



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

CHURCH COUNCIL

*Connecting vision and ministry in
your church*

Written by Tim Moss

and Dan R. Dick

General Board of Discipleship

CHURCH COUNCIL

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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 a 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 by 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 does not 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.

FOREWORD

If this is the first *Guideline* you have used, we hope that it is helpful to your task of serving on the Church Council. If you’ve used them before, you will find this to be a very different *Guideline* from those which you have seen in the past. While the predecessor bodies, the administrative board, and/or the administration council functioned as *administrative bodies*, we now see the Church Council more as a body which *enables and supports ministry*. While it will concern itself with administrative matters, it is intended to be a future-oriented body, *focused on the mission, vision, goals, and strategic planning of the church*. If your congregation still operates out of the old administrative board/council on ministries structure, this document can help you to change to an operating structure that is flexible and tailored to your congregation’s needs. We encourage you to make the change, and we will support you in your

efforts. We would hope that your council will be small enough to be efficient and lend itself to consensus decision making whenever possible.

If you plan to continue to employ an administrative board and a council on ministries, however, remember that each is a separate church council, the first dealing with administrative matters and the latter with ministry. *The Book of Discipline* no longer identifies either as separate entities.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

The **Primary Task of the Church Council** is to: (1) carry out the business of the charge conference; (2) help the congregation articulate its vision; (3) oversee planning of the congregation, and (4) develop systems that assure people are received into fellowship, guided and encouraged in their spiritual transformation and growth, and supported as they live out their lives as Christian disciples.

Opportunities for Your Congregation

As you begin to think about the focus of your work, think about the following questions for a few moments. These are but a sampling of the questions you will be asked as you read through this booklet. They will help you think about your congregation and how it might be in ministry within the church and to the community

- What hopes and concerns do you think people have about their community and their faith? How do they relate to living as disciples and good neighbors?
- What experiences might help people understand how the Bible and Christian faith can be resources for daily living?
- What can your congregation do to improve the quality of life for at least one group of people in your community?
- How can you keep in touch with changes in the congregation and the community and respond to them in a timely fashion?

Responsibilities of the Church Council

As a member of the Church Council, you will be a part of the primary decision-making, evaluating, and forward-looking body of the church. You will be called on to support ministry and oversee administration through meetings held at least quarterly. Look at it as a high calling, because you will be involved intimately with the life of the congregation. Some of the specific duties and responsibilities of the church council follow:

1. Be accountable to and serve as the executive agency of the charge con-

ference, overseeing the administration and organization for ministry of the congregation.

2. Provide for effective pastoral and lay leadership for the mission and ministry of the congregation.
3. Provide for financial support, physical facilities and the legal obligations of the congregation and to recommend to the charge conference the compensation, housing needs and benefits for pastors and other paid staff.
4. Provide for the connectional responsibilities of the congregation; to see that the congregation's relations to appropriate annual conference and district programs and structures are maintained.
5. Constantly monitor the current reality of the congregation: that is, have a continuous awareness of the concerns, hopes, and needs of the community (including the congregation) and an understanding of how the congregation may address those concerns and needs. This will involve knowing the demographic facts of both congregation and community and understanding what the congregation's standing in the community is. It will also be aware of areas where new congregations can be sponsored.
6. See that the congregation (a) has a shared vision that is clearly understood and supported by its members and (b) sets goals which are consistent with the mission of the church and that move the congregation toward its vision.
7. See to the congregation's involvement in ministries of nurture, outreach, and witness—to the development of leadership and to the evaluation of the congregation's discipleship in these areas of ministry.
8. Promote organizational learning in the congregation.
9. Encourage and support an inclusive and ecumenical spirit within the congregation.

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

1. Be a spiritual leader. *Focus on ministry* first and then on administration.
2. Stay focused on the primary task. Keep the council focused on the primary task and the vision of the congregation.
3. Actively guide the work of the council, preparing agendas, conducting meetings, communicating with members and monitoring the spiritual life and activity of the congregation.
4. Lead the visioning/strategic planning process within the church.
5. Actively participate in developing learning/training experiences for the council.
6. Conduct an annual short-term planning meeting with the council.
7. Maintain a close and intentional working relationship with the council.
8. Provide accountable leadership to the charge conference.
9. Understand the polity and doctrine of The United Methodist Church and become familiar with its resources and organization.

8 Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation

Getting Started

1. All members complete the reading of this guideline.
2. Leaders convene a meeting of the Church Council to get acquainted, share hopes and concerns, discuss the questions in the “Opportunities” section above, and begin your planning for the year.
3. Leader, talk to your predecessors in the position or others who have held the position in other congregations.
4. All members, listen to people who can instruct you about what life is like in your community—your pastor, lay leader, volunteer leaders and other community leaders can help you. This is an important part of current reality which can help lead you to opportunities for ministry.
5. All members individually and then as a council, evaluate the present ministries of your congregation. What is working well? What is not working well? Where are the gaps.
6. All members participate in learning experiences offered by your conference or congregation.

Helpful Skills and Interests

These are attributes desirable, not only of the chair, but for the council as a whole. Where an attribute is lacking, particularly in the leader, an effort should be made to compensate for it in the selection of other members.

1. The ability to listen deeply and communicate with people of all ages who may also be diverse in other ways;
2. An interest in learning about United Methodism—its organization, history, and theology;
3. The ability to conduct effective meetings;
4. The ability to work with diverse volunteers;
5. A genuine interest in the community.

People Who Can Help

1. Your pastor
2. Your district superintendent and district lay leader
3. Your conference council on ministries staff. The lay leader should receive conference mailings for the benefit of the council.
4. InfoServ: a service which either directly provides information about all aspects of The United Methodist Church or tells you where to find it (800-672-8140 or www.umcom.umc.org)
5. The General Board of Discipleship, Congregational Leaders provides backup to InfoServ and in-depth information on local church ministry or administration (877-899-2780 ext 7190, www.gbod.org)

For additional help, see the Resources section at the end of this booklet.

Responsibilities of the Church Council

Be accountable to and serve as the executive agency of the charge conference, overseeing the administration and organization for ministry of the congregation.

The United Methodist Church is a *connectional* church. It is not a confederation of autonomous congregations, but rather a system wherein congregations are connected to each other through conferences—district, annual, jurisdictional, and general. This connection enables the church to be united in mission and to share a common system of resources. The charge conference at the local congregational level is the foundational unit in the connectional system. From there we progress through the district conference to the annual conference, and finally to the General Conference. The charge conference (“charge” referring to “pastoral charge” or the church or churches in the charge of a given pastor) is the governing body of the local church(es) within the charge, having the role of oversight of the various church councils. It is also the connecting link between the local church and the general church. *The annual meeting of the charge conference is much like a formalized church council meeting*, except that it is called and conducted by the district superintendent. Among its duties, the charge conference elects the officers of the charge. It also evaluates the effectiveness of mission and ministry within the charge, sees to matters of membership, and sets support for pastor(s) and staff. It may also make changes to local church structure.

With the approval of the district superintendent, special meetings of the charge conference may be called. On certain matters, such as major building and other capital expenditures, where it is felt advisable to extend the decision making to the entire membership of the congregation, a church conference may be substituted for the charge conference.

