

Call to Action

Setting goals to grow vital congregations

Frequently Asked Questions

Metrics and Goals for Congregations

The Call to Action report said that The United Methodist Church is adverse to metrics. We do not like to set goals and account for our progress toward the goals. The bishops and other church leaders recognize that our primary concern is souls not numbers. Metrics and numbers do not tell the whole story, but numbers do represent souls. When our numbers are declining, we are reaching fewer souls, and we are reducing our capacity to reach new souls for Jesus Christ and transform the world. When we do not set goals, we are susceptible to continuing to do the same things that are not working. Goals help us not only to measure outcomes but also to evaluate the effectiveness of ministries and strategies.

Why Set Goals?

Churches set goals to:

1. Give clarity and focus to ministry. Clarity and focus connects disciples to purpose and focuses attention toward the purpose of the church.
2. Move the church forward. Without goals, congregations can become stuck in a rut, doing the same things over and over without making progress.
3. Create greater accountability. Goals that are prayerfully developed and discerned with God in mind keep us accountable to the ministry of Jesus Christ. Holy Spirit inspired goals that are achieved make us more like the body of Christ.
4. Make the congregation better. There is a saying, *“you do not have to be sick to get better.”* Good goals make us better. Not for better sake but to make us better for serving the community.

Researchers have identified that goals make the difference in success or failure for people of similar backgrounds and educational standards. Studies find that 3% of people are highly successful in their life plans and careers, 30% are moderately successful and 67% just exist. The significant difference for the 3% who are highly successful is that they have written down specific goals. The 30% who are moderately successful have a general idea of where they are going but don't have any goals formalized. The rest are happy to watch the world go by. What is interesting is that people in the 30% category only need to put in a small effort to jump into the next group. The secret behind the effort is the development of habits and strategies which support the achievement of clear goals. (GoalMaker, by Kevin Seerup)

What will we measure and why?

What we measure receives attention. Across the denomination, we want to give attention to and, therefore, we will measure:

1. *Disciples in worship* - worship attendance;
2. *Disciples making new disciples* - number of professions of faith;
3. *Disciples growing in their faith* - number of small groups;
4. *Disciples engaging in mission* - number of disciples doing outreach in the community and the world; and
5. *Disciples sharing their resources for mission* - amount of money given to mission.

You will note that these are, for the most part, not activities but results, fruit of our ministry. Activity is not always the best measure. Measuring activity — for example, ministries or people contacted has some value, but it does not indicate if a congregation is achieving the desired outcomes or fruit. A congregation can be quite satisfied with its activity, but if the activity is not producing fruit, then this activity may be the wrong activity, may be focused internally only or may lack the power of the Holy Spirit. We are measuring the five fruits listed above for the following reasons:

1. While churches may measure different activities and results, across the entire connection we will have five common measurable fruits/goals so that we can learn from one another and focus resourcing on achieving particular fruit. There is synergy, learning and power when we do things together.
2. These measures are essential for the body of Christ. They were demonstrated in the Acts 2 church (Acts 2:41-47), and they are the areas of a church's life that are most often described in the New Testament.
3. These measures are core to the values of United Methodism — building up the body of Christ, doing evangelism and engaging disciples in changing the world.
4. Churches will use the following chart to identify their goals and submit this chart to their district superintendent by the end of 2011, March 2012 at the latest. Bishops will present to the 2012 General Conference their congregations' goals as a gift to the ministry of The United Methodist Church in the next quadrennium. This chart may be completed and submitted on line by going to www.umvitalcongregations.org and selecting the *Setting Goals* tab and following the instructions for setting goals. This web site will be live on July 15, 2011.

People and Ministry	2008	2009	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015
Disciples worship - Average worship attendance							
Disciples make new disciples - Number of people who joined by profession of faith							
Disciples engage in growing their faith - Number of small groups, Sunday school classes and Bible studies							
Disciples engage in mission - Number of people from the congregation engaged in local, national and international mission/outreach activities							
Disciples give to mission - The total amount given by a local church to other organizations for support of benevolent and charitable ministries (this amount includes apportionments paid and support for all United Methodist and non-United Methodist organizations active in work such as advocacy, education, health, justice, mercy, outreach and welfare anywhere in the world)							

How will the measures/results be used?

