcity, we are convinced that there is not enough to go around, living in fear that we will not have sufficient provision to do what we want for as long as want. As a result, we hold on to what we have, refusing to invest in Kingdom possibilities or even worse, burying our heads in the proverbial sand, afraid to acknowledge the resources we do, or don't, have.

In the parable of the talents, Jesus also approaches this paradigm of scarcity:

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

—MATTHEW 25:14-15 (NLT)

In this parable, Jesus tells us how the servant with one bag buried the “talents” because the servant feared what might happen to what little he had.

In contrast, the servants with the two bags and the five bags both invested wisely what the master had given them, multiplying the gift for greater use. Jesus explains that when the master returned, the servant who hid, or buried, the talents out of fear was scolded, being deemed unfaithful and even “wicked” because he had been motivated by his own concerns rather than the concerns of the master. However, in response to the two servants who invested the resources wisely, the master replied:

To those who use well what has been given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance.

—MATTHEW 25:29 (NLT)

Considering this human tendency, Paul reminds us that God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and that when God calls and sends us to serve, God will provide what we need to do so faithfully, especially when we do this in partnership with others. To illustrate this point, Paul uses the image of a farmer planting seed, saying:



Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.” And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others.

—2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-8 (NLT)

To be wise and faithful stewards requires our being honest about the resources we do have and then investing those resources wisely and faithfully for the greatest yield, being guided by how those investments can be used for Kingdom purposes. And, as Paul reminds us, when we do invest and utilize those resources for the purposes of God, our gifts will produce a great harvest of generosity and joy through those who have been beneficiary of our investments.

Even though the world insists on a paradigm of scarcity, the promise of God's Word is one of sufficiency, that we will have enough to be faithful and obedient to what God is calling us to do. However, at the same time our faithful discipleship calls us to be shaped by this paradigm of *sufficiency* and abundancy, we are also faced with the reality of declining "metrics."

As we discussed in Chapter One, many of our churches are experiencing declines in membership, worship attendance, and giving due to the convergence of many factors over the past several decades. Nonetheless, God's promise for us remains steadfast and true, that we will have enough to accomplish what God is requiring of us as a church. But what if our sufficiency comes from more innovative and community-based partnerships? What if our current context is less of a "crisis" and more of an opportunity calling us to think and act beyond ourselves?



When God was calling Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses' immediate response was "No way, God! I don't have what I need!" Moses pleaded with God, insisting that he was not a good speaker, that the people would not listen, and that he did not have the power or authority to convince Pharaoh to act. In response, God reminded Moses that he was also calling and sending Moses' brother, Aaron, who would partner with him to speak on his behalf. And then, to Moses' continued fear, God asked:

"What do you have there in your hand?"

"A shepherd's staff." Moses replied.

—EXODUS 4:1-2 (NLT)

Then God demonstrated for Moses that what he had in his hand would be enough to accomplish what God was sending him to do.

Like Moses, God may be asking us today: “What do you already have on hand that I can use to accomplish my purpose in the world?” God is calling us, like Moses, to use faithfully what we already have so we can bring about God’s kingdom purposes in our communities today. The key for us is to assess what we do have and to be faithful and obedient servants to invest and use wisely what we have been given.

Stewardship is more than how we are raising and spending our money. The definition of a steward is one who oversees and manages that which belongs to someone else. So as faithful biblical stewards, we are called to oversee and manage the assets of the church which belong to God, not to us, and which are to be used for God’s ultimate purposes, not our own.

“

...as wise and faithful stewards, we must be proactive in our approach to managing what the church has been given...

”

So, what is God calling us to invest? God is calling us to invest everything the church has been given including our finances, our facilities and other property, and our human capital, including our spiritual gifts and passion for ministry and our time. Additionally, part of being faithful stewards is knowing when shifts are occurring in those assets to manage what the church has so we can do all the good we can, in as many ways as we can, for as long as we can, to paraphrase John Wesley.

Being wise stewards requires us to remain up-to-date and aware of changing resources and planning wisely for the future. We accomplish this by tracking and making note of trends of giving and spending, and by making faithful adjustments to our budgets and expenditures when needed for greater fruitfulness and sustainability in our ministries. Our failure to pay attention to these trends often results in our making rash and unfaithful decisions.

In contrast, as wise and faithful stewards, we must be proactive in our approach to managing what the church has been given, using all we have for the greatest Kingdom impact and to bless our community. Furthermore, the key to having what we need is to ask for what is needed and then to utilize what we have been given.

In Matthew 7:7, Jesus said:

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. (NRSV)

When it comes to stewarding our financial resources, too often we fail to ASK, trusting that God's people will respond faithfully by giving. As leaders of the church, we must keep the congregation informed of our financial status, asking people to give, and we, ourselves, must lead by faithful example by tithing and giving beyond the tithe when needed.



Another important aspect of asking people to give is through planned or legacy gifts through bequests. Recent studies report that the wealthiest generation is now retiring and aging with the potential for legacy gifts in the years to come. Therefore, it behooves us to not forget this potential asset. Additionally, our United Methodist Foundations across the connection are an avenue through which our investments can do “all the good we can” by investing our assets connectionally. For more information on creating legacy giving, visit www.umfwnc.org/individuals/planned-giving.

One other way in which our financial investments are leveraged and magnified for Kingdom purposes is through our connectional giving. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul was writing to the churches in Corinth, inviting them to join with other churches in the region to support the spread of the Good News. Paul was speaking of a truth which we see today: by investing in our connectional giving and contributing to ministries along with other churches, our investments in the Kingdom of God magnify and spread. In the United

Methodist Church, our apportionments are our connectional giving. Therefore, when we give faithfully through our apportionments, we are investing broadly and widely to birth and support ministries that no one church could do alone: responding to disasters, providing educational support, supporting our missionaries around the world, and birthing and revitalizing ministries locally and globally.

Another common untapped resource of the church is our facilities and properties. For many of our churches, much of our real estate, namely our buildings, sits empty and unused for most of the week. In some cases, our buildings have rooms that are never utilized beyond storing the many things we no longer use!

One of the ways in which we can determine our faithful path for now is to engage in a comprehensive assessment of how to utilize our property and facilities for greater fruitfulness in ministry. Increasingly, churches are realizing that our real estate offers an incredible opportunity to better serve the community through partnerships with others, and in some cases the possibility for additional income streams. Church properties are being repurposed for community services, affordable housing, adult and children daycare (sometimes in the same facility!), and in supporting small businesses and local industry.

Lastly, but not least, of our untapped resources is our human capital. The time, talent, and spiritual gifts of our people are the greatest asset God has given us to serve God and our neighbors. However, we have often failed to recognize or tap this hidden potential and thus have failed to be wise and faithful stewards of our most precious resource.

To explore and discover the spiritual gifts, passion and joy for ministry among our congregation, ***Finding Our Burning Bush*** is also included, beginning on page 94. This resource can be used as an additional study to strengthen the engagement of our laity in ministry.



When churches experience diminishing finances, one area that is directly impacted is how we staff our ministries. Over the past several decades, some of our churches have depended more heavily on paid staff for ministry to happen. Some of our churches have been staffed with highly gifted and called individuals who faithfully lead our ministries. However, we must also realize that ministry can and should happen largely through the ministry of the laity!

Scripture reminds us that the role of our staff, especially our clergy, is **to equip the saints for ministry**. Therefore, to faithfully steward those who are hired by the church, namely our clergy, we must empower and allow them to do what scriptures calls them to do, to equip the laity to serve as ministers in all areas throughout the life of the congregation. In doing so, we are investing our resources more faithfully, creating a generative model of ministry that is more affordable, sustainable, not to mention, more biblical, for years to come.

God has promised us that we will have everything we need for our faithful path forward for now... and in the future. The key to finding those right next steps forward is through being wise and faithful stewards of what God has provided.

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. Are we, as a congregation, more shaped and led by a paradigm of scarcity or abundance? Do we trust that we will have all we need to be faithful in our ministry, including finances and people?
2. How willing are we to “let go” of some things we have done or insisted on in the past if this is necessary for faithful stewardship?
3. How willing are we to rethink and re-purpose the use of our facilities for a greater Kingdom impact in our community?
4. Do we consider ourselves, as laity, as “ministers,” or do we think the pastor is the primary one who is called to do ministry?

Reflect

To ensure that we are being faithful stewards, let's ask ourselves:

1. How well are we stewarding our current **Financial Resources** through:
 - Accurate, transparent and understandable financial reporting to the congregation on a monthly basis?
 - Faithful tithing (giving 10% or more) and other giving?
 - Planning for financial sustainability for mission and ministry over the next five, ten and even twenty years?
 - Supporting the missional giving of the connectional church (apportionments) beyond our local congregation thus increasing our missional impact locally and globally?
 - Minimizing (or eliminating) our indebtedness as a congregation?
 - Investing current financial resources wisely and responsibly to gain greatest yield while making socially responsible investments?
2. How well are we planning future financial resources through:
 - Planned Legacy Giving among our members, constituents, and friends of the church?
 - Investing our current assets wisely and responsibly for long-term gain?
3. How well are we stewarding our **Facilities** by:
 - Optimizing our church space for current ministry needs?
 - Supporting the community through utilization of church space?
 - Re-purposing facilities and property for community use and potential income stream?
 - Maintaining our facilities and planning for future maintenance needs, including budgeting annually for deferred maintenance?
4. How well are we stewarding our **Time** and **Talents** as a congregation by:
 - Becoming less dependent on paid staff and becoming more faithful and reliable as the ministry of the laity?
 - Knowing and serving from our individual spiritual gifts and passions for ministry?
 - Implementing a system for equipping and deploying laity into ministry (laity engagement)?