The Church Council serves as the managing agency for the charge conference and is, with the exception of the involvement of the district superintendent, the same body. For more information about the charge conference, consult *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000*, Paragraphs 11, 41, 42 and 245 thru 249.

Options for Decision Making

Among many things you will be required to do as a council, one of the more important functions will be to make decisions for the church.

Robert's Rules of Order is probably the most commonly used body of rules. Unfortunately it involves debate and culminates in voting.

Voting creates winners and losers. There are several other methods that usually don't make losers. These are consensus and discernment.

For some of the weightier decisions, discernment may be the method of choice. However, it can be quite cumbersome. Let me suggest that consensus is a very effective method that, once learned, is a satisfying and efficient means of coming to good decisions.

Consensus

- Consensus means general agreement, solidarity. It does not mean unanimous.
- The chair clearly states the issue.
- All participants are required to express their feelings and opinions—without outside comment or interference and give the reason for their positions.
- Clear up discrepancies. Get the facts.
- No one dominates.
- Participants must be open to the possibility of changing positions. Unyielding positions kill the process.
- Combine similar positions or points of view, wherever possible.
- Seek to make changes to positions that will help make them acceptable to others.
- Leader, don't claim consensus until you are sure you have it.
- Learn more about the process of consensus.

Provide for effective pastoral and staff leadership and their support and for lay leadership for the mission and ministry of the congregation.

Two of the administrative committees required of the local church are the pastor (or staff) parish relations committee and the committee on lay leadership. The chair of the pastor-parish relations committee is elected by the charge conference and is a member of the Church Council. The pastor is named by *The Book of Discipline* to be chair of committee on lay leadership and is also a member of Church Council. The Church Council has the responsibility for the oversight and coordination of these and other committees.

Pastor-parish relations committee has the responsibilities of maintaining, for the congregation, amiable working relationships with pastors and other staff, evaluating their performance, counseling them, and making recommendations for changes in staff or improvements to the staff by education or training. It recommends the salaries and other support, such as housing and benefits for pastors and staff. It establishes job descriptions and interviews prospective employees. Of special note, the pastor-parish relations committee must carefully screen prospective employees, including background checks.

It also evaluates and recommends those candidates for ordained ministry or local lay pastors arising from within the congregation. The church council takes the recommendations of this committee, decides on them, and reports them to the charge conference.

Lay speakers or lay speaking candidates apply directly to the Church Council for approval to take courses and to continue in their ministries.

The committee on lay leadership, chaired by the pastor, is responsible for providing candidates for church office from among the membership of the congregation. Once recruited by this committee, these candidates are presented by the Church Council to the charge conference for election. This committee serves as the consultant to the council on matters of the gifts, expertise, and calling of the laity. It is also accountable for the training-to-office of those elected. The Church Council, in turn, supports and enables the committee in its training role.

For more information in this area of resourcing the church see *The Book of Discipline* ¶251, 258.1, and 258.2.

The Committee on Lay Leadership

Keep in mind the spiritual gifts and other attributes that are needed for the positions for which you are providing candidates. This is particularly critical in the case of the Church Council chair, the lay leader, the chairs of the finance and pastor-parish relations committees and the members of the board of trustees. For example, the council chair should be expected to possess the spiritual gifts of leadership and administration. The lay leader should possess the gifts of leadership and exhortation and be well known in the congregation.

These positions are important to the life of the church and the right persons should be selected and recruited carefully. It is most important to be very straightforward with candidates as to the nature of the job.

Provide for financial support, physical facilities, and the legal obligations of the congregation.

There are two additional administrative committees required in the local church. One is the board of trustees. All of the members of the board of trustees are elected by the charge conference. They elect their own chair who becomes a member of the Church Council. In the board of trustees is vested the authority for the property and facilities of the congregation. This includes the routine maintenance of building and grounds, including making it a safe and barrier free environment. It also may include authority for equipment or building modification that does not exceed 10 percent of the total value of the property.

Along with the Church Council, the board of trustees has the legal obligation to see that the congregation operates within local codes and state laws governing such entities as churches. If incorporation of the congregation is desired or required, it is this committee that is empowered to carry it out. The board of trustees is required to see to the insurance requirements of the congregation in the areas of fire, theft, public liability, and fidelity among others. It is additionally important that the church be insured to cover actions of staff and volunteers that may result in legal actions against it. The trustees are authorized to receive gifts, subject to direction by the charge conference. It serves as consultant to the Church Council on legal matters, insurance, and anything otherwise related to the physical property of the church and is required to submit an annual report to charge conference. It is also responsible for a yearly church accessibility audit. For more information, consult the *The Book of Discipline* ¶258.3, 2524-2549; your conference office; or the General Council on Finance and Administration.

The final administrative committee is the committee on finance. The chair, the church treasurer, and the financial secretary are members of the Church Council. This committee is responsible for raising the funds to support the congregation's needs, both routine and special, usually through financial campaigns. It is also responsible for developing the annual budget of the church, which is subsequently acted upon by the Church Council and charge conference. Income is recorded by the financial secretary, while disbursements are made and recorded by the treasurer. Periodic reports are prepared by the treasurer and submitted to the Church Council for approval. The committee see to the counting of receipts and to the auditing of financial records. The committee serves as the consultant to the Church Council on financial matters. For more information, consult the *The Book of Discipline* ¶258.4,

your conference office, or the General Council on Finance and Administration.

Provide for the connectional responsibilities of the congregation.

The Church Council is the executive agency for the charge conference, a connectional entity that is related to district and annual conferences through the district superintendent, the pastor, and the lay member to annual conference. The lay leader also has connectional responsibilities. The pastor(s), the lay member(s) and the lay leader (it is recommended that the lay leaders and lay member positions be combined) are all members of the Church Council. The pastor(s) and the lay member(s) are voting members of the annual conference.

The annual conference has as its primary task the recruiting and development of leaders for the local congregations. General agencies develop resources for local congregation (for example, this document is the result of collaboration between The United Methodist Publishing House and the General Board of Discipleship) and carry out other responsibilities that support local churches (for example, the General Board of Global Ministries manages our mission efforts here and abroad, and General Board of Church and Society carries out General Conference mandates in the areas of peace, justice, and social concerns).

One way in which we support the annual conference and agencies is through a system of financial apportionments. It is an important function of the church council to see that the obligations are fulfilled. Another way to support the general church is through local church members who serve agencies and the conference through committees and other activities. A final way in which we can support our connectional relationships is by supporting conference or district learning opportunities and other special events.

Constantly monitor the current reality of the congregation.

The “current reality” of the congregation is the *way things are, right now, in every respect, with the congregation and the community around it*. If the vision of the congregation is to be kept fresh and evolving, the Church Council must have an up-to-date handle on the many factors that make up current reality. In fact, a shared vision for the congregation is impossible without a deep and clear understanding of the congregation, its members, and the community that surrounds it. Probably the most important single thing the Church Council can do is to keep in touch with the current reality

of the congregation. How can a congregation and its members be in ministry unless they understand what and where the opportunities are? One never starts out on a journey without knowing the point of origin.
Understanding current reality is the starting point for the visioning journey.

