

A Strategic Plan for the Oklahoma Annual Conference

In this time of great need and opportunity, how does our Annual Conference participate in sowing mustard seeds of faith?

What must the Annual Conference do that individual local churches cannot?

Within the United Methodist Church, the role of the Annual Conference is to set the agenda and allocate resources in the most fruitful way so that more people, more diverse people, more younger people become world transforming disciples of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of the annual conference is to make disciples for Jesus Christ by equipping the local churches for the ministry and by providing a connection for ministry beyond the local church, all to the glory of God.”
¶ 601, **Book of Discipline**

Beliefs

The parable of the mustard seed indicates that growth and multiplication are expected signs of faith in God's kingdom.
Matthew 13:31-32, 17:20

- ❖ Our mission is to make and multiply disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world.
- ❖ We want to reach more people, more diverse people, and more younger people.
- ❖ We believe all congregations in Oklahoma have the potential to grow and multiply like mustard seeds.
- ❖ All of Oklahoma is our parish.
- ❖ Focusing on a few key areas (instead of everything) will increase our impact.
- ❖ Being faithful results in being fruitful.

Guiding Principles

The mission of the Church is to proclaim and embody God's Kingdom as revealed through Jesus Christ.
Matthew 28:18-20

- ❖ Discern what God is doing in our midst.
- ❖ Each congregation does its unique ministry based on its gifts and calling.
- ❖ Innovation in response to an honest assessment of reality.
- ❖ A movement, not a program.
- ❖ Informed by our Wesleyan heritage.
- ❖ Connection-wide discernment.
- ❖ No one-size fits all strategy, solutions or training.
- ❖ Open to creative solutions and emerging truths as informed by our Biblical heritage and power of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Shift from the local church serving the annual conference to the annual conference serving the local church which, in turn, serves the mission.
- ❖ Celebrate and grow what is working.
- ❖ Refocus our assets and energies to serve our mission.
- ❖ Positive accountability for all to our mission: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Our long-term strategy must focus on three areas that matter most, so that seeds sown become fruitful and multiply.

The birth of the Church on the day of Pentecost occurred as the Holy Spirit empowered the disciples to proclaim the message of the crucified and risen Christ. Part of the story of the Church's birth is defined by the Holy Spirit's empowerment of the apostles to speak in languages they did not understand. The other part of the story of the Church's birth is the Holy Spirit's empowerment of people from diverse backgrounds to hear the same message about God's mighty works. The Church exists through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Acts 2: 1-14

D Actively encourage fruitful congregations and ministries to multiply through the start of new faithful communities.

Growing Fruitful Congregations

We believe all congregations in Oklahoma have the potential to be Kingdom sowing congregations.

- ❖ Create a shared understanding about what is a fruitful congregation
- ❖ Encourage fruitful congregations to multiply themselves through starting new faith communities
- ❖ Invite congregations that are not bearing fruit to enter a discernment process
- ❖ Targeted spiritual growth training in churches of all sizes who desire to grow beyond their current plateau

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. 36) When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38) Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."
Matthew 9:35-38

2) Invest in lay, clergy, and indigenous leadership.

Spiritual Leaders (both clergy and lay)

Recruit, Assess, Equip and Send

We believe in the priesthood of all believers.

- ❖ Create a leadership training system for clergy and laity with measurable outcomes
- ❖ Training of coaches
- ❖ Opportunities for all to learn about starting or restarting churches
- ❖ Recruit indigenous leaders (including younger clergy)
- ❖ All clergy and lay leaders practice tithing

The Church is the body of Christ that is connected together in ministry that embodies the presence of the risen Christ. All parts of Christ's body are connected together in ministry and mission that strengthen and support the larger ministry of the Church.
1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Romans 12:4-8

3) Be more fruitful in our ministry partnerships in spaces local churches can't reach without abandoning those in need.

Promote Ministry Partnerships

(in the places the local church alone cannot)

- ❖ The local church connects with its own community as its "parish"
- ❖ Grow the Conference spiritually and proactively so that we are a force for justice in the state.
- ❖ Create a conference-wide young adult cluster
- ❖ Encourage and support racial/ethnic ministry (some of which will be anchored by existing churches)
- ❖ Continue to measure the fruitfulness of the Annual Conference and the ministries it supports (see back panel)
- ❖ Establish regional ministry teams to influence decisions about where new ministries/churches should be planted

Measuring Annual Conference Fruitfulness

We will measure the success of this strategic plan in many ways. Here are our current thoughts:

- ◆ The number of vital congregations is increasing over time.
Vital congregations demonstrate:
 - ❖ A clear and shared vision for ministry.
 - ❖ Intentional discipleship outside of worship.
 - ❖ Professions of faith.
 - ❖ Impact the local community.
 - ❖ Worship attendance growth.
 - ❖ Stewardship and tithing.
 - ❖ The means of grace.
 - ❖ Individuals going into full-time Christian service.
 - ❖ Compassion and justice.
- ◆ The number of vital congregations is increasing as the percentage of non-vital congregations is decreasing
- ◆ New church starts meet benchmarks set at launch and replicate within 10 years.
- ◆ Trends from local churches start to synchronize with demographics ... including age, ethnicity, culture and socio-economics.
- ◆ Increased number of pastors who are younger than 45.

What other measures might help us know whether the Oklahoma Annual Conference is being fruitful?

Recent Activities

- ◆ Holy Conferencing
- ◆ Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit Study
- ◆ Ministry Audits
- ◆ 40-Days of Prayer and Preparation

Next Steps (between now and Annual Conference 2009)

- ◆ If delegates vote to move forward, they introduce the plan to their local congregations who then:
 - ❖ Assess against the mission to be fruitful congregations
 - ❖ Study the mission field
 - ❖ Inventory resources (leadership, facilities, etc.)
 - ❖ Discern your unique opportunities
 - ❖ Create a plan with benchmarks.

Strategic Planning Committee

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Matthew 25:14-30

In this parable the servant who is faithful with the gift of five talents is given the talent from the servant who chose to bury, rather than multiply, the talent he have been given. The parable of talents indicates that God expects a faithful response to the gift of God's kingdom through the abundance of fruitfulness.

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“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.” *Matthew 13:31-32 NRSV*

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