



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Planning for lifelong faith formation

Written by Carol F. Krau
General Board of Discipleship

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Our Identity, Call, and Mission

About now a small voice in the back of your mind may be whispering, “What am I doing here? To what have I said yes? What is my role?” At the same time you may be aware that your congregation has extended to you a *call—a call to serve*. And you have said *yes—yes to leading in a vital mission*.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. You have agreed to serve as a leader bringing your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to the church. When the leaders focus on the church’s purpose—*its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ*—and link that purpose to the passions of the people, amazing things can happen.

The fundamental way we fulfill our mission is to reach out to people in the name of Jesus Christ, to relate people to God, to nurture and strengthen them in their journey of discipleship, and to send them into the world to be the church—inviting and receiving others in the name of Jesus Christ. We call this the primary task of The United Methodist Church.

Effective leaders keep the whole of the primary task in their sight, working to keep all of its aspects in concert.

Leaders in the church must be first, and foremost, spiritual leaders who model and embrace Christian discipline and teaching. *By practicing the means of grace—prayer, fasting, studying Scripture, corporate worship, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Christian conversation, and acts of mercy—church leaders stay tuned to the mission of the church and live out the primary task.* Members and would-be members should be able to look to a congregation’s leaders for spiritual example and direction, because true leaders are known by their fruits. People’s lives are changed through their influence.

Leaders use their gifts and talents to enable others to use their gifts and talents to the fullest potential. The flow of information, inspiration, guidance, and vision from leaders is an encouragement to others on their spiritual journey. Leaders help others to see new possibilities. When leaders are focused on the mission of the church, community is built and ministry occurs. The church focused on God is alive with creative energy aimed at transformation.

Four Essential Leadership Functions

Church leaders support and strengthen the church when they pay attention to these leadership functions: (1) help people discover the current

reality in which they live; (2) bring together the congregation's understandings of current reality and desired reality into a shared vision; (3) develop the plans to help the community move from current reality toward the reality of its shared vision; and finally, (4) monitor the whole work of the church as the congregation moves with God's guidance toward its vision.

1. Discovering Current Reality

Accurately describing current reality—the way things are—may be the most important function of leadership. The booklets in this Guideline series offer suggestions for leaders to pay attention to the various committees of the church's ministry. In addition, it is critical for church leaders—lay and clergy—to spend time together discussing the ministry of the whole congregation. The conversation needs to include attentiveness to God's guidance and everything that describes a congregation's "what we are, here and now." Because God is always doing a new thing, this job is continuous. When we pay attention to change, we provide a base of integrity and strength from which to move into the future. Faith in Jesus Christ and a spiritual centering in God offers the strongest foundation to move people fearlessly through the massive changes of the twenty-first century.

2. Naming Shared Vision

Ask the question, "What do you want more than anything else in the world?" and most persons will give a response that indicates that they want to live in a world filled with love, faith, security, and meaning. Because persons desire a positive future, they are willing to invest themselves in organizations that are committed to it. By its very nature, the church is devoted to the creation of a better future. When the church promises to move people personally and corporately toward their desired reality, people will invest time, energy, and resources into the church. As people see their own desires linked to the congregational vision and deeper understanding of God's future, they deepen their commitment and involvement. Building this link is a vital role of leadership.

Naming a shared vision is accomplished by asking people about their lives and their faith, and listening very carefully. By listening, we mean deep listening—the kind that requires setting aside our own agendas and entering into the worldviews of others, and listening for God through the conversation. It is a significant shift in our understanding of leadership in the church to move from telling people what we think they need to know to listening to people in order to find out who they are and what their desired realities are. Effective spiritual leaders listen to the hearts of people and begin to articulate a shared vision.

3. Developing Bridges

To span the gulf between our current reality and the hope expressed in the shared vision, leaders must build a bridge. The third critical function of leadership is to plan actions and develop systems that create the bridge across this gulf. Leaders who are elected to administrative and program committees are responsible for the ongoing work of the church and must pay attention to the present. At the same time, leaders *must* be focused on the future—keeping today and tomorrow in tension—ensuring that the church doesn't get stuck in the past, present, or future.

Church leaders who are attentive to God's leading and who can hold the tension between today and tomorrow are *visionary leaders*. Visionary leaders see it all—current reality, desired reality, and the bridges to get from one to the other.

4. Monitoring the Journey

Perhaps the most critical task for leaders is keeping an eye on the whole of the faith journey of the congregation. When leaders are constantly caught up in “doing” the administrative and program work of the church, there is not any time left for “being” with God in prayer to discern the leading of the Spirit for the congregation. Leaders must step back from “doing” constant activities in order to pay attention to the total direction of the church's mission and ministry. All elected and appointed leaders must spend time together listening to God in prayer, Bible study, conversation, and other means of grace in order to lead the entire community in the work of Christ. Anything less is not Christian spiritual leadership.

What's My Job?

You plan educational ministries for persons of all ages so that they will have opportunities to seek to know God and discover ways to live as Christian disciples. You will work closely with the church council to align your work with the mission of the congregation. You may also work with an education ministry team, a Sunday school superintendent, and/or age-level coordinators.

What Are My Basic Responsibilities?

- To listen to God through worship, prayer, Bible study, and conversation with Christian friends to discern God's call for your congregation.

- To listen to people in order to determine needs and develop opportunities that help them strengthen their relationship with God and respond to God's grace.
- To convene the ministry team for Christian education and/or nurture.
- To work with your pastor and the ministry team to build and interpret a congregational vision for Christian education.
- To assess needs, identify gaps, and set priorities for your congregation's educational ministries.
- To plan and evaluate settings for teaching, learning, and practicing spiritual disciplines for persons of all ages.
- To identify and equip effective leaders for each educational setting.
- To identify needed resources for each educational setting.
- To develop and administer the annual education budget.