The Church Council must diligently maintain the function of visioning close to itself. Because the actual business of visioning must be done by a body which is truly representative of the congregation, additional persons might be drawn upon to make the effort representative. A member of the council other than the chair, perhaps the lay leader, might lead the effort. Whatever is organized to track current reality and develop vision must truly be representative of the congregation.

Let us suggest to you a list of things that you might want to know as part of your current reality. You will doubtless want to add others to it.

- You need to understand your congregation's history and its culture.
- What is your congregation's historical and current relationship with the connection?
- What is the church doing now in the area of faith formation?
- What is the church doing right now in the area of developing discipleship—in education, leadership development, small group activity, etc?
- Is there a system for intentionally developing disciples? What does it look like?
- What is the church doing right now to foster good stewardship?
- What system does the church have for nurturing its own members?
- In what ways is the church in ministry to its community and the world?
- What do your members think of their church?
- What does the community think of your church?
- What are the barriers to entry into your congregation?
- What are the barriers to ministry?
- What are the dreams of the members of the church?
- How are the church members gifted?
- To what kind of ministry is the church disposed?
- What is the property and physical plant situation? Is it adequate now? Will it support growth?
- What is the financial condition of the church?
- What is the staffing situation? Do you have enough people? Do you have the right people?
- What demographic facts do you know about your church? community?

Some things you should know are:

- Growth patterns in the community
- Religious preferences in the community, including data on the unchurched
- Socio-economic, ethnic and age breakdown of community
- Juvenile crime and out-of-wedlock birth data
- Growth statistics of your church
- Age-level statistics of your church
- Giving patterns

There are agencies such as the General Board of Global Ministries, Precepts Inc., and local community, township, or county agencies that can provide various aspects of this information.

See that the congregation has (a) a shared vision that is clearly understood and supported by its members and (b) goals which are consistent with the mission of the church and that move the church toward its vision.

Our mission is our business and our reason for being. The 2000 General Conference of The United Methodist Church stated very clearly that *“The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ.”* That is both the Great Commission and the primary task of every congregation in our denomination. The mission and the current reality of the congregation form the context out of which shared vision must grow.

Vision is our mental picture of how we want things to be. As we talk to members about their dreams for the church, as we better learn and more deeply understand the current reality of the church, and as we pray and draw the Holy Spirit into the process, a shared sense of vision, begins to emerge. As team members talk to each other and other members about the emerging vision and as the pastor shares it with the congregation, the vision coalesces into something very distinct and tangible. Members begin to own the vision. It becomes compelling and even irresistible. It becomes a vital tool for the congregation in several ways.

The vision becomes the force for long range planning. Because the vision is widely owned by the congregation, goals can be set which will become the elements in the bridge to the future—and the realization of the vision. The goals can represent brick and mortar or other capital projects. They can represent changes which will lead the congregation to become a learning church. They can represent serious changes in ministry. They can represent

changes in the organization of the church to carry out its business, its mission and its ministry. Once set, the goals launch the church on its planning efforts. It is critical that the council keep the congregation well informed about the setting of goals and the detailed planning for implementation.

The vision also becomes one of the touchstones, along with the mission, which the congregation must use to evaluate everything it does. Vision and mission must be used to guide short term planning, the tactical, day-to-day business, and program planning. Everything the church is involved with needs to be evaluated against these touchstones.

See to the congregation's involvement in ministries of nurture, outreach, witness, and leadership development, and to the evaluation of the discipleship of the congregation in these areas of ministry.

The Church Council shall provide for the planning and implementing of a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. How the areas of ministry mentioned below are to be implemented and how they are to be handled administratively and organizationally are matters for the council, as the agent for the charge conference, to determine. The specific ministry areas, in large part, are not treated in *The Book of Discipline*, though ¶251.2 does define nurture, outreach and witness as follows.

(a) The nurturing ministries of the congregation shall give attention to but not be limited to education, worship, Christian formation, membership care, small groups, and stewardship. Attention must be given to the needs of individuals and families of all ages.

(b) The outreach ministries of the church shall give attention to local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice and advocacy. These ministries include church and society, global ministries, higher education and campus ministry, health and welfare, Christian unity and interreligious concerns, religion and race, and the status and role of women.

(c) The witness ministries of the church shall give attention to developing and strengthening evangelistic efforts of sharing of personal and congregational stories of Christian experience, faith, and service; communications; lay speaking ministries; and other means which give expressions of witness for Jesus Christ.

(d) The leadership development and resourcing ministries shall give attention to the ongoing preparation and development of lay and clergy leaders for the ministry of the church.

Those specific areas in which the congregation chooses to get involved are a function of the gifts, talents, preferences, and size of the congregation

and the opportunities afforded it by its location. We have already dealt with several of the specific areas because of the nature of the mission of the church. We will deal with several others in the following sections. Just how the Church Council interfaces with the ministries of the congregation is something it should determine itself. That there be representation from ministry areas on the council is without question. One possibility is to have a representative from each of nurture, outreach, and witness area on the council.

Promote organizational learning in the congregation.

In order for our congregations to stay in touch with current reality and with the spirit of the times, they must become learning organizations. Our denomination and many of our congregations have declined because of our unwillingness to pay attention to what was going on around us and to respond to it. There are several aspects to the business of becoming learning organizations. The first is to expand the areas of learning and methods of learning in which we involve ourselves as a church and as individuals. This means going well beyond the traditional “Sunday school” model in terms of what we learn, how we learn it, when we learn it, and where we learn it. The second is to give ourselves the opportunity in teams or small groups for reflection about what we learn.

Such things as *Disciple Bible Study* and *Christian Believer*, available through Cokesbury, and *FaithQuest*, available through the General Board of Discipleship, are examples of programs that foster congregational learning. A Church Council learning the current reality of the congregation and reflecting upon it is a quite different example. Home meetings, aimed at various kinds of learnings with reflection, are another.

Learning in the church has most often meant Sunday school—Bible learning, social issues, or relationships—in a classroom setting. That isn’t bad, but it’s hardly enough. There are many good and varied resources that can now be delivered by video, internet and other means. It is important that we learn about them and use them. Some of the topical areas into which we should consider expanding our learning are as follows:

- **United Methodism, its history, theology, and connectedness.** Learning about our church instills a sense of belonging to something great. *FaithQuest* and *The Book of Discipline*, 2000 are two of many good resources.