Right Next Steps for Now...

Identify at least one new or modified strategy to become more faithful stewards of our resources by:

- Knowing our current financial status and planning for long-term financial sustainability
- Increasing our tithes and offerings
- Investing our current and future assets for greater gain
- Developing alternative income streams, including use and re-purposing of facilities and property
- Developing processes by which the laity are equipped and engaged in ministry

Being Wise & Faithful *Stewards*

To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church

Reflect

How well are we stewarding our
FINANCIAL RESOURCES?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST
and DO to more faithfully steward
our FINANCIAL RESOURCES?

Reflect

How well are we stewarding our
FACILITIES and PROPERTIES?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to more faithfully steward our
FACILITIES and PROPERTIES?

Reflect

How well are we stewarding our
TIME AND TALENTS as laity?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to more faithfully steward our
TIME and TALENTS of the laity?

Right Next Steps to Steward...

Finances: _____

Facilities: _____

Our Time & Talents: _____

partnering in *collaboration*, not competition

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #561

Jesus, United by Thy Grace

and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek thy face
and know our prayer is heard.

Help us to help each other, Lord,
each other's cross to bear;
let all their friendly aid afford,
and feel each other's care.

Up unto thee, our living Head,
let us in all things grow;
till thou hast made us free indeed
and spotless here below.

Touched by the lodestone* of thy love,
let all our hearts agree,
and ever toward each other move,
and ever move toward thee.

To thee, inseparably joined,
let all our spirits cleave;
O may we all the loving mind
that was in thee receive.

This is the bond of perfectness,
thy spotless charity;
O let us, still we pray, possess
the mind that was in thee.

* Lodestone: a naturally occurring magnetic rock

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-18 (NLT)

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.

Means of Grace: Prayer

Loving and uniting God: By your Spirit, you called and created us to be your one church, saved and united by your grace. Yet we confess, Lord, that we have divided your church across geographic, racial, socioeconomic, and denominational lines.

Forgive us, Lord. For the ways in which we have broken and divided your body, have mercy on us. For the ways we have insisted that we are better on our own, forgive us.

Open our hearts and minds to see and know what it means to be your one body, your one church, working together to bring about your one Kingdom here on earth. So be it through us, Lord. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.



Partnering in Collaboration, Not Competition

Throughout the New Testament, we hear stories of the early church growing and expanding in amazing and exciting ways. However, as soon as the church started to grow and spread, so did diversity and disagreements. When Jesus said, “Where two or more are gathered together,” he should have also added: “there will be divisions and differences among them.” To address the emerging differences, the apostle Paul, in his letters to the early church, addresses the importance of this diversity within the Body of Christ and the call for unity among us.

Paul makes it very clear: God has called and created us as the Church to be united, not uniform. The strength and fulfillment of our ultimate purpose as the Church will only be realized when we function out of our unique calling and giftedness. But as we explored briefly in Chapter Five, as only one congregation we have limited effectiveness. However, when churches share resources, both capital and human, we can do so much more!

As an illustration, Paul uses the human body whose individual parts are limited in their ability if not united and functioning as part of the whole. Likewise, it is so with the body of Christ, the Church.

Too often we have convinced ourselves that we are in competition with other churches, competing for members, ministries, assets, and accolades. However, Scripture makes it undeniably clear that we were created and called to be a united Church. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul says:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

—EPHESIANS 4:4-6 (NLT)

In this one sentence, Paul uses the word “one” seven times! In other words, God has created us to be completely one! We might worship in different spaces and in different ways, and we might even have some differing views. But as Paul reminds us, we are united in our hope and faith and in the worship of our one True God.



*As United Methodists, we are a **connectional church, local churches connected and bound together in our shared mission and ministry...***



Paul goes on to remind us that we are also united in our one calling as the Church — to be God’s instruments and vessels of grace and hope, to be the body of Christ for this broken and hurting world. But to do so faithfully and effectively, we desperately need one another as churches. No individual church can fulfill this calling alone.

As United Methodists, we are a connectional church, local churches connected and bound together in our shared mission and ministry to our communities and our world. As stated in Paragraph 132 of our *Book of Discipline*, we are connected

by sharing a common mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences that reflect the inclusiveness and missional character of our fellowship; by sharing a common ethos that characterizes our distinctive way of doing things.

However, our call to be connected as the one church goes beyond our connection as United Methodist churches. In his sermon *Catholic Spirit*, [note he is talking about the Latin meaning of the word catholic being universal or widespread], John Wesley calls us to unity in the church despite differences of practice, doctrine, location, or denomination. He says:

**“Is your heart right with God?
Is your faith filled with the energy of love?
Is your heart right toward your neighbor?...”**

If so, Wesley says, we should join hands with one another in love and service for the betterment of all humanity.

We are reminded in Paragraph 203 of our *Book of Discipline* that the local church is to be

a connectional society of persons who have been baptized, have professed their faith in Christ, and have assumed the vows of membership in the United Methodist Church... Such a society of believers, being within the United Methodist Church and subject to its Discipline, is also an inherent part of the church universal, which is composed of all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In Paragraph 207, we are further challenged to express this connectional and shared calling beyond the United Methodist church by responding

to opportunities for ecumenical resource sharing in their communities by creating ecumenical shared ministries, working with local congregations of other Christian churches to enhance ministry, make wise stewardship of limited resources, and live out the ecumenical spirit in creative ways responsive to the needs of God's people as well as to opportunities for expanding mission and ministry.



As individual congregations, we often find ourselves saying: “There are just too many needs. We are only one church.” However, we are failing to remember that **together** we are the **one body** of Christ, called to fulfill the Great Commandment and Great Commission in our communities and around the world. We should never be in competition with other churches. Instead,

God has called us to a ministry of collaboration and cooperation, bringing our greatest gifts and passions to minister with the gifts and passions of others.

To faithfully fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church, God calls us to do this in **partnership with others**. In our shifting church landscape, an increasing number of churches are struggling to do ministry alone. But the reality is, we were never called or sent to be in ministry as individual churches. So, whether our church is “making it on our own” or looking for help to sustain and grow our ministries, we ALL need one another to serve our communities most

effectively. In fact, to be a faithful witness, our communities need to see us ministering together.

One way of partnering with other churches in the area is through the development of missional networks, or groups of churches working together, whether all United Methodist churches or with churches of other denominations. Through a missional network, churches come together for shared missional and ministry support, such as lectionary groups or worship planning, shared community worship services and bible studies, and missional engagement within the community. Within a missional network, although churches maintain their own structure and individual resources, they choose to partner with other churches for specific purposes, whether on an occasional or ongoing basis.



Within our own connection as United Methodist churches, we have a strong historical tradition of churches partnering together for shared ministry within our communities. Another way of doing this is through cooperative parishes.

In paragraph 206 of *The Book of Discipline*, a **cooperative parish** is described as a form of mutual cooperation between two or more United Methodist congregations in a community

as a means of creating greater effectiveness in the nurture, outreach, and witness ministries of urban, suburban, and town-and-country situations.

Churches who form a cooperative parish might share ministry resources, including a shared youth ministry, a shared pastoral team who participate in cooperative worship planning, worship services, pastoral care, and missional engagement with the community. The key to an effective cooperative parish is that the churches participating are all choosing to be “cooperative,” knowing that they are more effective and fruitful in their ministry together, bringing the best of who they are and what they offer to their shared life and ministry to the congregations and to the community.

One potential benefit of a cooperative parish is that each church in the cooperative can provide more ministry with shared resources. In doing so, each church can extend and multiply the resources of any individual congregation through wise and faithful stewardship for Kingdom purposes. Therefore, this model of ministry can be both fruitful and biblical!

For churches who are interested in exploring the possibility of participating in a cooperative parish with other United Methodist churches in the area, the following are key steps to do so:

1. Read through thoroughly and discuss together Paragraph 206 of *The Book of Discipline* to understand the specifics and expectations of engaging in a cooperative parish ministry.
2. Schedule a meeting with the district superintendent to discuss the possibility of cooperative parish ministry with other churches in the district.
3. Identify ministry strategies in which engaging in mutual partnership with other churches will strengthen the NOW ministries of worship, discipleship formation and stewardship within your own congregation and outreach, witness and missional engagement within your local community.
4. In coordination and communication with the district superintendent, meet with other congregation(s) to dialogue about cooperative ministry opportunities based on the strategies you have identified and incorporating the input from the other local United Methodist congregation(s).

As the one body of Christ, God also calls us to minister cooperatively with churches of other denominations. Paragraphs 207-211 in *The Book of Discipline* outline a process and structure for **ecumenical shared ministries** which are similar to engaging in a cooperative parish but with churches of other denominations. Paragraph 208 explains:

Ecumenical shared ministries are ecumenical congregations formed by a local United Methodist church and one or more local congregations of other Christian traditions. Forms of ecumenical shared ministries include: a federated church, in which one congregation is related to two or more denominations, with persons choosing to hold membership in one or the

other of the denominations; a union church, in which a congregation with one unified membership roll is related to two denominations; a merged church, in which two or more congregations of different denominations form one congregation that relates to only one of the constituent denominations; a yoked parish, in which congregations of different denominations share a pastor.