TIP: Listening to people will help you connect the work of the congregation with the hopes and dreams of the people you serve. Ask someone to be your partner. Set a goal to interview at least one person every three months. Include persons from the community as well as the congregation. The interview should be informal. Decide who will ask questions and who will take notes. Ask open-ended questions, such as "Tell me about. . . ." After several interviews, review what you have heard, and look for patterns and themes. Use this information with the ministry team as you plan.

What Is My Relationship with Other Education Leaders?

Depending on the size and needs of your congregation, you may work with other educational leaders. These leaders may include a Sunday school superintendent, a small group ministries coordinator, age-level coordinators, or others determined by your congregation.

These leaders may assist in planning so that all educational ministries support one another and operate from the same understanding of the congregation's mission. Together you are responsible for tasks such as:

- Publicizing and promoting opportunities for teaching and learning;
- Supervising the Sunday school and age-level ministries;
- Supervising weekday ministries;
- Planning special events, such as vacation Bible school or seasonal activities;
- Providing ongoing opportunities for teachers to build knowledge and skills;

- Ordering curriculum resources and purchasing supplies and equipment;
- Maintaining safe, clean, and attractive facilities; and
- Maintaining records.

How Do I Create an Effective Team?

Pray and study the Scriptures together in your team meetings. Include group-building activities such as storytelling, sharing joys and concerns.

Before each meeting, ask team members to identify items that need to be included on the agenda. Invite team members to share in leading the meeting.

Create a meeting climate of respect and trust. Encourage different ideas and opinions. Ask questions to help the team explore assumptions, values, and likely outcomes for possibilities under consideration.

Recognize and celebrate the gifts and abilities of each team member. Express your appreciation for the contribution of each team member. Draw on the strengths of each person as you plan.

How Do I Relate to Other Groups in My Church?

A. Churchwide Planning and Administration

1. The Charge Conference

The charge conference is the primary administrative body in the local church. It sets policy, approves the annual budget, endorses the direction for the ministries of the congregation, and elects persons to leadership positions.

You may report about educational ministries to the charge conference at its annual meeting. You may also receive guidance from the charge conference related to congregational priorities for teaching and learning.

2. The Church Council

The church council, or the equivalent structure in your congregation (such as the administrative board), is responsible for planning and coordinating

the congregation's ministries. This body insures that every aspect of the church's mission is adequately planned and supported.

You may be a member of the church council. You keep the council apprised of your ministry team's plans.

B. Program Development and Support Level

Beyond the church council, each congregation determines the amount of organization needed to plan for the faith formation of its constituents. Here are two possible bodies related to Christian education: (1) the ministry team for Christian education (or nurture) and (2) age-level and life-span ministries.

3. The Ministry Team for Christian Education or Nurture

Members of the ministry team plan for the full spectrum of the congregation's needs: children, youth, families, single adults, teachers, persons with special needs, and others. The pastor, along with any Christian education staff, serves as an ex officio member of the ministry team. The team builds a congregational system for teaching and learning that addresses these needs comprehensively. The church council elects the members of the team.

4. Age-Level and Life-Span Ministries

Age-level and life-span ministries may consist of one or more coordinators, one or more councils (leadership teams), or a combination of coordinators and councils. Each coordinator or council acts as an advocate for a certain group in the church, for example, families or older adults.

The church council elects coordinators and council members. Age-level coordinators serve as the chairpersons of the age-level councils. These council members keep other ministry teams and individuals informed of issues and matters concerning the group they represent.

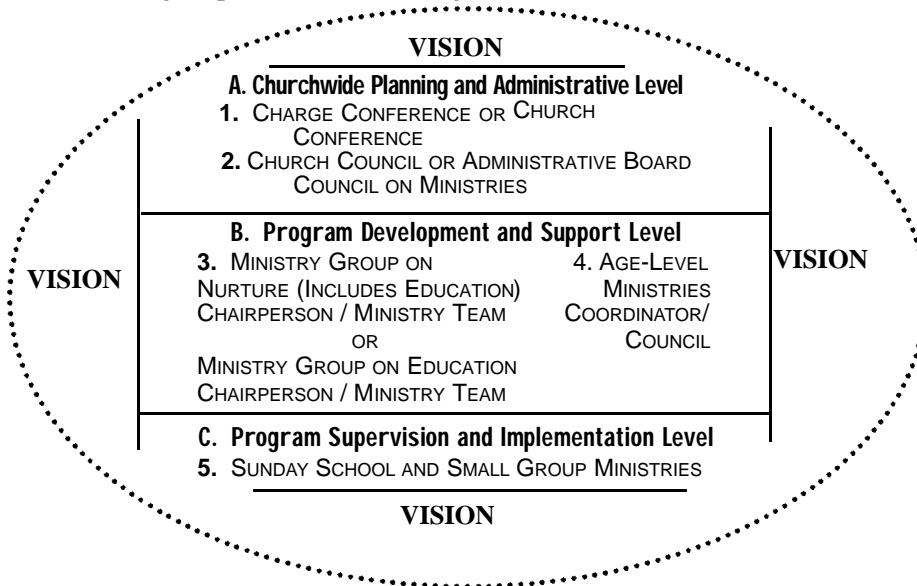
C. Program Implementation Level

5. The Sunday School and Small Group Ministries

The Sunday school and small group ministries are mandated parts of the local church. (See ¶255, *The Book of Discipline* 2000.) These ministries operate under the guidance of leadership designated by the church council. These ministries enable persons to experience God's presence, build knowledge and skills for discipleship, receive and express support, and participate in service in Christ's name.