- **Spiritual formation/spiritual disciplines.** Unless we are spiritually transformed, there will never be individual or congregational energy for our mission. An emphasis on helping people with this transformation must be a part of our discipling system. Some important sources of help in this area include *Disciple Bible Study*, *Lay Speaking Ministries*, *Walk to Emmaus*, and *Lay Witness Mission*.
- **Servant leadership/spiritual leadership.** We need to understand and be skilled in the means of partnership, community and just plain working together better. Listening skills, consensus development, spiritual discernment, trust building and effective confrontation are but a few things to be learned. There are many resources that can be drawn from in this area. *Partners in Ministry: Clergy and Laity* is one such resource.
- **Caring ministry.** There are opportunities for ministry all around us. Yet we often fail to see them. We need to learn how. The church offers fine resources in the areas of prison ministries, visitation, and social justice, to name a few.
- **Gifts/call.** It is important for individuals and the congregation to understand these two subjects. There are many resources available on the subject of spiritual gifts. We are all called, but to what ministry? The *Lay Speaking Ministry—Basic Course*, *The Christian as Minister*, and *Discover God's Call*, an affiliate of the Foundation for Evangelism are resources.
- **Faith sharing.** This subject terrifies many people. But, it can be learned and need not be a frightening experience. *The Faith-Sharing Congregation* is an excellent resource for congregational learning in this area.
- **One of the critical things that the Church Council must learn in dealing with all of this is something about “systems thinking.”** It is important to understand the congregation as a system—that everything that happens within a congregation eventually impacts everything else in the congregation. Learning within the framework of the congregation is a multidimensional issue which, if it is to be comprehensive, must be approached systematically. Sometimes problems in the church may resist simple cause-and-effect analysis because they are systemic problems. Systemic problems require that we keep on asking why and digging deeper for solutions.

Just What is a System?

The congregation is a system. The United Methodist Church is a system. We've heard the word *system*, but most of us would have a tough time defining it. A process or a simple system is something that receives inputs, transforms them, and delivers outputs. Ezra Earl Jones in *Quest for Quality in the Church* defines a system as "an interdependent group of people, processes, functions and activities that work together for a common aim." Systems are made up of, among other things, processes. The core process (primary task) of the church is to reach out and receive people into fellowship, help them develop a transforming relationship with God, nurture them in discipleship, and send them into the world as faithful disciples. That is the most important process of the many processes that make up the system called "the church." It is the mission of the church stretched out into its parts. It is very important for the council to understand that all parts of the system interrelate and affect all of the other parts. In order for the church to be effective and efficient at its primary task of making disciples, all of the other processes or activities within the church must operate to support the primary task.

Encourage and support an inclusive and ecumenical spirit within the congregation.

It is expected from our United Methodist Christian heritage that we be inclusive. The diversity that results strengthens our understanding and enriches our faith. Inclusiveness in the context of the church implies a willingness—an openness—to accept into our fellowship the full spectrum of humanity. Inclusiveness does not just mean welcoming racial diversity. There are many other ways in which humanity is diverse and for which we must be inclusive, such as geographical origin, age or generational category, socioeconomic level, educational level, disabilities, and others. There are many combinations of factors which give rise to cultural differences. We need to understand them and use our understanding to reach, serve, and have fellowship among culturally diverse people. (Two helpful resources are *Culture Shifts—A Group Bible Study for Postmodern Times* and *Postmoderns; The Beliefs, Hopes, and Fears of Young Americans*.)

Being inclusive also means having a tolerance for and a willingness to work with other Christian denominations and non-Christian religious entities. Successful ministry to the community may very well depend on our willing-

ness to collaborate with others. The relationships we can develop make us partners and friends and offer a powerful witness to the community.

Responsibilities of the Chairperson

As the nature of leadership in The United Methodist Church changes, so do the roles of the key leaders. A generation ago, the chairperson of the administrative council or council on ministries acted primarily as an administrative chief operations officer (COO), making sure that the planning and implementing of church programs was attended to. Organizing and conducting monthly or quarterly meetings was at the heart of the task. In the complex task of creating centers for spiritual formation, the role of the council chairperson is much larger and much more important than previously.

As council chairperson, you are a partner in ministry with your pastoral leadership and the lay leader of your congregation. In concert, pastors, lay leader, and council chairperson oversee the nurture, outreach, witness, and administrative work of the church. The council chairperson holds the “big picture” view of the work and life of the congregation. As such, the council chairperson is fundamentally the CMO—chief ministries officer—of the congregation. (This description is also appropriate for administrative board and council on ministry chairpersons in alternative structures.)

What does this new role actually look like? What are the requirements and expectations of the council chairperson? This short list is a beginning point for defining the work of the church council chairperson. In each setting, the demands will be unique, but these nine responsibilities lay a sound foundation for your task.

- 1. Be a spiritual leader—focus on ministry rather than administration.**
- 2. Stay focused on the primary task—keep the council focused on the primary task and vision of the congregation.**
- 3. Actively guide the work of the council—preparing agendas, conducting meetings, communicating with members, and monitoring the progress of the members.**

4. **Lead the visioning/strategic planning process within the church.**
5. **Actively participate in developing learning/training experiences for the council.**
6. **Conduct an annual short-term planning meeting with the council.**
7. **Maintain a close and intentional working relationship with the pastor(s) and lay leader of the congregation.**
8. **Provide accountable leadership to the charge conference.**
9. **Understand the polity and doctrine of The United Methodist Church; become familiar with its resources and organization.**

Be a Spiritual leader—focus on ministry rather than administration.

At one time in our Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren history, it was understood that the work we did in committee or council should be as inspiring, edifying, and meaningful as any worship service or Bible study. Work that did not feed the soul and lift the spirit was viewed as work not worthy to be done. Ministry should never be lost to administration.

Leaders in today's church often reflect that they do not feel that council and committee work is spiritually uplifting. Too many meetings, with too many motions, and too much debate leave people feeling frustrated and burned out. Often, agendas for meetings are created and a short time for devotions is slated as the first item on the list. *Instead of our business meetings being something into which we impose a ten-minute devotion, we need to create ninety-minute devotions in which we deal with the business of the church.* As the chairperson, you have the opportunity to make each meeting time an experience of faithful discipleship. Draw on prayer, Scripture, and tradition to provide a foundation for the work being done. No one but the council chairperson can set that kind of tone.

The council chairperson is first and foremost a **spiritual leader**. He or she has the critical task of reminding everyone that the work of the church is holy, worshipful work. When everyone comes to the table with their personal agendas, the council chairperson clarifies that it is the work of the council to seek and perform God's will, rather than its own will. The work of the church is to honor and glorify God by creating settings where men, women, and children can enter into a life-changing relationship with God.

A critical criterion for the council chairperson is whether he or she is actively engaged in a discipline of spiritual growth and devotion. A simple age-old truth holds that you cannot lead where you have not been. The church needs faithful leaders who are continuously feeding their own souls. The ability to stay focused on the critical work of the church demands a healthy relationship with God. Daily prayer, reflection, reading of Scripture, regular attendance in worship, fellowship, study, and active sharing of faith in word and deed (what John Wesley referred to as the means of grace) are necessary qualities of the effective spiritual leader. Council chairpersons need to exemplify the kind of faith that builds and strengthens the entire community.

How deep is the well from which you draw? Are you able to help others understand the importance of a strong personal devotion for the successful creation of faith forming communities? When the ministry of the Church Council is deeply rooted in the practice of the means of grace, it keeps focus on the will of God, and becomes a center for renewal and growth.

Stay focused on the primary task—keep the council focused on the primary task and vision of the congregation.

The primary task of the church is what it must do in order to fulfill its mission. The work of reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus Christ, relating people to God, nurturing and strengthening them in their faith, and sending people out into the world to live transformed and transforming lives defines who we are. All of our work—our program, our worship, our service, and our fellowship—needs to align to this primary task.