The general church and annual conferences exist to serve Jesus Christ by resourcing and supporting the local church. The general church, annual conferences and local churches work together to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The goals, planning processes and strategic visioning for vital congregations exist to enable each local church to have a vital future in disciple making. Achieving goals is not an end in itself, but rather a tool to see if what we are doing is producing fruit. The actual process of disciple making, the means of grace, is our main priority. Through goals, we are attempting to help each congregation be as strong and as vital as it has been gifted to become. The primary use of the goals is to provide opportunities for reflection and conversation for strengthening ministry.

Appropriate questions by conferences and congregations include:

1. After working on your goals and seeing your results, what have you learned?
2. From your learnings, what will you continue to do?
3. From your learnings, what will you do differently during the next six months?
4. What training and/or encouragement can the conference provide to support you in meeting your goals?

How is vitality measured?

The Call to Action measured congregational vitality as 1) growth over a five-year period; 2) the amount of engagement by disciples in worship, making new disciples, small groups and ministry; and 3) the generosity of a congregation for mission.

What if the numbers being received are not reliable?

Each congregation will measure against its own progress. It is not the intent to compare congregations to one another but to review its own progress. If a church overstates progress in one year, it will need to reconcile this with its results in the next year. The fruit for a congregation will be available online, and laity and clergy will be able to review their church's goals and results and ensure the numbers are accurate.

How will churches be supported to reach the goals?

A planning guide and resources will be available July 15, 2011, online at www.umvitalcongregations.org. Conferences will also identify how they will support congregations in reaching their goals.

Where do churches actually report their goals? Do they do that individually, or do conferences collect all the figures and just report the conference totals?

Each conference will determine how its congregations will assist congregations in setting and report their five goals. Resources have been prepared to guide congregational planning and goal setting. Also, an online resource has been developed to identify a church's prior experience in four of the goal areas based on a church's statistical reports. This is designed to help congregations set future goals based on past experience. This online resource also predicts a church's trends for 2012-2015 based on the church's past experience. These resources may be found at www.umvitalcongregations.org under the "goals" tab starting July 15, 2011. For conferences that use these resources, the reporting tool will also tally a district's totals and a conference's totals. It is each conference's responsibility to report the total goals for its congregations at General Conference.

What is the role of conference agencies, such as the Board of Congregational Development?

Conference agencies and staff are critical for growing vital congregations. They provide training, feedback and encouragement to congregations as they set their goals and work on achieving them. Conference leaders are encouraged to identify how they will work together to grow vital congregations within their conference.

Do churches need to stop all other programs/endeavors and start doing this?

No! You are encouraged to build on what you are already doing. There are numerous excellent strategies and training that conferences are employing that are helping congregations to grow worship, make new disciples, start more small groups, engage disciples in mission, and strengthen the financial health of congregations. We do encourage conferences to evaluate their own strategies and resourcing to determine their effectiveness. In the fall of 2011, on the www.umvitalcongregations.org site, it will share effective strategies and resources that are being employed by conferences, districts and congregations. We can all learn from one another as we increase the number of highly vital congregations within The United Methodist Church.

How will the "qualitative" affects of vital congregations be measured? Numbers don't tell us the whole picture.

Quality and excellence is essential for all we do for God. These five goals are not the only measurements for congregations. These are five that have been agreed to across the entire connection. Yes, that is right, for every congregation. But congregations and conferences may

have other measures that they will add to these. This is at the discretion of the congregation or conference. We anticipate that congregations will assess the quality of ministry and discipleship they are doing as well. Standardization for other measures are not as practical because expectations in congregations vary by size, experience and geography.

What will the metrics be used for?

We hope congregations will use the goals to evaluate their ministry and what God is calling them to do in the future. Conferences presently use the statistics for these goals to allocate resources -- financial, personnel and training resources. We anticipate that conferences will continue this practice in the future.