In choosing to engage in ecumenical shared ministries, churches demonstrate both a strong commitment to being the one body of Christ and being wise and faithful stewards of the faith community's resources to serve the local community cooperatively. As with cooperative parish ministries, ecumenical shared ministries require active dialogue, engagement, and partnership with other congregations, including churches of other faith traditions.



For churches interested in exploring how to engage in **Ecumenical Shared Ministries** with Other Non-United Methodist congregations, the following steps should be followed:

1. Read through thoroughly and discuss together Paragraphs 207-211 of *The Book of Discipline* to understand the specifics and expectations of engaging in an ecumenical shared ministry.
2. Schedule a meeting with the district superintendent to discuss the possibility of ecumenical shared ministry with other churches in the community.
3. Identify ministry strategies in which engaging in mutual partnership with other churches will strengthen how to minister to the local community in the areas of Nurture, Outreach, and Witness.
4. In coordination and communication with the district superintendent, meet with other congregation(s) to dialogue about ecumenical shared ministry opportunities based on the strategies you have identified and incorporating the input from the other congregation(s).

Whether we choose to engage in a more formal relationship with other churches, such as through cooperative parishes or ecumenical shared ministries, or less formally through missional networks, ecumenical ministries, or community partnerships, our call to partnership is clear. God is calling us, God needs us, to be the ONE body of Christ to bring about the Kingdom of God, right here, right now. This work cannot and should not be done alone.

“

*Sometimes **what** and **who we need most** is
right outside the doors of our church if we
are able and willing to see and engage them.*

”

An additional source of partnerships for ministry is other communities of faith, governmental and non-profit agencies and even businesses in our communities. Too often, we overlook the possibility of engaging in strategic partnerships with these other groups who have similar commitments and desire to transform our communities for good. These other agencies might offer additional financial, physical and even human capital to partner with us in our ministries to our neighbors. Sometimes what and who we need most is right outside the doors of our church if we are able and willing to see and engage them. What if everything we need to minister faithfully is in our community... we simply need to partner with others to discover it.

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. When we hear being the “one body of Christ,” what does that mean for us?
2. Have we regarded our relationship with other churches as being cooperative or competitive?
3. How open are we to being in partnership with other churches?
4. How might God be using our current context and circumstances to encourage us to partner with others?

Reflect

To ensure that we are faithfully partnering with other churches in our community, begin by asking ourselves:

1. How well are we partnering with other churches in our area to meet the needs of our neighbors, including through missional networks?
2. How well are we ministering collaboratively with other United Methodist churches in our community? List and describe current collaborative ministry strategies.
3. How well are we ministering collaboratively with other non-United Methodist churches in our community? List and describe current inter-denominational collaborative ministry strategies.
4. What are new ministry strategies we could consider with other churches?
5. How would our congregation respond to ministering cooperatively with other churches in the community, especially as it relates to sharing resources and ministries?

6. How would our congregation respond to ministering collaboratively with congregations of other ethnic groups or faith traditions?
7. What other agencies or groups within our community might also become fruitful partners?

Right Next Steps for Now...

Identify at least one new or modified strategy (idea) of how we might partner with...

- Other United Methodist Churches in the area.
- Churches of other denominations.
- Other community agencies.

Partnering in *Collaboration,* not Competition

To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church

Reflect

How well are we PARTNERING
WITH OTHER UMCS?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to more faithfully partner with
other UMCS?

Reflect

How well are we PARTNERING
WITH OTHER CHURCHES?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to more faithfully partner with
other churches?

Reflect

How well are we PARTNERING WITH
OTHER COMMUNITY AGENCIES?

Adjust & Do

What do we need to ADJUST and
DO to more faithfully partner with
other community agencies?

Right Next Steps for Partnering with...

UMCs: _____

Other Churches: _____

Other Community Agencies: _____

determining the path forward... *for now*

Means of Grace: Worship

THE UNITED METHODIST HYMNAL #381

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us,
much we need thy tender care;
in thy pleasant pastures feed us,
for our use thy folds prepare.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast bought us, thine we are.

We are thine, thou dost befriend us,
be the guardian of our way;
keep thy flock, from sin defend us,
seek us when we go astray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Hear, O hear us when we pray.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Hear, O hear us when we pray.

Thou hast promised to receive us,
poor and sinful though we be;
thou hast mercy to relieve us,
grace to cleanse and power to free.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
We will early turn to thee.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
We will early turn to thee.

Early let us seek thy favor,
early let us do thy will;
blessed Lord and only Savior,
with thy love our bosoms fill.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.
Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus!
Thou hast loved us, love us still.

Means of Grace: Study of Scripture

LUKE 14:25-33 (NRSV)

²⁵ Now large crowds were traveling with him, and he turned and said to them,
²⁶ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.
²⁷ Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.
²⁸ For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹ Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, ³⁰ saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’
³¹ Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he cannot, then while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.
³³ So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

Means of Grace: Prayer

Gracious God: You are our faithful and fearless Leader, guiding us forward for the sake of your mission. You guide and lead us both through green pastures and through dark valleys, all the time tending to us faithfully along the chosen path.

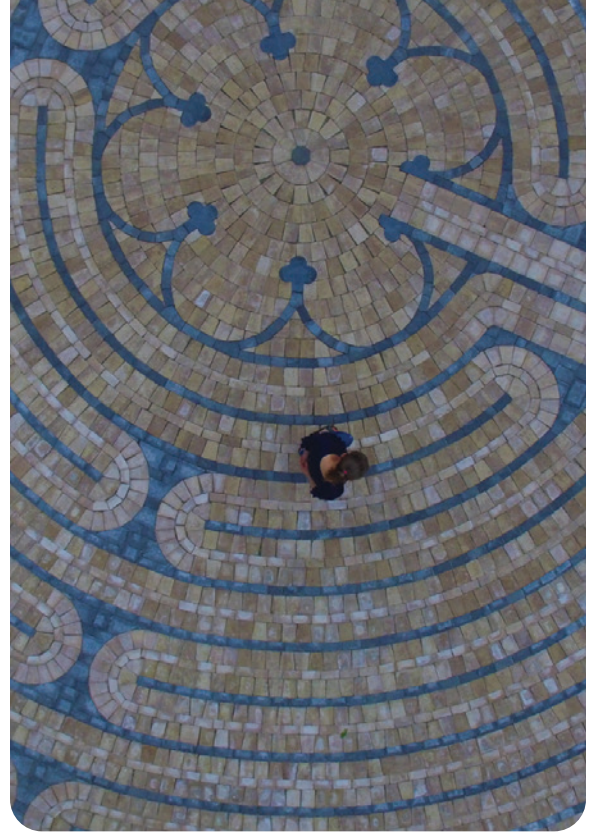
As we prepare to move forward on new and renewed paths in ministry, give us courage to take our next steps in alignment with our Call and Commission as your Church.

Help us to serve you faithfully no matter what challenges are ahead and give us joy, energy, and fulfillment on the journey. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.



Determining the Path Forward...for Now

Often in our culture, a leader tries to convince others to support his or her mission by making promises of what the followers stand to gain if they follow the leader. Jesus, however, takes the opposite approach in calling us to join him in his mission to bring the kingdom of God here on earth. Instead of telling us what we will gain, Jesus tells us to count the costs.



Jesus was undoubtedly a powerful and influential leader, drawing large crowds that grew day by day. But instead of seeking more and more followers for himself, Jesus made sure his followers understood the cost of following him. In describing these costs in Luke 14, Jesus begins with the most basic of loyalties and reminds us that we must be able, willing, and committed to give up even our family to be faithful and obedient to his cause, to fulfill his Kingdom mission.

Throughout this study of our biblical and Wesleyan expectations of being the church, we have also discovered that there are significant costs of fulfilling the Call and Commission of the Church. And at various points along our journey, we have paused, as Jesus teaches us, to stop and count the costs of moving forward faithfully along any particular chosen path. In his sermon, *Self Denial*, John Wesley tells us that:

In running “the race which is set before us,” according to the will of God, there is often a cross lying in the way; that is, something which is not only not joyous, but grievous; something which is contrary to our will, which is displeasing to our nature. What then is to be done? The choice is plain: Either we must take up our cross, or we must turn aside from the way of God.

Wesley continues by saying that to be faithful and obedient to God's will, we must deal with the cross, the burden, in our path. We must decide the way forward and decide how to respond faithfully to the burdens encountered, often by denying ourselves and our own desires.

“

...we must understand what it means to be the Church and what is required of us “therein.” Otherwise, we are not faithful to ourselves, our calling as a church, or utmost to God.

”

In another one of his sermons, *Of the Church*, John Wesley speaks at length on the nature of what it means for us to be the Church. He speaks rather forcefully in this sermon when he says:

Can anything be more absurd, than for [church members] to cry out, “The Church! The Church!” and pretend to be very zealous for it, and violent defenders of it, while they themselves neither have part nor lot therein, nor indeed know what the Church is. And yet the hand of God is in this very thing!

According to Wesley, we must understand what it means to be the Church and what is required of us “therein.” Otherwise, we are not faithful to ourselves, our calling as a church, or utmost to God. Therefore, we should be constantly reminded of the basic requirements of what it means for us to be the church, as we have done throughout this study.

