

Living into The Methodist Way of Discipling
Strengthening our Faithfulness and Fruitfulness
In Following the Five Practices

Charge Conference 2008

Introduction

The Council on Bishops has been clear in their leadership: local congregations are chartered in their local setting for the purpose of “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” We fulfill this mission by inviting and enabling persons to join with us in learning to live into the five practices of The Methodist Way: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Discipling, Salty Service and Extravagant Generosity. To do this, every congregation must constantly ask themselves two questions: Are we being faithful to the way of life and mission to which Jesus calls us? And are we being fruitful in engaging the people of our community and the next generation in joining us on the journey of discipleship?

The Florida Conference Cabinet believes that the leadership of every congregation must be intentional and rigorous about asking themselves these questions of faithfulness and fruitfulness. Therefore this Charge Conference season, we are asking leaders to: (1) review how they have lived into the goals and strategies that they set for themselves last year; (2) select two of the five practices in which they would like to focus this year; and (3) set new initiatives and goals for the coming year.

In fulfillment of this portion of your Charge Conference Report, please include in writing: 1) a copy of last year’s Charge Conference approved goals; 2) an evaluation of how you lived into last year’s plans and their effectiveness; 3) the two practices you would like to focus upon this year; and 4) one strategic initiative, goal and action steps for each of the two practices. **Please be prepared to share this with the congregation during the Charge Conference.**

Note: If your congregation is already involved in NCD, reFocus or another structured transformational process, we ask that you review where you are in this process and share your plans for improving your faithfulness to Christ’s mission and fruitfulness in your community *instead* of following the steps below. If you are unclear whether your congregation is involved in “a structured transformational process,” please discuss this with your District Superintendent well in advance of your Charge Conference.

I. Review last year's intentional transformational process

After locating the goals and strategies that your leadership set during the 2007 Charge Conference, ask your Leadership Team or Church Council to discuss the following questions:

- Did you fulfill the plans that you set out for yourselves as a congregation? If so, congratulations! If not, why not?
- Did they have the intended results? If so, please share your results! If not, why does your leadership feel this did not have the hoped for results?
- What did you learn from your experiences last year in attempting to be more faithful to Christ's mission and more fruitful in your community?

Please attach a copy your congregation's goals and strategies approved last year and a summary of your discussion of these review questions as part of your Charge Conference Report this year.



II. Select two of the practices to focus upon this year

Last year we focused on three of the five practices of fruitful congregations lifted up by Bishop Whitaker in his "Focus on the Fundamentals." This year, we ask each congregation to select two of the five practices and continue improving both their faithfulness and fruitfulness in living into these core practices within their community. As your Leadership Team or Church Council wrestles with which two practices deliberately to improve, consider using any or all the following ways to make your discernment:

- Pray for God's guidance as to where you should focus your attention this year. If each of these practices is essential to faithful and fruitful ministry bearing Christ's name, in which two practices is the Spirit leading you to strengthen your ministry in the coming year?
- Gather newsletters and bulletins from the last four or five months. On a legal sheet of paper turned horizontally, create five columns and write one of the practices at the top of each column: Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, Intentional Discipleship, Salty Service and Extravagant Generosity. Now sort

each of the activities and events mentioned in the newsletters and bulletins under one of the core practices. What patterns emerge? What does that suggest about where congregational leaders might need to focus their attention in order for your congregation to have a holistic and biblical ministry?

- Go to www.congregationaltransformation.com, under the “Methodist Way” tab and download the “*Methodist Way Congregational Self-Survey*.” This survey involves a group of key leaders rating the congregation’s strength in each of the five core ministry practices. By adding up the responses, leaders gain a perspective on the relative strengths of the five practices in their congregation as perceived by those who took the survey. What does this suggest about opportunities to improve your congregation’s ministry?
- In which of the five practices do you sense the congregation and community would receive the greatest return on your investment of attention, time, energy, creativity and resources?

III. For each of the two selected practices, identify a strategic initiative, a goal and action steps for implementation.

A strategic initiative is a general statement of what you hope to do to improve the faithfulness and fruitfulness of your selected practice. A goal gives the specific details of how you intend to achieve this initiative: who, what, when, where, how many, how much, etc. Action steps lay out the essential things that must happen for this goal to become a reality; in practice, each action step should include who is responsible for it and when it will be completed.

Below are two examples of what a congregation might choose to include in their Charge Conference report in fulfillment of this section. These are only examples and should not limit the Spirit-led creativity of congregational leaders.

Example I:

Practice: Intentional Discipling

Strategic Initiative: Develop a small group ministry to include the three key elements of in-reach (fellowship and pastoral care), up-reach (Bible study and prayer), and out-reach (hands-on ministry to those beyond the small group) as a tool for engaging 20 percent of the congregation in an intentional process of discipling.

Goal: Establish five small groups meeting the criteria of the key elements by March 2009. Martha James, in coordination with the pastor, will provide key leadership for developing the small group ministry.

Action Steps:

- Identify leadership (primary/apprentice) for the groups;
- Develop a leader covenant;
- Lead a 6-week pilot group with the selected leaders to model format;
- Provide small group leader basic skill training;

- Develop system for follow-up, evaluation, accountability;
- Select resources for use in up-reach component, for example: “Companions in Christ,” “Disciple Bible Study,” “Alpha,” “Christian Believer,” “Jesus in the Gospels”;
- Publicize small group ministry opportunity;
- Recruit members for small groups;
- Initiate small group meetings;
- Implement follow-up system;
- Evaluate the model and system.

Example II:

Practice: Extravagant Generosity

Strategic Initiative: Establish a ministry of assisting families to become financially independent, debt-free, and financially able to follow God’s leading in becoming extravagant in their generosity.

Goal: By February 2009 start a Financial Peace Ministry (produced by Dave Ramsey -- <http://www.daveramsey.com/fpu/church/>) to train families in how to put into practice biblical principles of financial stewardship. George Smith, in coordination with the pastor, will give leadership to establishing this ministry.

Action Steps:

- Order video materials/leader training packs for Financial Peace University;
- Recruit two group leaders to be trained in Financial Peace University materials;
- Conduct training of group leaders;
- Publicize the FPU opportunity utilizing video clips in training pack;
- Recruit the first two groups for FPU;
- Conduct the first two 12-week classes of FPU;
- Evaluate the impact on families involved (debt reduction, increased savings etc.);
- Produce video testimonies/conduct testimonies in worship;
- Recruit two groups of FPU class participants;
- Train personal financial counselors to be available to congregation.