A Model for Organizing Christian Education

Look at the following diagram to review possible ways your church can be organized for educational ministry. The congregation's vision provides the impetus for the way that a congregation structures itself. The diagram suggests three basic components of organization and then offers ideas for organizing for that component. The simplest structure would consist of the church school being responsible only to the church council and the church council being responsible to the charge or church conference.



What Is Our Team Trying to Accomplish?

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.

—Romans 12:2

For United Methodists, the Christian life is a process of being transformed by God's grace into the likeness of God's Son, Jesus Christ. Christian education provides essential support to this lifelong process of transformation. As you plan your educational ministries, you will want to pay attention to ways these ministries assist persons in developing their relationship with God and in living faithfully in the world. Your ministries should help children, youth, and adults grow in

- Knowledge of the Scripture and tradition;
- Skills in practicing the means of grace; and
- Abilities to live as accountable disciples.

The General Rule of Discipleship

United Methodists take discipleship seriously! John Wesley organized classes to help Christians maintain the discipline necessary for following Jesus Christ. Class members met regularly to “watch over one another in love.” They were accountable to one another for their discipleship.

The classes used the General Rule of Discipleship to guide their practice. Today we state this rule as: “To witness to Jesus Christ in the world and follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

You can see the strong connection between loving God and loving neighbor in this rule for discipleship. United Methodists have always been clear that faith and service go hand in hand.

Think about how your educational ministries support persons in your congregation as they seek to know God and live as Christian disciples.

As you can see, Christian education involves much more than giving and receiving information about the Bible, the church, and God. Christian education is relational in nature and experiential in practice. It involves the whole person—heart, mind, body, and spirit. It is about who we are as God’s people as well as what we do and what we know.

People in your congregation, including members of your ministry team, will have had varied experience with Christian education. Some will have attended Sunday school since childhood; others may have never participated in a class or small group. Most will be somewhere in between those two ends of the spectrum.

It’s better not to assume that everyone understands the purpose of Christian education in the same way. You may find quite different perspectives about what you’re trying to accomplish. Your work will be more effective if you spend time as a team exploring your purpose, praying together, and coming to consensus about your goals.

Use the following resources to explore your purpose:

(1) The Bible: Matthew 25:31-46; Luke 10:25-42; John 21:15-19; Romans 12:1-18; Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-13

(2) *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation* (Discipleship Resources, 1993).

The Means of Grace

Throughout the centuries, Christians have discovered spiritual practices that have helped them know God. John Wesley called these practices *means of grace*—means by which we experience God’s grace. Wesley’s classes supported members in using these spiritual practices and deepening their faith and practice. These practices included:

- Prayer
- Study of the Scriptures
- Worship (especially celebrating the Lord’s Supper)
- Fasting
- Christian conversation
- Works of mercy (showing compassion and working for justice)

Your educational ministries should help persons learn to use these spiritual disciplines. It is not enough to know *about* prayer—we need to pray. It is not enough to know *about* the Bible—we need to incorporate its wisdom and truth into our daily living. It is not enough to know *about* worship—our lives should be shaped by the reality of God’s presence and, therefore, filled with joy and praise.

TIP: To help your congregation understand the purpose of Christian education, ask your pastor to preach a series of sermons on the means of grace. You may ask adult Sunday school classes and other small groups, such as United Methodist Women circles or the choir, to study the scripture passages listed above. Ask a representative from those groups to share with your ministry team what they learned about the goals for educational ministries. Use their insights to help build a congregational vision for Christian education.

Getting Started

Pray for your team, your pastor, and your congregation. Ask that God will guide your leadership and focus the work of the ministry team.

Talk with your pastor and other leaders about the mission and vision of your congregation. Learn how Christian education supports the mission and vision.

Identify resources that can support your leadership. See the list on page 30. Contact your conference office and find out who provides leadership for Christian education in the annual conference and in your district. Ask to be put on the mailing list to receive Christian education information and your conference and district newsletters.

Call each ministry team member to introduce yourself to the members who are not acquainted with you and to welcome new team members. Talk with team members about their particular area of responsibility—what they hope to accomplish, how their work fits into the overall vision for Christian education, how you can support their ministry.

Convene a meeting of the team within thirty days of the beginning of the planning year to get acquainted, to explore the purpose of your ministry, and to acquaint team members with the current plan for educational ministries.

TIP: You may have other new persons on the team. Make sure that they have a copy of the Guidelines related to their area of responsibility. (See back cover for a list of titles.) You may also want to read copies of Guidelines related to age-level ministries so that you better understand how that work relates to the ministry of Christian education.

How Do I Plan?

Be clear about what you're trying to accomplish. As your team continues to pray, study, and work together, develop a mental picture of what your congregation would be like if it were effectively preparing and supporting persons in living as disciples of Jesus Christ. Invite as many individuals and groups as possible to provide feedback and input for this vision.

Review your current educational ministries. Think about who is in your congregation and your community. Identify settings that are helping accomplish your purpose. Be honest about the programs that are no longer effective in helping persons grow in faith. Make a list of your strengths and your gaps in ministry.

Recognize points at which you need to do some research or additional learning. You may find that “business as usual” doesn't work anymore. Spend time listening to persons in the congregation. Read and discuss a book together. Meet with a leader who can help you learn about the changes taking place, and develop new strategies for Christian education in today's context.

Explore alternatives. Be open to new ideas. Learn what other congregations are doing in Christian education. At this stage, avoid “we've always done it that way” and “it'll never work” thinking.

Decide which possibilities will be most effective in moving your congregation toward its vision. Set priorities related to what needs to be done first, next, and so on. Determine a time line for your work so that you can measure your progress and readjust plans when necessary.

Develop an action plan. Clarify all the details for each educational opportunity. Include information related to the following:

- Target audience
- Date, time, and location
- Leadership
- Resources and equipment
- Room setup
- Publicity
- Budget
- Evaluation

Establish a feedback loop. Use surveys, questionnaires, and other means to receive feedback from leaders and participants in each setting. Use the feedback to plan more effectively, build on your strengths, and eliminate unnecessary work.