We have been exploring together the Call and Commission of the Church which provides the “plumbline” of our faithfulness and fruitfulness as a congregation. We have explored in depth three primary texts which Jesus gave us in his final teachings as he was passing the baton of ministry to us:

- Matthew 22:37-39 (loving God, loving our neighbors, and loving ourselves)
- Matthew 25:35-40 (embodying this love by meeting the real needs of real people)
- Matthew 28:19-20 (going, befriending, teaching, and sending disciples of Jesus Christ).

To be faithful and obedient to Jesus' Call and Commission, we must pay the costs of fulfilling all these minimum requirements. And, if we are honest with ourselves, ALL churches can improve how we do this most faithfully...for now. How we did this five, ten, or twenty years ago is likely not effective in how we are called to do so faithfully at this point on our journey. Our context has changed. Our congregation has changed. And our capacity for ministry has changed. Therefore, we must change our strategies for developing our faithful path forward today.

Throughout this study, we have been asked to engage at the end of each chapter the Questions for Christian Conferencing to spark our conversation with one another, leading to more in depth assessment through the RAD questions (Reflect-Adjust-Do). By completing this process for each chapter, we have gathered important information (subjective and objective data) to align our ministries with our biblical and Wesleyan expectations. Additionally, at the end of each chapter, we were encouraged to take The Right Next Step for Now by identifying at least one new ministry strategy or one existing strategy that could be modified to more faithfully fulfill the **Call and Commission** of the church which we have summarized on the accompanying worksheets.

Once we have completed this thorough assessment in each of these areas, we also need to determine how and how much we will adjust our ministries moving forward. In doing so, we need to honestly ask ourselves what we are **Able** and **Willing**, and **Committed** to do. There is a clear distinction between these three.



Our **Ability** to move forward reflects our capacity for ministering faithfully. Therefore, to assess our ability, we must consider the availability of resources needed to move forward to implement various strategies, including people, money, and skills.



Our **Willingness** reflects our desire or will. In other words, we can have the resources to move forward in a particular manner (i.e., money in the bank) but not the willingness to give of those resources to follow or implement a particular strategy.

Our **Commitment** reflects our dedication to giving or sacrificing what we have available to ensure that something comes to pass. Furthermore, committing to one particular path, or strategy, might also require that we give up other agendas or plans that

are contradictory to this path. Again, we might have the ability and willingness to see that something happens, but we lack the commitment on the part of individuals or the church to make the changes needed.

Based on an honest assessment of our **Ability**, **Willingness**, and **Commitment** to move forward, we can develop a Plan for strengthening a comprehensive approach to fulfilling the Call and Commission of the church, including our Nurture, Outreach, and Witness ministries.

To develop a faithful plan for moving forward, follow the steps listed below:

1. Gather our completed worksheets for each chapter.
2. **Reflect** on our responses to the questions on each chapter's worksheet. Make sure that we have written our reflection responses on each chapter's worksheet.

3. Determine what we need to **Adjust** in each of the ministry strategies discussed in the questions to be more fruitful and faithful in that area. Make note of those **Adjustments** on the worksheets.
4. Review and/or identify new or modified strategies noted on the worksheet for each chapter to **Do** that ministry more effectively moving forward. Make sure for each strategy listed that we are **Able** and **Willing**, and **Committed** to follow through with this strategy.
5. Compile the new and modified strategies from each of the worksheets from chapters two through six to develop ***The Faithful Path...for Now Action Plan*** using the worksheet provided at the end of this chapter.
6. Together, as a team, review the strategies we have identified and prioritize which of these we believe we can faithfully, and effectively, implement first. This will help determine the first right step forward, then the next, then the next.

Any chosen path forward can be a faithful one if it is aligned with our biblical and Wesleyan expectations and if it is based on an honest assessment. However, if a plan is based on an inaccurate assessment or inaccurate data, then it could become an unfaithful choice because it does not truly reflect the costs and sacrifices which we are able, willing, and committed to make.

Furthermore, a plan is only effective and faithful if we are committed to putting it into action. Therefore, as leaders, we need to support and hold one another accountable to following through with our plan, one faithful step at a time. Remember, it is not necessary, nor advisable, to try and implement all our strategies at once. Instead, we should choose to first implement the strategy, or a few strategies, that could potentially bring immediate positive results, and build our momentum from there.

Lastly, remember, we are not called nor sent to do this alone. There are other churches in our area who are ready, able and willing to partner with us. We are also encouraged to reach out to our district superintendent, or other local churches, district, or community partners to come along beside us. Studies have proven repeatedly that we will be more effective if we write it down, share it with others, then have accountability partners who will hold us to the plan. So do it!

And most importantly, remember that Jesus has promised to be there with us, every step of the way. As he spoke these last words in Matthew to his disciples, he is also speaking to us:

And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

So be it, friends. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Questions for Christian Conferencing

1. As we review the work we have completed in this study, with particular attention on the Right Next Steps for Now, what do we honestly believe we are **Able**, **Willing**, and **Committed** to do?
2. What sacrifices are we willing to make to develop a faithful plan for moving forward?
3. What will be most difficult to relinquish as we choose a faithful path forward?
4. What resistance do we think we will likely encounter as we move forward faithfully?

Reflect

Gather and review the worksheets from the previous chapters to compile the RAD from this study as noted in the steps above.

Right Next Steps for Now...

- Gather and discuss the Right Next Steps identified on the worksheets for Chapters 2-6 on the following Action Plan Worksheet and determine what we are honestly **Able**, **Willing**, and **Committed** to do...for now.
- Prioritize the Right Next Steps on the Action Plan that will provide momentum for moving forward.
- Continue to pray over this plan, then begin sharing the plan with others, including the Church Council (or other governing body) for approval, other related ministry teams, the district superintendent, and other churches or groups in the area for support and partnerships.

The Path Forward...for Now

Action Plan

**To Fulfill the
Call and Commission
of the Church**

For the Love of God & Others

List strategies for Passionate
WORSHIP, LOVE and CARE,
and Radical HOSPITALITY.

For the Love of Our Neighbors

List strategies to address the
SPIRITUAL, EMOTIONAL, and
PHYSICAL needs of our neighbors.

Generative Disciple-Making

List strategies to GO OUT, BE
DISCIPLES, and to TEACH and
MENTOR others.

Being Wise & Faithful Stewards

List strategies to better steward our
FINANCES, FACILITIES, and PEOPLE.

Partnering in Collaboration, not Competition

List strategies to PARTNER with
Other UMCs, other Churches, and
Community Agencies.

Able-Willing-Comitted

List below what we are ABLE,
WILLING, and COMMITTED to
let go of and take on.

Setting Priorities

First Next Step: _____

Second Next Step: _____

Third Next Step: _____



finding our burning bush: *spiritual gifts*

What is a Burning Bush?

God sent Jesus to embody the love of God here on earth. Then, as Jesus was completing his earthly ministry, he passed on the baton of ministry to us.

We are sent into this broken and hurting world to continue the work of Jesus.

On the night before his death, Jesus prayed to God: *As you sent me into the world, I am now sending them into the world.*

—JOHN 17:18 (NLT)

Jesus has called each of us, and all of us together as the church, to do his work.

Our **Burning Bush** is a way of describing our **call** to ministry. In other words, our Burning Bush is the unique way God has equipped us, and wired us, to respond to the needs of our neighbors.



Our **call** to ministry or **Burning Bush** will be at the intersection of the needs of God's people and our unique ability to respond, as it was for Moses.

Moses and the Burning Bush

¹ One day Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian. He led the flock far into the wilderness and came to Sinai, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a blazing fire from the middle of a bush. Moses stared in amazement. Though the bush was engulfed in flames, it didn't burn up.

³ "This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it."

⁴ When the Lord saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

"Here I am!" Moses replied.

⁵ "Do not come any closer," the Lord warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. ⁶ I am the God of your father — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ Then the Lord told him, "I have certainly seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries of distress because of their harsh slave drivers. Yes, I am aware of their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians and lead them out of Egypt into their own fertile and spacious land. It is a land flowing with milk and honey — the land where the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites now live.

—EXODUS 3:1-8 (NLT)

Moses' call to ministry began with God pointing out the needs of the people.

Apart from the needs of God's people, our calling has no meaning or purpose.

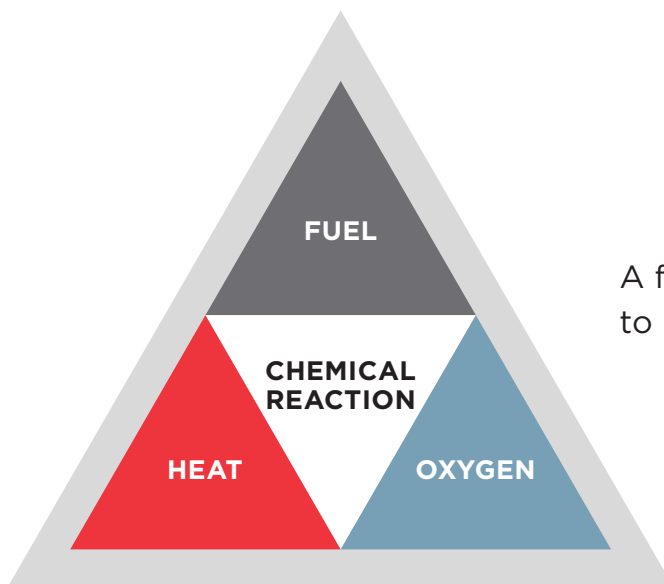
But once we can hear the cries of God's people in need, we must then ask ourselves:

"What is my/our unique ability to respond?"