As council chairperson, you sit in a unique position to view how the work we do aligns with the primary task. The council chairperson asks the critical question of every church leader: “How does this support our primary task?” For too long, our churches have dealt in part with the primary task without understanding the whole. Formerly, many churches viewed evangelism as the work of reaching out and receiving. Worship related people to God. Education and fellowship nurtured and strengthened people in their faith, and mission work moved us into the world in service to others. In the past, church leaders viewed the four dynamic aspects of the primary task as separate functional areas and worked accordingly.

Systems thinking helps us to see that all four aspects are interconnected, and effective ministry requires that we fulfill all four aspects in every work we do. As this shift in understanding occurs, the council chairperson has the important duty of helping people see how each thing we do

embraces all four aspects of the primary task. Evangelism is not just reaching out and receiving—the council chairperson clarifies how evangelism reaches and receives, relates to God, nurtures and strengthens, and transforms lives. The same is true of worship, education, missions, stewardship, finance, membership, or any other work that we engage in as the church. In this way the council chairperson does not merely manage—the council chairperson leads.

Within each congregation, a vision for ministry exists. It may be held by a few or by many. It may be clear and compelling, or it may be fuzzy and confused. Vision may be a statement on a wall or a message in the hearts and minds. The nature and content of the vision is not the important point here. What is important is that the council chairperson be clear about what the vision is, and that she or he communicate that vision on a regular basis.

Vision is our picture of what the primary task will look like for us. It is our way of living out our mission together. Vision is a complex and wonderful way of helping people find their place in the community of faith and the work of God. The council chairperson, along with the pastor(s) and lay leader, articulate the vision of the congregation and ensure that the vision aligns closely to the primary task. Together, the council then plans the most effective way to realize the vision at any given time.

While individual members of the Church Council will attend to specialized focus areas of ministry, the council chairperson maintains the “big picture” view, and strives to weave the many diverse pieces into an integrated whole. By regularly lifting the primary task and the vision before the entire council, the chairperson provides the necessary threads to create a tapestry with integrity and strength.

Actively guide the work of the council—preparing agendas, conducting meetings, communicating with members, and monitoring the progress of the members.

There will always be a management/coordination function to the work of the council chairperson. It is inescapable, but it is not the most important role. Any time that the administrative function of the task supersedes the spiritual function, effectiveness will diminish. It is important to remember that the coordination function can be a spiritual function, when it is approached that way. A woman in Cleveland, Ohio, told me that she served as her administrative

council chairperson for six years. She labored over the agenda and the meetings, and she eventually burned out. She took two years off, during which time she developed a deep spirituality and practiced the means of grace. She returned to leadership when her church adopted a church council design. She now says that her agenda and meeting plan are part of her prayer and devotion time. She will not bring anything to the meeting that she has not spent time dealing with in prayer. She reports that the effect is transforming. She looks forward to council meetings because she feels that what she is doing is important and honors God. She also reports that the meetings are less contentious, tense, boring, and long-winded—and without her having to lift a finger. As she tells it, “The meetings changed because I changed. These are God’s meeting now.” How does your thinking change when you shift your perspective from viewing meetings as your burden to bear to having the privilege of leading God’s meeting?

Design a plan, practice it, and stick to it. Figure out the best way to stay in touch with your council members, gather information for the agenda, create the agenda, conduct meetings, and communicate the results of meetings. Establish a meeting covenant with council members so that everyone knows what to expect. Set specific start and ending times, schedule agenda items in blocks of time, plan a break, and then stick to the covenant. If people know that the meeting will start when it is scheduled, then they will learn to be on time. If the meeting ends exactly on time, people will not dread coming to the meeting. If people know that they will be given a break, they will give better attention. Remember, people’s productive endurance level, especially in the evening is approximately ninety minutes. Whatever cannot be accomplished in ninety minutes is probably not worth accomplishing. Wherever possible, meetings should not exceed two hours, including chit-chat and refreshments. A number of short meetings are more effective than fewer long meetings.

Also, be very clear about what needs to be done by the council. Much council time is taken up sharing information and ideas that could be communicated in different ways at other times. Minutes or notes from each meeting should be distributed within one to two weeks to allow time for corrections to be made and questions to be raised at times other than at the council meeting. The Church Council meeting should be that place where decisions are made, actions taken, and instructions given that cannot be done any other way. This allows time for the truly important visionary and planning work to be done during meetings.

Visioning or Futuring?

In current popular usage, *visioning is a process of strategic planning based on the shared desired reality for the future of the congregation.*

Futuring is the development of a strategic plan based on projections and trends of the future.

Futuring is an important component of strategic planning and helps to shape the desired reality in the visioning process.

Our culture is “bottom line” driven. We want tangible results. We believe that talk is cheap and so our time together needs to yield something concrete. This mindset is going to hurt the church as we move into the twenty-first century. The bulk of the important work in the church is in the area of futuring—where will we need to be in three-, five-, or seven-years? How do we get there? What do we need to learn to be more effective? Who are the people we will need to be ready to serve? This is speculative and conceptual work. If it is not done by the planning council of the church, where will it be done? Creating meeting settings where we do not merely report on what is and what was is vitally important. The art of meeting planning is to effectively deal with both the “now” and the “not yet.” Adequate time needs to be given in every meeting to attend to the “fuzzy” brainwork of futuring, as well as the “concrete” work of program, money, and maintenance.

Lead the visioning/strategic planning process within the church.

Think for a moment, when the house needs painting and the lawn needs mowing, which do you do first? Most people mow the lawn. Why? Because it’s easier, less time consuming, less costly, and the painting can wait. The lawn will keep growing faster than the house will deteriorate. The problem is, the grass continues to grow and it demands attention on a regular basis. If all we ever do is attend to the immediate need of the grass, eventually the house will deteriorate past a critical point. Immediate demands often cause us to ignore long-term needs until it is too late. Due to limited resources of time, energy, and money, we rarely think in terms of doing both at the same time, so the short term supersedes the long term.

This is very true in the church. The ongoing, day-to-day work of the church demands so much time and effort that we sometimes neglect the larger, long-term issues. There is a growing awareness, however, that we neglect the long-term in favor of the short-term at our own peril. The need to be attending to the future of our congregations is clearly a pressing con-

cern for a majority of our churches. The fundamental problem is that we have so filled the time of our Church Councils with short-term issues that there is no time for visioning and strategic planning. Maintenance and administration absorb the valuable resources needed for planning and futuring.

One disastrous result of this reality has been the formation of visioning or planning teams separate from the Church Council. Why is this a bad idea? A number of reasons will make clear the pitfalls to such a practice.

1. Visioning and strategic planning need to be done by those in leadership positions. Managers adopt the plans made for them by others.
2. Those who vision need to have the power and authority to act on their vision. A team that is creating a vision for the Church Council does not have the authority to make anything happen.
3. Visioning and planning will remain secondary to the primary work of the existing council structure. If visioning and planning is not the top priority now, it will not become the top priority based on someone else's work.
4. Visioning and planning cannot be done in isolation from the ongoing processes of leadership. Teams are effective at completing projects. Visioning and planning are processes, not projects. Visioning and strategic planning need to be central to the work of the ongoing organizational groups who make decisions, implement plans, and control direction.