TIP: You can develop a standard form to be used with any educational setting. At the top of the form, include a space for entering the name and date of the event. Then provide several questions for reflection, with space for written responses. Use questions such as:

- What did you learn (or experience)?
- What was most helpful about this opportunity?
- How will you use what you learned and experienced?
- What are your suggestions for the next time this opportunity is offered?

Celebrate your ministry. In your ministry team meetings, have a party to celebrate the conclusion of a special event. Send a note of thanks to Sunday school teachers and other group leaders. In worship invite the members of the congregation to give thanks for what they are learning and for how they are growing in faith.

The Ministry of Christian Education: Transformation for Discipleship

Through Christian education we invite people and communities of faith to be transformed as they are inspired and challenged to:

Know and experience God through Jesus Christ,
Claim and live God's promises, and
Grow and serve as Christian disciples.

(Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation, p. 5.)

What Do I Plan?

The process of transformation is indeed the goal of your ministry. This process involves developing and strengthening skills, identifying and shaping values, building knowledge, and experiencing supportive community.

Our denomination understands this process as *sanctification*—going on to perfection. As our experience of God deepens, we become more Christlike. We mature in faith and develop a coherence of belief and behavior.

Your congregation is unique. Therefore, as you plan with your goal in mind, settings, content, and the particular details related to each educational opportunity should be designed to match your congregation. However, as you and your team work together to determine the exact ministries needed in your congregation, you may want to reflect on how your congregation assists persons to grow and mature in the following areas:

Knowledge of the Bible

- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Major biblical persons
- Major biblical events
- Major biblical themes

Skills related to learning the Bible

- Methods of Bible study
- Resources for Bible study (concordances, atlases, dictionaries, etc.)

Knowledge of the church

- Christian worship
- Christian sacraments (baptism and Holy Communion)
- United Methodist heritage

Spiritual formation

- Methods for prayer
- Bible study skills
- Fasting
- Participation in worship
- Ability to share faith stories

Connecting faith and daily life

- Building healthy families and communities
- Incorporating ethics in the workplace
- Knowing issues affecting your community, the nation, and the world
- Participating in mission and outreach
- Working for peace and justice

Skills for connecting faith and daily life

- Recognizing assumptions
- Identifying and evaluating options
- Reflecting on personal experience in light of Scripture and tradition
- Making decisions consistent with values and beliefs

Forming values/characteristics consistent with the gospel

- Compassion
- Loving-kindness
- Hospitality
- Patience
- Peace
- Generosity
- Self-control
- Mercy
- Hope
- Joy

As you consider this list, what would you add? What would you eliminate? Talk with your team about how you plan for children, youth, and adults in order to build these skills, knowledge, and values. Review and evaluate your current educational ministries in light of this conversation. Identify gaps and priorities for planning future ministries.

When Do I Plan?

Planning is an ongoing process. Advance planning may be done yearly, quarterly, or monthly. The type of learning opportunity and time needed to prepare for it determine how far in advance you should begin.

The “Monthly Planning Guide” on page 18 suggests a possible flow based on the calendar year. Depending on your meeting schedule, combine tasks as necessary. You may want to meet monthly if your team is new so that the team can learn its responsibilities and receive needed support and guidance.

TIP: Remember to check the church calendar when scheduling events in order to avoid conflicting with other church programming that involves the same people you want included in your event. As soon as your dates are confirmed, call the church office to place the dates on the church calendar.

Each quarter you will want to finalize plans for events and/or classes taking place that quarter. In addition, you will begin planning for events and/or learning opportunities scheduled for the next three months.

For Whom Do I Plan?

God is calling your congregation to ministry with God's people. God's people in your community include persons who are of certain ages, who are employed in various occupations, and who come from particular cultural heritages. Through Christian education, these specific people come to recognize themselves as a part of all God's people, who extend beyond your community.

As you plan, focus on people and their relationships with God and one another. Start with people and plan ministries that address their real-life needs instead of planning ministries and then finding ways to fit people into them. The first way of planning is relationally focused; the latter method is institutionally focused. You are not trying to maintain an institution; you are working to connect people with the risen Lord!

Who are the people in your congregation and in your community? What are their needs? What are their gifts? Perhaps you will find

- Children whose parents are at work when they come home from school;
- Single adults with no family nearby;
- Middle-aged adults caring for aging parents;
- Persons with physical and mental disabilities;
- Young people who hunger for a meaningful relationship with an adult; or
- Senior adults who are coping with retirement or the loss of a spouse.

Knowing as much as possible about the people in and around your congregation will help you set priorities, determine new settings for ministry, and reach out to new people.

A Monthly Planning Guide

<p>January Celebrate Epiphany. Hold a mission study or mission fair. Publicize Lenten studies. Offer teacher development options.</p>	<p>February Offer Lenten studies. Plan for Holy Week and Easter. Begin planning for vacation Bible school. Identify needs for summer educational settings.</p>	<p>March Continue Lenten studies. Plan for Pentecost. Review plans for confirmation service. Enlist leaders for summer and vacation Bible school.</p>
<p>April Celebrate Easter. Plan for teacher appreciation. Continue planning for vacation Bible school. Promote summer camping.</p>	<p>May Celebrate families. Hold confirmation service. Celebrate Pentecost. Recognize teachers and small-group leaders. Publicize vacation Bible school.</p>	<p>June Review needs for fall educational settings. Enlist leaders for fall educational settings. Set date for Rally Day and/or Promotion Sunday. Plan for fall teacher orientation.</p>
<p>July Hold vacation Bible school. Begin plans for after-school ministries. Plan for Christian Education Sunday. Sponsor a mission project.</p>	<p>August Publicize fall plans for education. Hold teacher orientation meeting. Finalize plans for Promotion Sunday, Rally Day, and Christian Education Sunday.</p>	<p>September Celebrate Rally Day and/or Promotion Sunday and Christian Education Sunday. Publicize plans for confirmation class and new-member classes. Present Bibles to third graders.</p>
<p>October Plan mission emphasis for Thanksgiving season. Begin plans for Advent.</p>	<p>November Implement mission emphasis. Publicize Advent studies and events.</p>	<p>December Hold Advent/Christmas studies and events. Plan for Epiphany and Lent.</p>

How Do I Plan Ministry Team Meetings?