Our Unique Ability to Respond

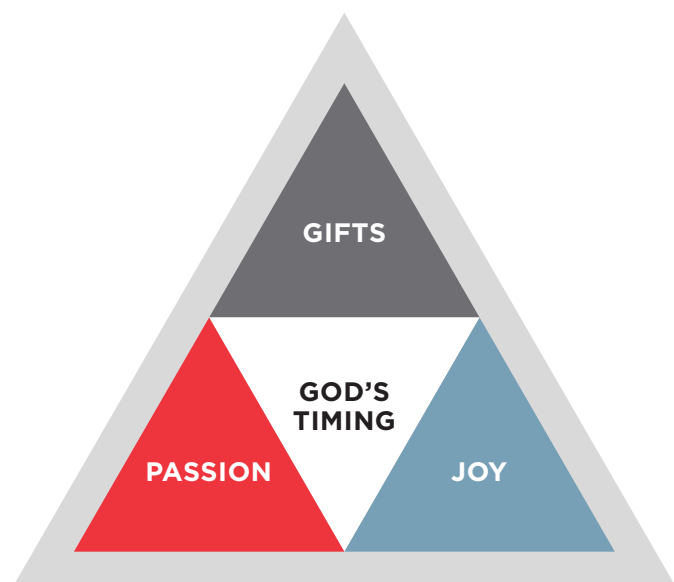
So why did God use a bush that was burning to get Moses' attention? Beyond the obvious attraction of flames and then the added unusual nature of not being consumed by the flames, a fire combines multiple elements.

And it is in understanding these elements that leads us to see why God used a burning bush to communicate Moses' call. Let's look at what is necessary for a bush — or anything else, to burn.



A fire needs these four items interacting to make a fire.

In the same way all four elements and conditions must be present to have a fire, our **Burning Bush** will be found when the following elements and conditions come together.



Finding Our Spiritual Gifts

In our baptism and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God has given each of us specific gifts or abilities to serve God and to carry out the work of the Church. Whether we recognize it or not, the Holy Spirit has worked in us.

- ⁴ *Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts,
but it is the Holy Spirit who is the source of them all.*
- ⁵ *There are different kinds of service in the church,
but it is the same Lord we are serving.*
- ⁶ *There are different ways God works in our lives,
but it is the same God who does the work through all of us.*
- ⁷ *A spiritual gift is given to each of us
as a means of helping the entire church.*

—1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7 (NLT)

Scripture makes the source and the purpose of spiritual gifts very clear. They are given to each of us by the Holy Spirit as a means of helping the church. Helping your church, my church, all churches is the purpose and goal of these gifts.

Scripture also makes it very clear that no spiritual gift is better or more important than any other. Gifts are for the church. And all are needed.

- Under [Christ's] direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly.
As each part does its own special work,
it helps the other parts grow,
so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

—EPHESIANS 4:16 (NLT)

This is what distinguishes a spiritual gift from a talent or skill. Skills are abilities that we learn. Talents are natural abilities that we can nurture and further develop. But spiritual gifts are super-natural abilities that are specifically given by God to us for the particular purpose of carrying out the ministries of the Church.

¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers,

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

—EPHESIANS 4:11-13 (NLT)

Three primary scriptures tell us about these gifts and how they work together to build up and accomplish the work of the Body of Christ, the Church. For this study, only these three scriptures that specifically discuss spiritual gifts are utilized for composing a list of gifts.

- Romans 12:1-8
- 1 Corinthians 12
- Ephesians 4:1-16

We do have to face the fact that this list might scare some of us. We might not have talked about some of these gifts at our United Methodist churches growing up. But, Spiritual Gifts are Scriptural. And, if we are honest with ourselves we will find within our churches all these gifts.

Maybe what scares us is the emphasis some churches put on particular gifts to the exclusion of other gifts. This study does not do that. Gifts are “to equip the saints for the work of ministry.”

Spiritual Gifts

In our baptism and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God has given each of us specific gifts or abilities to serve God and to carry out the work of the Church (from Finding Your Burning Bush pamphlet with Spiritual Gifts assessment).

ADMINISTRATION: the God-given ability to organize people and materials to accomplish God's work. Characteristics may include attention to details, organizational skills, effective delegation, and clear communication to a group.

APOSTLESHIP: the God-given ability to reach out to and connect with different groups of people (including different cultures or races) for the sake of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Characteristics may include willingness to try new things, learn new languages, chart new territories.

COMPASSION: the God-given ability to demonstrate care and empathy to those who are suffering (regardless of who they are or where they are) and to reconnect them with the love of Jesus Christ. Characteristics may include willingness to listen, visit, and dwell with the sick, the lonely, and the hurting. (Mercy in NIV, Kindness in CEV, NLT)

DISCERNMENT: the God-given ability to distinguish between good and evil, pure and impure motives, truth and deceit. Characteristics may include intuitiveness, the ability to see or distinguish what others cannot, or the ability to tell when others are being truthful or if a situation is in alignment with God's will.

ENCOURAGEMENT: the God-given ability to strengthen or build up others while holding them accountable to godly standards. Characteristics may include the ability to see God's promise in/for others, offering words of both hope and challenge. (Exhortation in NRSV)

EVANGELISM: the God-given ability to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that lead others to faith in Him. Characteristics may include an enthusiasm for sharing Jesus and their own faith stories with others and extending open invitations to be a part of the fellowship of believers.

FAITH: the God-given ability to see, trust, and remain steadfast in God's will despite the setting or circumstances. Characteristics may include a commitment to live one day at a time, refraining from worrying, and trusting God's faithfulness no matter what happens.

GIVING: the God-given ability to give freely and joyfully of one's resources while managing resources to the glory of God. Characteristics may include knowing how to best use money or other resources to serve God and joyfully giving of their own to do so.

HEALING: the God-given ability to be used by God as an instrument of God's restorative and healing grace (physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual). Characteristics may include the willingness and desire to pray for those who are suffering with the confidence that they will be healed and restored.

HELPING: the God-given ability to work "behind the scenes" to ensure that God's work is accomplished. Characteristics may include doing what others are unwilling to do, jumping in without having to be asked to help, and, in general, being the "unsung hero" of a group or project.

INTERPRETATION: the God-given ability to understand and communicate to others what is being said in unknown languages (such as ecstatic/spirit-given or foreign). Characteristics may include a supernatural ability to understand languages never formally studied or previously unknown languages (tongues).

KNOWLEDGE: the God-given ability to bring to others insight and truth, rooted in God's Word. Characteristics may include a love of researching and gathering information to understand and communicate difficult truths.

LEADERSHIP: the God-given ability to motivate and move others to action to accomplish the work of the Lord. Characteristics may include the ability to communicate vision and to empower others to use their gifts to accomplish the vision.

MIRACLES: the God-given ability to see God's hand at work in extraordinary ways, even contrary to natural law. Characteristics may include the ability to invoke God's power to accomplish what otherwise would seem impossible and to pray with full assurance that God will act.

PASTORING: the God-given ability to nurture others in their own faith development and to guide them through difficult circumstances to remain a faithful disciple. Characteristics may include a love of mentoring others one-on-one, working with small groups, and sharing their own faith journey to strengthen the faith of others.

PROPHECY: the God-given ability to speak God's truth into situations and to call people back to godly ways of life to avoid destructive patterns. Characteristics may include a spiritual boldness to speak the truth in love and a firm commitment to a godly way of living rooted in Scripture.

SERVING: the God-given ability to extend the love of Jesus Christ to others by readily and tangibly meeting their physical needs. Characteristics may include putting other's needs before their own and a preference for "demonstrating" their faith instead of talking about it. (Ministry in NRSV)

TEACHING: the God-given ability to instruct others in biblical truths in ways that they can understand and apply these truths to their daily lives. Characteristics may include a love of learning and practically sharing with others what they have learned.

TONGUES: the God-given ability to speak in unknown languages, private (God-given) prayer language, or to speak in languages not previously studied. Characteristics may include having a prayer language during private times of prayer, speaking in unknown utterances that others have interpreted for God's people and purpose, and a supernatural ability to speak foreign languages so the Gospel of Jesus Christ is spread.

WISDOM: the God-given ability to apply God's deep, never-changing truths in common sense ways to our ever-changing circumstances. Characteristics may include "spiritual maturity beyond one's years" and the consistent ability to know what to do or say in the right time and circumstances.

Finding Our PASSION

Every fire requires enough heat or a spark for ignition. Every call to ministry, or **burning bush**, requires enough **passion** to set it aflame!

Our passion for ministry is the spark that ignites us... it's what "trips our trigger" or gets us excited.

Passion is the **emotion** for ministry that gets us and keeps us going in ministry.

The prophet Jeremiah described his passion:

*My heart, my heart – I writhe in pain!
My heart pounds within me! I cannot be still.*

As Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of God's people as a result of their own sin, he was moved by great emotion and felt that he HAD to do something about it:

I can't stop! If I say I'll never mention the Lord or speak his name, his word burns my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones! I am weary of holding it in!