This list can go on much longer, but these few reasons illustrate a basic truth: *the primary work of the Church Council is visioning and strategic planning*. It belongs nowhere else, and all other work is secondary for the council. Individual committee chairpersons and team leaders are responsible for the management of what already exists. As chairperson of the council, your task is to focus the council beyond the immediate work to the horizon where the potential for new ministries and work will appear. *Remember, it is not your responsibility to do the visioning, but to ensure that the visioning occurs*. In cases where the chairperson is not the best person to lead a visioning process, it is still his or her responsibility to make sure that the right person is in place. This will require, in many settings, a radical reorientation to the way we conduct the business of the Church Council. Reports, budgets, proposals, and plans will need to be distributed before meetings, dealing with questions during non-meeting times, so that decisions can be made quickly and precisely to allow the bulk of the time to visioning and planning. A subtle, but significant shift will occur almost immediately. The

council will cease to ask, “What can we do with the resources that are available to us?” and will begin to ask, “What can we do to resource the work that needs to be done.’”

This also allows time for corporate prayer, study, and reflection on the part of the key leadership of the church. A council chairperson from South Bend, Indiana, shares, “Two years ago, we met for three hours and could never get everything done. Today we meet for ninety minutes, spend half that time in Bible study and prayer, and we always finish the entire agenda. We seem to get more done praying than we ever did when we ‘got down to business’.”

Scripturally, we are reminded that vision comes from God, and that good stewardship is managing wisely and well that which God has given. The role of the Church Council is to attend to the vision that God gives all the people in the community of faith, then to manage our resources to make God’s vision a reality.

Gifts

God’s people are all uniquely and wonderfully gifted. The Apostle Paul defines the church in terms of the gifts of its members. When writing to the churches in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus, Paul identifies different lists of gifts that describe very different churches.

Today’s church is as varied and gifted now as it was in the time of Paul. God grants specific gifts to communities in the same way that God grants gifts to individuals. Not every church will be gifted to perform every ministry. For this reason, the discovery and development of spiritual gifts is critical work in our congregations. Decisions concerning who is best to offer what service, how to link people together for effective ministry, what areas to maximize, and what areas to avoid all depend on a clear understanding of the gifts of the leadership in the church.

On an annual basis, the Church Council should explore the spiritual giftedness of its members, and the council chairperson should encourage the ongoing exploration and development of spiritual gifts within the congregation.

Actively participate in developing learning/training experiences for the council.

One poor assumption that continues to plague church leadership is that people can effectively perform their tasks without specialized training.

Everyone can learn—in fact, *needs to learn*—in order to grow. People need training in specialized areas of expertise, but also in basic team-work, leadership, communication, and conflict management. How to lead a meeting, create an agenda, brainstorm, prioritize work, arrive at consensus, and a host of other practical how-to's can greatly improve the leadership effectiveness of a local church. As council chairperson, you gain a unique perspective on the learning needs of your people.

Learning can happen at almost any time, almost anywhere, but it happens best when it is intentional. Not all council chairpersons will be good teachers, but they know good teachers. Making sure that people with the gifts and knowledge to bring learning to the council is one of the chairperson's top priorities. Developing a plan and vision for learning is something that the entire council can work on together. In fact, if the council members generate the list of ideas for learning opportunities, they will be more invested in training as it occurs.

Leadership is no longer defined as knowing more than everyone else. Effective leaders are learning leaders. As you view the work of the Church Council as ministry, rather than administration, it becomes clear that this is an occasion for the spiritual growth and development of the people who have agreed to lead others. Learning has a ripple effect. As leaders learn, they teach others. As they teach, they are inspired to learn. Learning generates its own momentum. As council chairperson, you have the opportunity to energize this process and maintain the momentum that will lead to greater effectiveness, deeper faith, and stronger ministry.

Conduct an annual short-term planning meeting with the council.

In between maintaining balance of the current work and visioning for the long-range work is the significant process of planning for the coming year. The church council has the responsibility to live in one year while planning for the next year (as well as looking three- and five-years down the road). At some point each year the practical matter of what our plan will be for *next* year takes primacy. While there are many different ways to handle this process, too often churches do not give it the time it needs to be done effectively. A well designed retreat—usually of one or two days—is needed to cover the entire ministry plan of a local congregation.

The short-term planning process needs to include five simple ingredients:

1. What is our current reality—what are we doing now that needs to continue into next year?
2. What new program needs to be developed to meet arising needs?
3. What are the key areas for growth and improvement?
4. How much will this cost?
5. Who are the appropriate people to make it happen?

Too often in many churches, planning consists only of numbers 1 and 4. We continue our program from one year to the next and develop a budget to support it. While both of these functions are important, they are inadequate to create an environment for growth and development. We need to be seeking new ways to fulfill our mission through our primary task. We need to continuously improve what we do—even the things we do quite well. And we need to be constantly asking ourselves who we can include in the work of the church. Interestingly, many Church Councils fail to even include number 5 in their planning since they believe that is the work of the committee on lay leadership (formerly nominations and personnel). It never occurs to the council that it has the right to make recommendations to nominations, and in fact, most committees on lay leadership are delighted to receive such suggestions—since it makes their job that much easier.

A well-designed council planning retreat can accomplish in one day what many churches struggle with all year. Done in the late spring or early summer, it allows all the other committees—finance, lay leadership, the board of trustees—time enough to do the work they need to do to support the plan. Also, the benefit of doing the work mid-year helps to gain a “reality check” on current conditions, and begin the futuring processes to shape long-range vision and planning.

Maintain a close and intentional working relationship with the pastor(s) and lay leader of the congregation.

One May morning, I watched a woman walk out of church during the opening announcements. As the pastor presented a new program that the church would launch later in the week, this woman stormed out the back doors. I saw her later and asked what was wrong. She told me that she was the council chairperson of her church and that the first she heard of the new program was from the pulpit that morning. It angered her that as the leader of the council she had no clue what was happening. I asked if the matter had been discussed at the Church Council meeting. She replied that the council hadn't met yet (remember, this was May) and that she hadn't discussed the church program with the pastor since her election at the last charge conference!

There is no doubt about it—communication is hard. It takes work, commitment, and flexibility; but without it nothing good can happen. As church council chairperson it is your responsibility to make sure you are in close communication with the pastor, the lay leader, and any other key leaders of your congregation. Your position makes it imperative that you know what is going on in the church. Waiting for others to tell you won't work. Proactivity is the only approach available to you as Church Council chairperson.

Set regular times when you can meet with the pastor(s) and lay leader of your congregation. Use this as a time to listen to the thinking of these key leaders, and then share your understanding of where things stand with the council. Be sure that you share a common understanding of the current reality, the desired reality, and the short-term and long-term processes in place for performing the mission and ministry of the church.