Before the Meeting

- Establish an agenda that allows for dialogue, reflection, and decision making. Check with team members to find out if they have items for the agenda.
- Check the date and time to avoid conflicts with activities of other important congregational groups.
- Give team members the date, time, place, agenda, and other materials far enough in advance so that they can prepare to participate actively.

- Contact the church office if you have special needs related to room arrangement or equipment.

At the Meeting

- Begin on time.
- Include a focusing activity that strengthens team members' relationships with God and one another and assists the team in understanding your ministry.
- Designate a person to keep track of decisions, assignments, and deadlines. Provide for balanced participation by persons of various viewpoints.
- Adjust the agenda so that priority items receive adequate attention.
- Ask for feedback on the effectiveness of the meeting so that you can incorporate helpful suggestions into future team meetings.

TIP: At the first meeting you chair, ask the team to establish ground rules for how you will work together. This agreement can help the team identify behavior and processes that will invite collaboration, encourage effective communication, foster Christian community, and reduce misunderstanding. Here are suggested ground rules:

1. Listen to one another.
2. Ask questions for clarification.
3. Discuss issues, not persons.
4. Be willing to consider opinions that are different from yours.

After the Meeting

- Promptly review your notes on decisions and assignments to make sure they are clear and accurate.
- Send out minutes to remind others of the assignments they accepted.
- Touch base with persons who are working on assignments to be sure they have been able to make progress. Find out if they need any assistance.
- Thank persons who have provided special resources or assistance.
- Reflect on the decisions and plans in light of the vision and goals of the congregation so that the group may continue on course. Think about additional information the team needs to continue with plans.
- Begin building the agenda for the next meeting.

What Is Included in the Education Budget?

You are responsible for developing and overseeing the budget for educational ministries in your congregation. You will submit an annual budget request to the committee on finance. The charge conference will approve the final budget.

Categories frequently found in the education budget include the following:

- Curriculum resources
- Books and videos
- Supplies
- New equipment
- Equipment maintenance
- Registration fees for leadership development events
- Honoraria for speakers and/or consultants
- Food and/or gifts to express appreciation for teachers and small group leaders

TIP: Ask your pastor, the chairperson of the finance committee, or the church treasurer to give you copies of the budget for last year and this year. Check the estimated needs against actual expenses to determine adjustments for the coming year.

Each congregation is responsible for deciding how to build a budget. Your budget may include only items listed above related to Sunday school and teachers' meetings. However, you may need to budget for all items related to age-level ministries as well. If that is the case, you may include funds for programs, such as:

- Vacation Bible school
- Weekday ministries
- Youth group(s)
- Special events for the liturgical year, such as an Advent workshop
- Senior adult ministries
- Mission education

TIP: If your congregation has children's or youth choir, work with the choir director(s) to determine budget needs to support that ministry. Decide who will include that request in their budget. Similarly, you will want to cooperate with the director of the preschool, day care, or parents' day out programs if any of these are part of your congregation's ministry

How Does Our Ministry Team Develop Effective Teachers?

The eighth chapter of Acts tells the story of Philip meeting an Ethiopian official who was reading from the book of Isaiah. When Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading, the man replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” The story then goes on to say that Philip “began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). As a result of their encounter, the Ethiopian official was baptized.

This brief story illustrates the importance of teachers in the faith formation of persons. It is not unusual for persons to name a Sunday school teacher from years ago as one of the most significant persons in shaping their faith. Teachers serve as interpreters of Scripture and spiritual mentors. They stimulate thought, encourage Christian values, and help develop decision-making skills. They become true “friends in faith.”

Critical Processes for Effective Teachers

Teachers are vital to accomplishing the goals of your educational ministries. In order for persons to experience the transforming presence of God, teachers need knowledge and skill in several critical processes:

- Keeping in touch with God—developing a relationship with God through using spiritual disciplines;
- Keeping in touch with God’s people—listening intently to the hopes and dreams of persons in their class or group, understanding any special needs, and accommodating their learning styles;
- Keeping in touch with experience—reflecting on family, work, and society in light of Scripture and tradition;
- Keeping in touch with the world—participating in the ongoing mission and ministry of the church; and
- Keeping in touch with teaching—developing the ability to use a variety of teaching methods and resources.

As your ministry team identifies persons in your congregation with the gifts and graces for teaching, you will want to support them through encouraging their spiritual growth as well as equipping them with the skills and knowledge they need to teach effectively. Talk with teachers to find out how you can provide support for individual and/or small group reflection, discernment, and learning.

TIP: New teachers will benefit from the wisdom of experienced teachers. Ask one of your strong teachers to mentor a new teacher. Consider establishing teacher apprentices by teaming an inexperienced teacher with an experienced teacher. Invite effective teachers to lead workshops on teaching methods and share ideas with new teachers.

How Do We Identify Teachers?

Pray. Begin by praying for God's guidance. Ask for wisdom in discerning whom God would call.

Work as a team. Ask other members of the ministry team, the Sunday school superintendent, members of the nominating committee, and/or the pastor to help with this ongoing task. Review needs several times during the year.