When we are passionate about something, it is harder to **not do** something than to do it. Like Jeremiah, when we are passionate about responding to a need, to not do something makes us weary!

So, what is it that "trips your trigger?"

Is it a wrong to be righted?

Is it a group you feel called to serve?

God has given me a passion for:



Finding our JOY for Ministry

Without air, a fire will burn out.

And without **joy**, we will burn out in ministry.

Our **joy** for ministry is our breath, our *ruach*. (The Hebrew word for breath or Spirit).

Where we find our **joy** for ministry, we find the Holy Spirit breathing new life or breath into us and others.

However, this does not mean that we will always be “happy” or that things will always be “perfect” when ministering within our **burning bush**.

When we find our **joy** in ministry, even in the most difficult circumstances, we find we still have **joy** and that the Lord gives us strength to continue.

The joy of the Lord is your strength.

—NEHEMIAH 8:10 (NLT)

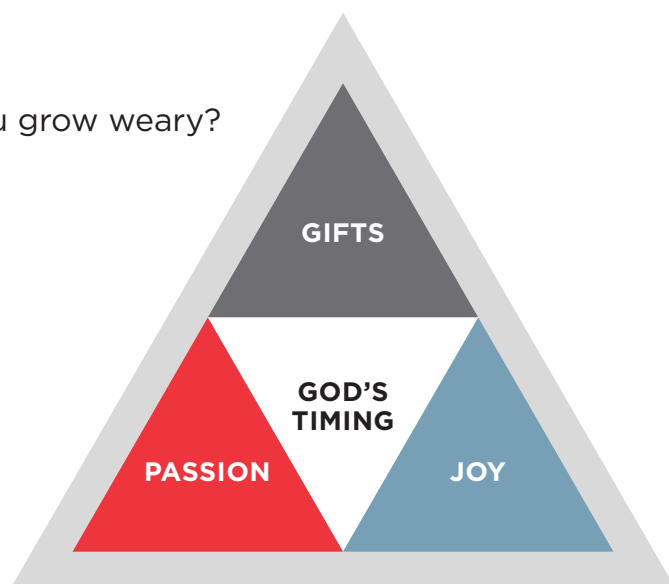
Without the Holy Spirit moving within our work for the Lord, and without **joy** in our ministry, we are like the dry bones in Ezekiel’s desert: worn out and breathless.

So, ask yourself:

What gives you great **joy**?

What do you do that rarely makes you grow weary?

God gives me great joy when I:



Waiting on God's Timing

Even when our **spiritual gifts**, **passion**, and **joy** come together, we sometimes have to wait on the fullness of God's timing and circumstances.

Remember: Our call to ministry, or **burning bush**, is defined by **both** the needs of the people and our unique ability to respond to these needs. Only God can determine **when** we are truly ready to respond in the way God is calling us.

Our job is to actively seek to understand our **gifts**, our **passion**, and our **joy** for ministry.

And then we open and offer ourselves for God to use us, God will decide, in God's own timing, how and when we will be used.

Those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.

—ISAIAH 40:31 (NLT)

New Paradigm for Ministry

This new paradigm for ministry is having permission to say “Yes” and “No.”

Finding our **burning bush**, or call to ministry gives us permission to say **yes** to that which God has called us to do, and to say **no** to that which we are not called.

Once we commit ourselves to ministering within our Burning Bush, we relinquish control over our ministries. In this new paradigm, we trust that God will raise up those servants who are called, and we trust that we will respond faithfully to the call God has given each of us.

However, this new paradigm will only work most effectively if each of us commits ourselves to live into our vows to support the church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service and our witness.

Each of us, and all of us together, are called to serve within the Body of Christ.

The question isn't **if** you are called.

The question is: **how** will you answer God's call by responding to your **burning bush**?

Instructions for Finding Your Burning Bush: Spiritual Gift Inventory

Set aside approximately 15-20 minutes to complete the spiritual gift inventory. Before beginning, spend a few minutes in prayer asking for God's guidance.

For each question, based on your current and past experiences, assign one of the following numerical responses to each question:

5 = Very Often

4 = Often

3 = Sometimes

2 = Seldom

1 = Never

Once you have answered all of the questions, use the score sheet at the end of the inventory or on page seven of the *Finding Your Burning Bush* study guide to tally your results.

In the box beside each question, following down the first column on the sheet, write your response to that corresponding question in the box.

Continue to follow along, writing your response to each question, down each **column** until you have written a numerical response in the box for each of the 80 questions.

Once you have recorded all your responses in the 80 boxes, add up the numbers for each **row** that corresponds to that spiritual gift (for example, add up your responses for questions 1, 21, 41, and 61 related to Administration). Write the total score in the box for that gift in the column entitled "Total Score."

Rank your top three spiritual gifts based on the highest scores. If there is a "tie," rank those gifts the same (in this case, you may identify more than 3 leading spiritual gifts). Write your top 3 (or more) leading spiritual gifts in the column entitled "Ranking."

Remember, pray for guidance.

spiritual gifts *inventory*

1	I would rather delegate a task to someone more capable than do the task myself.	
2	I am comfortable going to new and different places and working in strange and unfamiliar settings.	
3	I enjoy being an instrument of God's love to those who are hurting and lonely, regardless of their setting or circumstances.	
4	I get a strong "gut feeling" about whether a solution or situation is right or not.	
5	I affirm people who are doing a good job and can point out the best in anyone.	
6	I am comfortable openly sharing my faith with others.	
7	No matter what's going on in my life, I am able to trust God.	
8	I give generously and freely to others because I know God will meet my needs.	
9	God uses me to pray for others who are sick or suffering.	
10	I enjoy doing what others consider trivial tasks to accomplish the work of a group.	
11	I easily understand and quickly pick up foreign languages.	
12	I find and give solutions to problems through God's Word.	
13	Others look to me to take the lead and trust my guidance of a group.	
14	Others have told me that my prayers have brought about miraculous change or results.	
15	I enjoy mentoring others and working with people in small groups.	
16	I have felt moved by God to speak out against situations and circumstances that are wrong in the world.	
17	I enjoy serving others regardless of the task.	
18	People have told me that my instruction or teaching has helped them live out scripture practically.	
19	God has given me the ability to speak in languages unknown to me.	
20	People tell me that I know just what to say to help them handle a situation.	

21	I enjoy organizing people and resources to accomplish the work of the Lord.	
22	People who are different from me (including those from other races or cultures) are comfortable around me and working with me.	
23	People tell me I'm a great listener and they feel comforted when I am around.	
24	I am able to tell whether or not people are revealing the whole truth.	
25	I enjoy meeting with people who need encouragement and comforting.	
26	I respect other people's faith preferences, but I also want to tell them about the love of Jesus Christ.	
27	Others often lean on the steadiness of my faith during difficult times.	
28	I am comfortable talking about money and encouraging others to give of their resources.	
29	I believe that God can and does heal and restore others and uses people, such as myself, to do so.	
30	I am willing to get my hands dirty and do whatever it takes to get the job done.	
31	I can hear, understand, and explain verbal sounds that others cannot.	
32	Others tell me that I have helped them understand difficult truths.	
33	I am decisive and comfortable moving a group forward into action.	
34	I see God move and act in supernatural ways.	
35	Others have told me that I have helped them in their own faith development.	
36	God has used me to help people prepare for an important change that is coming.	
37	People tell me that my assistance has enabled them to be more effective in their ministry.	
38	I enjoy helping others apply scriptural truths to their everyday lives.	
39	I am able to learn and speak foreign languages very easily.	
40	I weigh many options when faced with a difficult decision and am able to apply historic and biblical truths to the options.	
41	Others look to me to oversee projects and meetings because they know I will see that things get done.	

42	I enjoy being and working with people from diverse backgrounds.	
43	When I see other people hurt, I hurt along with them.	
44	I have a sense of whether or not God wants me or others to do certain things at certain times.	
45	People think of me as the “cheerleader” of the group because I both challenge them and lift them up.	
46	I am not afraid or embarrassed to invite others to join me in my church activities.	
47	I believe that I, and others, can do all things through Christ Jesus, and I encourage others to live as such.	
48	I readily and joyfully tithe (give 10%).	
49	I enjoy being a vessel of hope and comfort for those who are suffering.	
50	I would rather be behind the scenes working than “out front” speaking, teaching or directing the activities.	
51	Without training I have been able to understand and explain to others what is said in unknown languages.	
52	I easily find strategies that God uses to help others and the church.	
53	I have a clear sense of vision and purpose and am comfortable communicating vision to others so they can “get on board.”	
54	God uses me and /or my prayers to do extraordinary – even miraculous – things.	
55	I am often called upon to help people work through difficult decisions.	
56	I see and point out destructive or ungodly patterns in people’s lives and help them to make needed changes.	
57	I am a doer more than a thinker or planner.	
58	I can easily organize a plan or lessons for teaching a Bible study or class.	
59	I can speak in another language without knowing what it is.	
60	I turn to deep godly truths to respond to life's challenges.	
61	I know how to put the right people and pieces together to accomplish a task and to make the right changes when needed.	