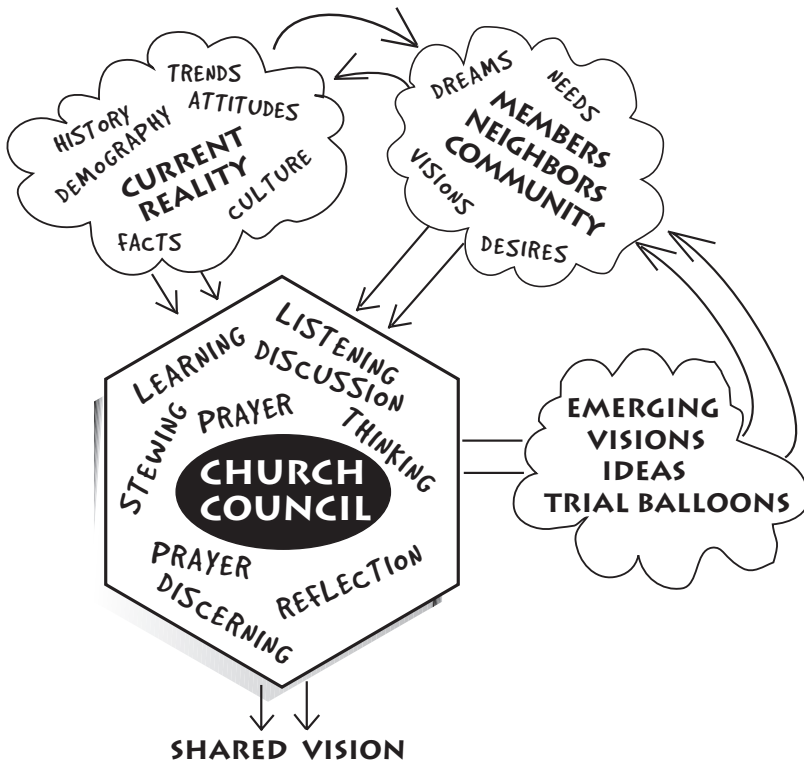
Also, remember to make this holy time—a time to pray and reflect on the work that God has entrusted into your care. Be diligent to create a strong feeling of partnership with the pastor(s) and lay leader. Stay focused on the fact that you are *spiritual* leaders. By proactively pursuing an open relationship with the clergy and laity leaders of the congregation, you create a wonderful working environment and model effective leadership for the entire council. This style of leadership brings everything out into the open, and avoids a great deal of stress and frustration along the way.

Provide accountable leadership to the charge conference. According to *The Book of Discipline*, all of the members of the Church Council are members of the charge conference. Each representative reports to and through the charge conference the progress in ministry for the prior year, and the plan for ministry in the year to come. Coordinating this gathering of information and synthesizing it into a cohesive picture is the function of the Church Council chair. As part of its accountability to the charge conference, the Church Council reviews the membership of the local church, establishes the budget on recommendation of the committee on finance, makes recommendations for the sponsorship of new congregations, proposes salaries for pastor(s) and staff on recommendation from the committee on staff-parish relations, and fills vacancies as needed among the lay officers of the church. It is the responsibility of the council chairperson to ensure that all necessary information is provided to the charge conference.

Understand the polity and doctrine of The United Methodist Church and become familiar with its resources and organization.

As council chair, remember: *The Book of Discipline* is your friend. As silly as this sounds, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* is full of information that you need to know to lead the church. Parts I-IV provide a historical, theological, and doctrinal context for our identity as United Methodists. They define our core beliefs and practices, and explain our understanding of what it means to be a Christian disciple. Our mission and purpose is defined, as well as a full explanation of our primary task.

Chapter 1 of Part V is essential reading for the council chair. These critical paragraphs define the structure and organization of the local church. Throughout the remainder of the book, there is important information that will help you effectively lead the congregation in its program ministries. At the end of these Guidelines, there is a listing of helpful resources that will help you understand The United Methodist Church, and where to turn when you need help.



Getting Started—The First Month

At first, you may be overwhelmed by how much you *don't* know. That's okay. In fact, it is much better than thinking you know it all. The more groundwork you lay in the first few weeks as the new council chair, the more effective you will be later on. There is nothing difficult or profound in these recommendations. They are simple, common sense activities that will yield substantial results later on.

- 1. Read and reflect on these Guidelines.**
- 2. Convene an orientation meeting of the Church Council to establish a working covenant.**
- 3. Talk to your predecessors in the position or council chairs of neighboring congregations for insights into their experience.**
- 4. Have conversations with people in the church who can help you better understand the current reality of the congregation.**
- 5. Examine the current program structure of the church—noting where you are clear on the way things work and where you are unclear about the way things work.**
- 6. Participate in learning/training events offered by your annual conference, district, general church agency, or para-church organizations.**

Read and reflect on these Guidelines

These Guidelines are designed to help you get organized to provide quality leadership for your congregation. They are not meant to be prescriptive, but to inspire creative thinking on your part. How might you use these Guidelines to fashion your leadership? What new and provocative ideas do you find here? What new ideas are triggered in your mind for things you might do with your congregation? As you read through these Guidelines, make notes on the things you want to try.

Set the Guidelines aside for a few days, then come back to them for a second reading. This will offer confirmation for some of your thinking, clarify questions you may have, and will reveal ideas that you may have missed the first time through. When you read through the second time, note any questions you still have.

Some leaders have found it helpful to include the Guidelines in their devotional time. Not that the Guidelines are devotional, but reflecting on the content in an attitude of prayer, meditation, and biblical study helps to read them in a deeper way.

As the chairperson of the Church Council, your work is interconnected to the work of so many other boards, committees, teams, and working groups. It is advisable to familiarize yourself with some of the other guidelines, especially those of the board of trustees. With the ever changing nature of legal obligation in our church, and the fundamental partnership between the board of trustees and the charge conference concerning legal matters, familiarity with the trustee guidelines and the trustee codes and laws for your state is wise. An excellent resource is Mary Logan's *The Buck Stops Here*, (Discipleship Resources). It is also well worth the cost to purchase an entire set of Guidelines to have on hand in the church office or library. Spend time leafing through the set and highlighting helpful information from each.

Convene an orientation meeting of the Church Council to establish a working covenant.

Early in the year, before any planning is done or agendas are created, convene an informal gathering of the Church Council members. This is not a time to do any specific tasks or engage in the business of the church. This is a time to get acquainted with each other at a personal level. During this time together—which is often best experienced off site, away from the church building—everyone should have opportunities to share their hopes and dreams, both personally and for the church. This is a time to find out what people like best about their church—and what they like least. This is a time to talk about personal passions. It may be a time to ask, “Why did you say yes when you were asked to serve the church?” It is a good time to ask people what they are expecting the Church Council experience to be for the coming year.

As the conversation unfolds, you will begin to better understand the people who form the council. This may be an appropriate time to begin to fashion an operating covenant with the church leaders—to discuss how long meetings will last, when they will start and end, and whether you will use *Robert's Rules of Order* or a consensus or discernment approach to decision making. You may begin to share what you expect from the council, as you hear what the council expects from you. The important thing to remember about this orientation meeting: *it is more blessed to listen than*

to speak. This is the time to hear from your council. They will have plenty of time later on to hear from you.