Develop a job description for teachers. Include this information:

1. Name and ages of the class or group
2. Time, date, and location of the class or group
3. Specific responsibilities for leading this class or group
4. Abilities and knowledge needed
5. Time involvement and requested length of commitment

Formulate policies to screen all volunteer or paid leadership with children and youth. Be clear that these policies communicate and support our belief in the sanctity of human life. State how these policies protect adult leadership as well as children and youth.

Establish expectations. Review the critical processes for effective teaching and your vision for Christian education. Discuss what you expect from teachers and what they can expect from the congregation.

Assess your needs. In what settings are teachers needed? Will those presently teaching continue to do so? Prepare a chart listing all classes and positions. Allow space for noting who will contact each person, when, and what response was received. (Include substitutes and team-teaching possibilities.)

Identify potential teachers and leaders. Make a list of persons with the gifts for teaching. Include persons who can develop these gifts and persons who already possess them. Ask your pastor and congregation for input.

How Do We Invite Teachers?

Ask people to teach. Talk with each person individually. If you send a letter of invitation, follow up with a personal conversation.

Explain the responsibilities. Talk about your congregation's vision for Christian education as it relates to the formation of Christian disciples. Make a connection between this vision and the role teachers play in helping your congregation move toward its vision.

TIP: If you're visiting with a person who has never taught before, bring along a sample of the curriculum. Point out the features that will assist him or her in preparing to teach. Describe the group with whom the person will be working. If the person is being invited to be a part of a teaching team, share information about other members of the team.

Describe the person's gifts. Explain why you believe she or he is the right teacher for a particular group. Name how the gifts will meet the needs of the class or group.

Ask the prospective teachers to pray. Encourage persons to pray for guidance as they consider your invitation. If the answer is affirmative, thank them. If they say no, lovingly respect their decision.

A Covenant with Teachers

As a way to formally acknowledge the call of God in teachers' lives, work with your teachers to develop a covenant. Talk together about your vision for Christian education and what is required of teachers in order for the vision to become reality. Ask teachers what they need from the congregation in order to be effective.

Then write down your agreement, and have the teachers, pastor, and members of the ministry team sign the covenant. A sample agreement might include the following:

1. Teachers will prayerfully plan and prepare.
2. Teachers will participate in worship.
3. The congregation will support teachers' spiritual growth.
4. The congregation will provide opportunities for teachers' continued growth in knowledge and skills.

How Do We Equip and Support Teachers?

Offer orientation-to-teaching sessions several times during the year. Invite potential teachers to explore whether teaching might be their gift.

Provide new teachers with information and assistance. Explain procedures for obtaining supplies, keeping attendance, collecting offerings, and other group needs. Furnish help with lesson planning and curriculum use.

Determine teachers' needs. Find out what knowledge and skills your teachers need to develop or strengthen and how to support their spiritual formation.

Provide ongoing opportunities for development. Plan to meet with your teachers once a quarter if possible. Schedule a presentation that addresses one of their expressed needs. Contact your conference or district office for names of people who can lead teacher development events. Also include a time for teachers to raise questions, identify concerns, and share advice and success stories.

TIP: In addition to teachers' meetings, plan for ways that teachers can increase their effectiveness individually. Provide articles, books, videos, and audiotapes related to teaching, the Bible, age-level development, and/or spiritual disciplines.

Express appreciation. There are many ways to say thank you. Consider which of these ideas might work for you:

- Dedicating teachers and their work during a worship service
- Holding a teachers' brunch, picnic, or covered-dish dinner
- Sending thank-you notes
- Writing newsletter articles that recognize the commitment of a teacher
- Purchasing a book for the church library in honor of a teacher

TIP: Provide child care during teachers' meetings and other special events planned for teachers. You might also schedule times for teachers to come to the church for planning and preparing their rooms. Check to see if teachers need child care during those planning times.

Pray for your teachers. Above all, continue to pray for each teacher, for his or her students, and for your congregation.

Basic Resources for Teachers

Make a list of resources for teachers available through your church library. Distribute the resource list to teachers. Basic resources include:

- Bible commentaries, such as the New Interpreter's Bible
- Bible dictionary
- Bible atlas
- Concordance
- Children's illustrated Bible storybooks
- Resources that describe age-level characteristics of children, youth, and adults
- Books or videos that describe teaching methods
- Devotional books and periodicals

Keeping Teachers Informed

Information and frequent communication build confidence and increase teachers' comfort levels. The following list of questions was created to help you anticipate the needs of the teachers and leaders in your church.

Meeting space:

- Where does the class or group meet?
- Are there restrictions on how the teachers may use or decorate the space?
- Do other groups use the same space at another time?

Time schedules:

- What time are group leaders expected to arrive?
- How long does each group meet?
- Will other groups be using the space immediately prior to or after this class?
- When can leaders prepare the space for their group?

Curriculum/resources:

- How do group leaders participate in selecting resources for their group?
- When and how do teachers receive their curriculum?
- Is extra curriculum material available?
- What do teachers do with resources when finished with them?
- How do teachers provide input and evaluation of the resources?

Resources, supplies, and equipment:

- What supplies are available?
- Does the church have media resources and audiovisual equipment? Where are they stored? How do teachers arrange to review media resources?
- Does the church have a library? Where is it?
- What is the procedure for checking out books, supplies, and equipment?
- When do teachers have access to resources and supplies?
- What if a teacher needs supplies the church doesn't have?
- Is there a budget to reimburse group leaders for out-of-pocket expenses?

Safety and emergency procedures:

- Who is designated to pick up each member of a children's class or group?
- How do teachers know if class members have any allergies or other medical conditions that might affect their participation in the group?
- Where is the first-aid kit?
- Where is the closest available telephone?
- What is the telephone number for the nearest hospital?
- Where are the fire alarms and fire extinguishers located?
- What is the emergency evacuation plan?
- What should a teacher do if he suspects that a group member is being abused?