62	I am willing to learn other languages and try new and different ways of doing things if it will strengthen the message of Jesus' love.	
63	I want to be part of the church helping those who are sick, imprisoned, or lonely.	
64	I can see flaws in belief systems or teachings that are not aligned with God's Word.	
65	People trust and respect my opinion because they know I will tell them what I think is right and godly.	
66	Others tell me that my faith story helped bring them to faith in Jesus Christ.	
67	I am able to step out in boldness when others are not as trusting or sure.	
68	I enjoy giving to support other's needs because God has blessed me to be a blessing to others.	
69	People have told me that my prayers have helped relieve their suffering.	
70	When I see something that needs to be done, I jump in and do it without waiting to be asked.	
71	I have understood and explained what the Holy Spirit is saying when someone is speaking in tongues.	
72	I believe it's important to research and understand all the options before making a decision and moving forward.	
73	When I speak in a group, others tend to listen and follow along.	
74	I have been the recipient and /or channel of God's miraculous power.	
75	I am comfortable listening and offering guidance to others facing spiritual and personal struggles.	
76	I am comfortable speaking out and calling others back to biblical truths even if others might make fun of me.	
77	I believe that my faith speaks loudest when I am serving others.	
78	People tell me that I clearly give instructions and directions that they can understand and follow.	
79	God gives me a special language during times in my private prayers.	
80	People can depend on me to use the right information, at the right time, for the right purpose.	

spiritual gifts *score sheet*

					TOTAL SCORE	RANKING
ADMINISTRATION	1	21	41	61		
APOSTLESHIP	2	22	42	62		
COMPASSION	3	23	43	63		
DISCERNMENT	4	24	44	64		
ENCOURAGEMENT	5	25	45	65		
EVANGELISM	6	26	46	66		
FAITH	7	27	47	67		
GIVING	8	28	48	68		
HEALING	9	29	49	69		
HELPING	10	30	50	70		
INTERPRETATION	11	31	51	71		
KNOWLEDGE	12	32	52	72		
LEADERSHIP	13	33	53	73		
MIRACLES	14	34	54	74		
PASTORING	15	35	55	75		
PROPHECY	16	36	56	76		
SERVING	17	37	57	77		
TEACHING	18	38	58	78		
TONGUES	19	39	59	79		
WISDOM	20	40	60	80		

sermon series *and* worship planning

The Faithful Path... for Now can be engaged in several different ways, depending on the needs of the congregation and the desires of the leadership. Primarily, the study is written to be engaged in a small group format among the church leadership, rooted in the communal practice of the spiritual disciplines, and incorporating a shared meal and communion when possible. However, some leaders may choose to also engage the fuller congregation in the content of the study, inviting everyone on the journey of discovery and discernment and fostering “buy-in” once the leaders begin developing the Faithful Path... for Now Action Plan.

One possible way to engage the fuller congregation is through a sermon series, incorporating messages from the primary themes introduced throughout the study. In this framework, the congregation would engage in that week’s study theme and worship components (carrying out the theme in scripture, worship, and prayer). Hymn suggestions are from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, however other worship songs may be more appropriate or familiar for a particular congregation. Additional modern worship song suggestions are also included.

Following the weekly worship, the leadership team (and others, if desired) would meet at some point to engage that week’s chapter as introduced in worship, including spending time in Christian Conferencing, conducting the Reflect-Adjust-Do exercise, and identifying the Right Next Steps for that week’s session.

Below are worship planning resources for each of the seven chapters of *The Faithful Path... for Now* to be engaged in part or in full by the pastor and worship team based on the desires and needs of each congregation.

WEEK ONE

“A Shifting Landscape”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalms 46 • Genesis 6:9-22 • Matthew 7:21-28

HYMNS

My Hope Is Built #368

The Church of Christ, in Every Age #589

Christ Loves the Church #590

God of Grace and God of Glory #577

Forward through the Ages #555

MODERN SONGS

Firm Foundation

Austin Davis, Chandler Moore, Cody Carnes CCLI 7188203

Cornerstone

Hillsong CCLI 6158927

Build Your Kingdom Here

Rend Collective CCLI 6186078

CALL TO WORSHIP

Though the earth shakes and the mountains crumble

You, O Lord, are our God.

Though times and circumstances change around us

Your Love, O Lord, remains steadfast and true.

Though people, circumstances and communities change

Your promise and call remain the same.

Be still and know that God is God.

We come, in stillness, seeking to hear God’s voice.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and gracious God: You are steadfast and true. You are our Rock and the foundation on which our church is built. As we seek direction for our church, guide and direct us by the power of your Holy Spirit so that your wisdom will be our wisdom, your insights will be our insights. As we discern together our right next steps as a congregation, guide our feet, determine our path, so that in moving forward we will bring glory and honor to you. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THEME

Over the past several years, many of our congregations and communities have experienced seismic shifts in the landscape of ministry, impacting how our congregations look inside our walls and how we engage in ministry with our neighbors. During these seasons of life and ministry, it is easy to become distracted and discouraged, focused on the shifts instead of the steadfastness of God and God's calling for us. God's love for us and for God's church has not changed and our Kingdom mission has remained steadfast and true. Therefore, **Why** we engage in ministry is still the same, but **How** we engage in ministry will need to change as we experience shifts in our congregation and our community.

WEEK TWO

“For the Love of God”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 36:5-12 • Deuteronomy 6:1-9 • Matthew 22:33-40

HYMNS

Love Divine, All Love's Excelling #384
Blest Be the Tie That Binds #557
Where Charity and Love Prevail #549
Help Us Accept Each Other #560

MODERN SONGS

God Is
The Outer Banks. Contact Outer Banks at theouterbanksinfo@gmail.com

All Belong Here
CCLI 7112307

Heart of Worship
Matt Redman CCLI 2296522

CALL TO WORSHIP

You call to us
Love the Lord.
You call to us
Love your neighbor.
You call to us
Love yourselves.
We come before God with all that we are
Hoping to be loved and to be love for others.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God: Your love abounds and surrounds us every day in the gifts of creation, family, friends, and your Church. But the greatest demonstration of your love for us is the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, whom you sent to teach us and show us how to love. Thank you for your unfailing and unconditional mercy and for loving us even when our actions and attitudes are unlovable. Open our hearts and minds to understand and know how to embody this unconditional love through our own lives and ministries. In the name of Jesus Christ, Lover of our souls, we pray. Amen.

THEME

As we seek to align our ministries with the Call and Commission of the Church, we begin by ensuring that everything we do and say reflects the unmerited and unlimited love of God given to us.

The psalmist proclaims that the steadfast love of God extends to all people, all of creation, to all time and in all places. But that love is not, and in fact, cannot be contained by us. The heart of God, which is the foundation of all creation, is at the heart of God's law that undergirds and guides what we say and do as the church.

Jesus made it very clear that our ministry should always reflect our love of God, our neighbors, and one another. Therefore, whether we are worshiping together on Sunday mornings, or living out our lives in the community during the week, we are called to express this deep and abiding love as a true mark of our discipleship.

WEEK THREE

“For the Love of Our Neighbors”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalms 82:1-8 • Deuteronomy 24:17-22 • Matthew 25:31-45

HYMNS

Christ for the World We Sing #568
The Church of Christ, in Every Age #589
Lord, Whose Love Through Humble Service #581
Here I Am, Lord #593

MODERN SONGS

Same God
Elevation Worship CCLI 7183537

If We Are the Body
Casting Crowns

CALL TO WORSHIP

We come to be fed and clothed in righteousness
Knowing people are hungry and naked around us.
We come to this place we call our home
Knowing others have no safe place to lay their heads.
We come to gather with family and friends
Knowing others are lonely, lost and hopeless.
Open our hearts and our eyes through our worship
To see and to know our neighbors in need.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and caring God: From the beginning of time, you created us in your image and called us to be your people, united by your grace and love. You have called us to welcome strangers and reach out to our neighbors, including those ignored, avoided, or even despised by others. Open our hearts and minds to see, to know, and to understand our neighbors and their needs. And give us hearts to love them, accept them, and care for them as you love, accept and care for us. In the name of our loving and caring Savior, Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

THEME

Jesus' summation of the Great Commandment can essentially be stated: Love God. Love your neighbor. Love one another. But Jesus further teaches us that this love must be put into action by tending to the real needs of real people.

Both the psalmist and the writer of Deuteronomy remind us that doing justice and loving kindness are essential to our faithfulness to God. And this loving kindness must be extended to strangers, the "foreigners" in our midst, because we, too, were once sojourners, foreigners, and strangers.

As John Wesley reminded us, there is no personal holiness apart from social holiness. Therefore, our lives as Christians and our ministries as the church must be reflected in how we minister to our neighbors, regardless of who they are and where they are.

WEEK FOUR

“Generative Disciple-Making”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 78:1-8 • Deuteronomy 11:18-21,26-28 • Matthew 28:18-20

HYMNS

Go, Make of All Disciples #571

Pass It On #572

Wonderful Words of Life #600

Wash, O God, Our Sons and Daughters #605

Lord, You Give the Great Commission #584

MODERN SONGS

Come As You Are

David Crowder CCLI 7017790

How Great Is Our God

Chris Tomlin CCLI 4348399

Shout to the North

Martin Smith

CALL TO WORSHIP

We have come to worship God as we gather in this space.

We have come to praise God with all that we are.

We have come in our desire to be faithful disciples

Disciples who seek to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

And yet, to follow in Christ's footsteps we must be willing to go out

To share the good news of God's redeeming love.

We come, we worship, we learn, and we grow

To go, to serve, and to make God known.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and sending God: You sent your Son, Jesus Christ, to teach and nurture us to become co-laborers in the field so that others will come into a loving relationship with you. Open our hearts and minds to know and understand what it means for us to be ones sent in your name. Give us the courage to go, teach, nurture, and witness to others about your love and grace. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THEME

Ever since God began forming us as a community of believers, we have been taught and told to pass on God's teaching from one generation to the next. The psalmist and the writer of Deuteronomy remind us of God's command to teach the coming generations of God's steadfast love and to model how we are to live out that love faithfully in the world.

Through these final teachings of Jesus which comprise the Call and Commission of the Church (Matthew 22, Matthew 25, Matthew 28), Jesus was passing the baton of ministry to his disciples and to us as the church today. For his Kingdom ministry to continue through us, Jesus knew that we must embody a generative model of ministry where his teachings and ministry are passed from one generation to the next. Only disciples can make disciples (like only sheep begat sheep). Therefore, "making disciples for the transformation of the world" begins with our being disciples, going into the world with the transformative love of Jesus Christ then equipping others to do likewise.

WEEK FIVE

“Being Wise and Faithful Stewards”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalm 147:1-11 • Exodus 4:1-17 • 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

HYMNS

Take My Life and Let It Be #399
God Will Take Care of You #130
Leaning on the Everlasting Arms #133
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty #139
Great Is Thy Faithfulness #140

MODERN SONGS

Take My Life
Chris Tomlin CCLI 4162843

Your Love Never Fails
Bethel Music CCLI 5508444

The Potter’s Hands

CALL TO WORSHIP

God is gracious, generous, faithful and true.
The Giver of every good and perfect gift.
We come to worship with open hearts and hands
To receive the fullness of God’s abundant grace.
We go to serve with open hearts and hands
Giving fully of ourselves from the grace we have received.

OPENING PRAYER

Generous and gracious Lord: You are truly the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and we can never out give you. Thank you for the promise to provide all that we need so that we can faithfully and fully give of ourselves in ministry to the world. Break the bonds of scarcity and fear that hold us back from giving of ourselves freely. Help us to know and enjoy the joy of giving when we witness how our gifts can bless others. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THEME

The world teaches us a paradigm of scarcity. However, God's Word teaches us a paradigm of sufficiency, even abundance. To be faithful in fulfilling the Call and Commission requires us to trust in God's provision, believing that God will provide all we need to be faithful in our ministry. However, to be faithful, God may require us to let go of our own agenda to be faithful to God's agenda. Too often, we are not attentive to what God has already given us. Like Moses, we are not aware of what we already have in our hands. To be faithful to the Call and Commission will require us to use all of what we've been given for the sake of God's Kingdom ministry: our finances, our facilities, our time, and our abilities. And when we do this faithfully, giving generously of ourselves as individuals to the church and as a church in ministry to the world, others will break out in thanksgiving to God celebrating that their needs, and our needs, are met.

WEEK SIX

“Partnering in Collaboration, Not Competition”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalms 133 • Nehemiah 4:10-23 • 1 Corinthians 12:12-18

HYMNS

Jesus, United by Thy Grace #561
O Church of God, United #547
Blest Be the Dear Uniting Love #566
We Are the Church #558
In Christ There Is No East or West #548

MODERN SONGS

Rest On Us
Maverick City/Upperroom CCLI 7126736

Bigger Table
Matt Maher

We Believe
Newsboys

CALL TO WORSHIP

We, though many, gather together as one
To worship our One True Lord.
Through our one baptism, one faith, we are united in our diversity
To serve together in our united purpose.
Come, Holy Spirit, and make us one
Brought together in love and bound together in peace.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and uniting God: By your Spirit, you called and created us to be your one church, saved and united by your grace. Yet we confess, Lord, that we have divided your church across geographic, racial, socioeconomic, and denominational lines. Forgive us, Lord. For the ways in which we have broken and divided your body, have mercy on us. For the ways we have insisted that we are better on our way, forgive us. Open our hearts and minds to see and know what it means to be your one body, your one church, working together to bring about your one Kingdom here on earth. So be it through us, Lord. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THEME

Too often, our churches become overwhelmed by the work that is before us, convinced that our church, alone, cannot accomplish what we need to do. And, honestly, we are right! God never called or sent us to be in ministry alone. Even more so, God does not desire us to be in competition with our neighboring churches or even community agencies. God is calling us to partner with each other, bringing together our combined gifts, abilities, and resources to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes in our community.

In this week's scriptures, we hear a consistent call for unity, a call to work together side-by-side for a common purpose of building God's Kingdom. Despite the references to weapons and "defending," even Nehemiah's recollection of rebuilding the wall is a reminder that despite the challenges we face, we are called to partner with others to accomplish what God is calling us to do.

Alone, we can do a few things, but together, we can fulfill the Call and Commission of the Church. What if God's provision for our ministry comes through godly partnerships with others? Just imagine the faithful witness this would also be within our communities.

WEEK SEVEN

“Determining the Faithful Path Forward...for Now”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Psalms 23 • Joshua 24:14-28 • Luke 14:25-33

HYMNS

- And Are We Yet Alive #553
- O Young and Fearless Prophet #444
- Forward through the Ages #555
- Hymn of Promise #707
- Marching to Zion #733
- Heralds of Christ #567
- Where He Leads Me #338
- This Is a Day of New Beginnings #383
- Forth in Thy Name #438

MODERN SONGS

Build Your Kingdom Here
Rend Collective CCL I 6186078

We Believe
Newsboys

I Have Decided
Elevation Worship

Oceans (Where My Feet Fail)

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord is our Shepherd, therefore our needs are met

To lead us forward in paths that bring glory to God.

We come to worship, seeking God’s face and God’s purpose

For God’s Word and God’s will to guide our way.

Open our eyes through the power of your Spirit

To guard our hearts, to guide our steps, to bring your Kingdom here.

OPENING PRAYER

Gracious God: You are our faithful and fearless leader, guiding us forward for the sake of your mission. You guide and lead us both through green pastures and through dark valleys, all the time tending to us faithfully along the chosen path. As we prepare to move forward on new and renewed paths in ministry, give us courage to take our next steps in alignment with our call and commission as your church. Help us to serve you faithfully no matter what challenges are ahead and give us joy, energy, and fulfillment on the journey. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

THEME

As we conclude this study of discerning our faithful path forward, we are reminded in this week's scriptures first and foremost of our Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who leads and guides us along God's right path. And yet, we are given the choice of if and how we will follow Christ's leading.

As the Israelites were on the edge of the Promise Land, after a long and often treacherous journey, their leader, Joshua, called them to commit to whom they would serve and be faithful. Likewise, Jesus, too, tells us that we must count the costs of what is required for Kingdom-building ministry.

To choose a faithful path forward, even if it is just for now, requires that we count the costs of the chosen path. Any path that is worthy of God's Kingdom mission requires we make sacrifices, whether it is giving up our own agenda to align with God's or making deeper commitments of our personal and corporate resources. The good news is (and there is ALWAYS good news in our faithfulness!), we do not make these sacrifices nor take these next steps alone. God is going before us, Jesus is remaining beside us, and others are wanting to partner with us as we take these next steps together.

CLOSING

“In Communion with God and One Another”

*For use at the close of each session.
Adapted from The United Methodist Hymnal.*

INVITATION

Pastor: Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him and seek to grow into his likeness.

Let us draw near with faith, make our humble confession, and prepare to receive this Holy Sacrament.

CONFESSION & PARDON

All: We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own goodness, but in your unfailing mercies.

We confess that we have not loved you, ourselves, or our neighbors as you have desired and commanded us.

We have not loved ourselves or others as you have loved us.

Forgive us, we pray.

We are not worthy that you should receive us, but give us your word, and we shall be healed and restored, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pastor: Hear the good news: Christ died for us while we were yet sinners; that is proof of God’s love toward us. In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven!

All: In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Glory to God!

THE PEACE

Signs and words of God’s peace are exchanged among us.

TAKING THE BREAD AND CUP

The bread and cup are prepared for the meal.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

Pastor: Lift up your hearts and give thanks to the Lord our God.

Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, you made us in your image, to love and be loved.

When we turned away, and our love failed, your love remained steadfast.

By the suffering, death, and resurrection of your only Son Jesus Christ you delivered us from slavery to sin and death and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which Jesus gave himself up for us, he took bread, gave thanks to you, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup, gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit, make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory, and we feast with him at his heavenly banquet

Through your Son, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church, all honor and glory is yours, almighty God, now and forever.

All: **Amen.**

LORD'S PRAYER • BREAKING THE BREAD • GIVING THE BREAD AND CUP

Pastor: The body of Christ, given for you. Amen. The blood of Christ, given for you. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

All: **Most gracious God,**

We give you thanks for the world you have created, for the gift of life, and for giving yourself to us in Jesus Christ through his life, death, and glorious resurrection.

Thank you, gracious God, for inviting us into ministry with you, to be the body of Christ for your world so that the world, too, can be redeemed and restored to you.

We thank you that in the power of your Holy Spirit you have fed us and led us through this Sacrament to be united with Christ and one another, giving us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

We are your servants, and yours is the glory, now and forever, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Amen.