How Do We Select Curriculum Resources?

As well as planning the educational settings your congregation will provide, you have responsibility for identifying appropriate resources for each setting. With your ministry team, review the purpose of your educational ministries as you have come to understand it through study, conversation, and prayer. Identify the biblical and theological foundations that undergird your purpose. Restate what values, attitudes, behavior, knowledge, and skills you hope persons will develop through participating in your congregation's ministry of Christian education.

This conversation should assist you in identifying the criteria you will use for selecting resources. In addition, you might want to include criteria from this list:

- Resource provides teachers with ideas to connect the Scripture with the daily lives of their group members;
- Resource supports teachers' spiritual formation;
- Instructions, when included, are clear and easy to follow;
- Group experiences include worship and other spiritual disciplines;
- Learning activities deepen knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith;
- Illustrations, when included, depict the diversity of all God's people;
- Group activities provide for a variety of learning styles;
- Group experiences create a loving, supportive group;
- Learning activities match the abilities of the age group for which they are planned;
- Resource fosters personal encounter of God's grace through Jesus Christ;
- Learning experiences develop attitudes of compassion, care, and hope;
- Resource provides opportunities to expand critical thinking skills;
- Group activities increase skills in living the faith and serving the needs of others; and
- Group activities inspire teachers and group members alike to commit their lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

TIP: Before you purchase curriculum resources, preview samples at a Cokesbury or other Christian bookstore. Your conference may have copies in the media center for your review. Check with other congregations in your area, particularly large churches, and ask if they have copies of any resources that you are considering.

Affirming Our Ministry

You may want to use the following quotation from *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation* (pp. 6-7) when you identify criteria for choosing curriculum resources. Discuss how this quote identifies some of the results you hope will occur through your educational ministries. List any other results that are not evident in the quote.

We believe in God, revealed through Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and creation, as witnessed to through the scripture, the worship, and the traditions of the faith, and we affirm that all of us, through our participation in Christian education, will:

Declare that God is present and active in the world;
Know the content of the Bible and the Christian faith;
Reflect on, discuss, witness to, and live our faith;
Make decisions based on our Christian values;
Discern and respond to the ministry to which God calls us;
Grow in God's grace and in the gifts God has given us for ministry;
Engage in a lifelong journey of learning and living the faith.

How Do I Know What Is Available?

Forecast, an annual catalog describing all available United Methodist curriculum resources, is mailed annually to each local church. There are quarterly supplements for *Forecast*, and each catalog includes a curriculum order form. Free additional copies may be ordered from Cokesbury.

TIP: Place orders for curriculum six to eight weeks prior to the date needed. You can order curriculum by mail, phone, or fax. Use the order blank found in *Forecast* or order by phone between 7:00 A.M. and 6:30 P.M., Saturdays 8 A.M. to 4 P.M. central time. Call toll-free 800-672-1789. Order by fax anytime: 800-445-8189. You can also order resources through Cokesbury on-line at <http://www.cokesbury.com>.

What if I Have a Question about Curriculum?

Curric-U-Phone (800-251-8591) can respond to your questions regarding curriculum. Curriculum representatives or Cokesbury action team members are available in some areas to consult and lead workshops in local churches. Call the curriculum representative program manager at 800-251-2591 for information.

Conference and district offices receive free sample copies of curriculum resources each quarter. Some areas have trained consultants to assist local churches. Ask your pastor for the names of people and phone numbers to call.

How Do I Promote Christian Education in My Congregation?

Plan for frequent communication among the teachers and leaders and with the congregation and community. Work with the Sunday school superintendent, ministry team, and church office to coordinate information sharing.

When you plan communication, think about how information will:

- Build a shared vision for your teaching ministry;
- Build connections between Christian education and other areas of congregational life;
- Present information concisely and accurately;
- Encourage participation; and
- Inspire appreciation for the significance of the teaching ministry.

Ten Tips for Planning Publicity

1. Use publicity to build a shared vision for Christian education.
2. Be as personal as possible; include how opportunities will benefit the intended audience.
3. Use at least two forms of publicity.
4. Repeat; be redundant.
5. Be uncomplicated in message and presentation.
6. Provide important details: what, when, where, for whom, cost.
7. Target your publicity for those who should participate.
8. Use the highest quality possible.
9. Include publicity in your budget.
10. Evaluate the publicity.

To begin, work through established avenues for publicity. Here are some suggestions to help identify vehicles for publicity within the congregation.

Sunday school greeters. Greeters or hosts/hostesses during the church school time create a direct and personal link to the congregation. These persons not only welcome those attending church school, but they act as a point of communication between the church school and individuals.

Reports at executive body meetings. Make a report, no matter how brief, at all church council or administrative board and council on ministries meetings. The reports keep the executive body informed of your plans and remind them of the importance of Christian education.

Indoor and outdoor bulletin boards. Use bulletin boards and displays that are attractive, eye-catching, and people oriented. Change them at least once a month.

Opportunities at worship. Include some aspect of the church school in worship at least once a month. You might

- Print a notice in the bulletin;
- Provide a special insert;
- Ask the pastor to include stories and/or songs currently being studied in classes in his or her sermon;
- Ask a class to present a skit; or
- Use a litany or prayer written by a church school class.

TIP: Plan to celebrate Christian Education Sunday in September on a Sunday of your choice. Contact the General Board of Discipleship (877-899-2780, ext. 7171) for a free resource with ideas for theme, a teacher's workshop, worship suggestions, and reproducible clip art.

Church newsletters. For each issue of your newsletter, write a column publicizing upcoming events or classes or recognizing a particular class or teacher. Since the pastor's column is frequently one of the most widely read pieces of direct mail, encourage him or her to refer to educational opportunities on a regular basis.

Use of the membership rolls. When you are targeting a specific group for publicity, use your membership roll to identify all members of that specific group. Plan a direct mail publicity piece for those people or make personal telephone calls to them to discuss an opportunity designed for them.

As you consider ways to publicize your educational ministries within your community or annual conference, review the following list of possibilities:

- Signs or billboards
- Posters and placards
- Printed pamphlets
- Booths and kiosks
- Telephone campaigns
- Direct mail
- TV and cable TV
- Newspaper articles
- Banners

Regardless of the size of your congregation or the size of your budget, plan to publicize your educational ministries regularly. Even longtime members

of the congregation need to be reminded of the opportunities available to them for learning and growing in faith.

Resources

General Church Print Resources

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2000 (United Methodist Publishing House, available from Cokesbury).

Forecast (Cokesbury). An annual catalog of United Methodist curriculum resources and other helpful Christian education materials. Free; mailed annually to each local church. Free additional copies may be ordered from Cokesbury.

Guidelines for Leading Your Church: 2001–2004 (Abingdon Press, available from Cokesbury or Discipleship Resources).

Interpreter (United Methodist Communications). The official program journal for United Methodist leaders. Issued eight times a year. Seven copies provided free to church officers selected by the pastor.

Job Descriptions and Leadership Development for Local Church Leaders (Discipleship Resources). A set of sheets describing the positions of all local church officers. Contains a manual for leadership development that includes training designs.

Leader in the Church School Today (Cokesbury). A quarterly magazine for leaders of Christian education. Includes articles, workshops, resource reviews, and program ideas.

Multiply God's Love: A Handbook of The United Methodist Church (United Methodist Communications). Provides easily accessible information about the structure and organization of The United Methodist Church and briefly describes its mission.

Program Calendar (United Methodist Communications). Annual calendar with liturgical season and United Methodist Special Sundays highlighted. Also includes lectionary readings.

Planning and Administration

The Courage to Teach, by Parker Palmer (Jossey-Bass Publishers). An in-depth look at what motivates persons to teach. Connects spirituality, content, and methodology.

Developing Christian Education in the Smaller Church, by Carolyn C. Brown (Abingdon Press). Provides creative ideas for maximizing the potential of a small membership congregation.

Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education, by Charles R. Foster (Abingdon Press). Analyzes current educational ministries and offers new approaches for the future.

A Faithful Future: Teaching and Learning for Discipleship, by Carol F. Krau, Judith Bunyi, N. Lynne Westfield, Joyce Brown, Barbara Bruce, and Ben Marshall

30 Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation

(Discipleship Resources). Provides workshop and retreat models, articles, and reading lists for developing effective teachers and small group leaders.

Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation (Discipleship Resources). Provides guidelines for education in The United Methodist Church.

Keeping in Touch: Christian Formation and Teaching, by Carol F. Krau (Discipleship Resources). Suggests five critical processes for teachers and small group leaders, and provides assistance for ministry teams in incorporating these processes in their educational ministries.

Leading Change in the Congregation, by Gilbert R. Rendle (Alban Institute). Describes the change process, including emotional aspects of change. Provides practical help for congregational leaders in navigating changes in congregational life.

The Learning Congregation: A New Vision for Leadership, by Thomas R. Hawkins (Westminster-John Knox Press). Explores learning at the “speed of change.” Provides framework for individual, team, and organizational learning.

The Once and Future Church, by Loren B. Mead (Alban Institute). Discusses shifts occurring in the church today and suggests future directions.

Planning for Christian Education: A Practical Guide for Your Congregation, edited by Carol Fouts Krau (Discipleship Resources). An essential guide to building a shared vision for Christian education and planning and implementing educational ministries.

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church, by Joy Thornburg Melton (Discipleship Resources). Provides assistance to congregations in understanding legal issues, determining policies related to the safety and protection of children and youth, and employing workers and group leaders.

Teaching and Learning

Adventures with the Bible, by Dorothy Jean Furnish (Abingdon Press).

Becoming a Thinking Christian, by John B. Cobb (Abingdon Press).

Beyond Leaf Raking, by Peter L. Benson and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (Abingdon Press).

The First Three Years: A Guide for Ministry with Infants, Toddlers, and Two-Year-Olds, edited by Mary Alice Gran (Discipleship Resources).

Start Here: Teaching and Learning with Adults, by Barbara Bruce (Discipleship Resources).

7 Ways of Teaching the Bible to Children, by Barbara Bruce (Abingdon Press).

Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth, by Dick Murray (Abingdon Press).

Teaching Young Children, by Mary Jane Pierce Norton (Discipleship Resources).

Youth Ministry Handbook, by Ed Trimmer (Abingdon Press).

Human Resources

Discipleship Ministries Unit
General Board of Discipleship
P.O. Box 840
Nashville, TN 37202-0840
Telephone: 615-340-7200
Fax: 615-340-7071
Web site: www.gbod.org/education

Cokesbury Service Center
P.O. Box 801
Nashville, TN 37202
Telephone: 800-672-1789
Web site: www.cokesbury.com

Curric-U-Phone (United Methodist Publishing House)
Telephone: 800-251-8591
E-mail: curricuphone@umpublishing.org
Discipleship Resources Distribution Center
P.O. Box 6996
Alpharetta, GA 30239-6996
Telephone: 800-814-7833 (to receive information)
Telephone: 800-685-4370 (to order)

EcuFilm
Telephone: 800-251-4091

General Board of Global Ministries
Service Center
7820 Reading Road, Caller #1800
Cincinnati, OH 45222-1800

United Methodist Communications
P.O. Box 320
Nashville, TN 37202
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