At the first meeting of the new council it will be important for you to come back to the members and restate what you heard from them at the orientation. The more clearly you can articulate their hopes and dreams for the church, their expectations for the council, and their understanding of why they have been asked to serve, the better everyone will be able to work together in the ensuing months.

Repeating one cautionary word: do not allow the orientation to become a “business meeting.” Don’t do planning, don’t make programmatic decisions, don’t talk budget, and don’t print an agenda. Instead, set a devotional tone. Help to communicate that the work of the council will be worshipful work centered in Christian discipleship.

Talk to your predecessors in the position or council chairs of neighboring congregations for insights into their experience. Although every experience is unique, there is immense benefit in talking to others who have walked your path before you. Too often, exiting leaders disappear without a trace, taking with them experience, wisdom, and knowledge that could be invaluable to the new leader. Often former leaders don’t want to interfere, so they keep their thinking to themselves. However, they are more than willing to share their insights when they are asked. Traditionally, we have not done a good job of building mentoring relationships into our organizational designs. Having former leaders mentor new leaders can be a wonderful way to bridge the gaps within a congregation and provide a consistency and momentum to the ministry of the church.

Where mentoring does not exist, the responsibility for seeking guidance and counsel will fall to you. Former council chairpersons within your congregation and current council chairpersons in neighboring congregations are good resources as you find your own leadership style in the church. By talking with and observing others, you will learn both what you do want to do, and what you want to avoid, as a leader. Talking with others also helps to build a network that may result in ongoing nurture and support.

Have conversations with people in the church who can help you better understand the current reality of the congregation. You would be amazed by what people know. There is only one sure way

to find out, and that is to talk to them. In our churches, we often become ingrown—only listening to one another in leadership. The reality is that most of the truly innovative ideas come from outside. The most incisive insights into our processes and procedures often arrive from objective third parties. Knowledge about the history of the congregation and surrounding community is widespread throughout the people who sit in the pews. An even more vital perspective is held by the physical neighbors to the church who may never enter its doors. Many Church Council chairs find that the most important work they do in their first few weeks is to wander through the community and ask people what they know about the church. A basic lesson to remember is: before you can plan to move toward a new destination, you have to know where you're starting from. Conversations with pastors, lay leaders, volunteers, people in the pews and in the community provide a necessary view of current reality. *Much of your thinking about how to proceed with the Church Council will emerge from the first few weeks when you talk to people to get a clear picture of the current reality.*

A second part of the listening process is to ask people in the congregation and community what their dreams are for the future. Questions like, “What do you want more than anything else in the world?” may give you images of the desired reality for the congregation—ways that your church can help people realize their deepest desires as they come to know God in Christ. Don't worry about planning or organizing your thinking at this point. Allow your first month as council chairperson to be spent in “sponge-mode;” soaking up as much information and insight as you possibly can.

Examine the current program structure of the church—noting where you are clear on the way things work and where you are unclear about the way things work.

If your church is like most, there is a paper-trail ten miles long that will tell you what you need to know about your current program and structure. Charge conference booklets, annual reports, meeting minutes, newsletters, and even old bulletins can help you understand “the way things work.” Don't be intimidated. Approach it the way a prospector approaches a stream—sift through a lot of silt to find a few nuggets of gold.

Although it may not feel this way, nothing is set in stone. Just because something was done one way in the past doesn't mean it must be done that way in the future. But before you can decide how you want to proceed, it is wise to know how things work in the current reality. Gain as much insight into the current workings of the church as you can. Be clear about

what you know, but be every bit as clear about what you don't know. Then, ask questions. The mark of a good leader is not to always have the right answer, but to be able to always ask the right question.

When investigating a program, ministry, or committee, ask:

- What is this work area or ministry's work?
- Why is it done?
- How is it done?
- Who does it?

Just gaining insight into these questions will provide a good base from which to lead and work with others. If this seems like a lot of work, it is. You have agreed to provide leadership in one of the pivotal positions in your church.

Participate in learning/training events offered by your annual conference, district, general church agency, or para-church organizations.

If your church is extremely lucky, you are perfect, fully formed, knowledgeable about everything in the church, and equipped to handle every situation. If your church is normal, then you probably have some very strong gifts, but could improve your talents in some way. Short of Jesus Christ, the church has yet to find perfect leaders. That is not to say that the church does not have very good leaders. The best leaders are those who are constantly honing their talents, and are engaged in a wide variety of learning experiences.

As council chairperson, there are four spheres of knowledge that impact the work you do: technical knowledge, spiritual knowledge, process knowledge, and people knowledge.

Technical knowledge is knowledge about how the church works; what the committees, teams, and other leaders do; and your own personal expertise.

Spiritual knowledge is your knowledge of God and Jesus Christ and your faith commitment. Your spiritual journey and life of discipleship are grounded in your spiritual knowledge.

Process knowledge is your knowledge of how to get things done—how to lead meetings, organize resources, engage in visioning and planning processes, and monitor the “big picture.”

People knowledge involves working with others, resolving conflict, motivating co-leaders, and sharing what you know with others.

As the chairperson of the council, you will be constantly drawing on all four spheres of knowledge. Improvement as a leader requires a balanced approach to learning in all four spheres. Learning around the functional ministries of the church—worship, stewardship, evangelism, and education—will increase your ability to coordinate the whole. Spiritual learning through Bible study and Christian conversation will broaden your base for creating a worshipful work environment. Learning in leadership, systems thinking, continuous improvement, visioning, and planning will provide a stronger structure for the council. Finally, learning the dynamics of people skills—motivation, conflict resolution, spiritual gifts and leading styles—will help you create better working relationships.

Take advantage of the many learning opportunities offered within your annual conference or in your immediate area. Enroll in a variety of non-church related seminars and find ways to use that information in your congregation. Commit to learning something new every quarter of the year to improve the leadership you provide for your church.

A Few Helpful Skills and Interests

Listening—learn to listen deeply, especially to people you don't understand or agree with. Don't assume you know what other people are thinking. If you're not sure what someone means, ask them to help you. Listening is your most valuable tool.

Knowledge of The United Methodist Church—what makes a United Methodist a United Methodist? Until you can answer that question, you will have a hard time leading in the church. Find out who we are, what we believe, and what difference we make in our world.

Look outside—the chairs of the various committees need to stay focused on what the church is doing—they look inward. Take time to look outward—know the community and culture in which your church is located. Walk around. Get the outsiders' view. You may find out what people are looking for.

Resources

United Methodist Boards and Agencies with Support Helps

- General Board of Discipleship, Office of Children's Ministries, PO Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003, Phone (877) 899-2780, FAX (615) 340-7071 <http://www.gbod.org> Discipleship Resources, PO Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003, 1-800-685-4370
<http://www.discipleshipresources.org>
- General Board of Global Ministries, National Division and Women's Division, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115 (212) 870-3600, FAX (212) 870-3748 <http://www.gbgm-umc.org> Service Center, 7820 Reading Road, Caller # 1800, Cincinnati, OH, 45222-1800. 1-800-305-9857
- General Board of Church & Society, 100 Maryland Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002-5664 (202) 488-5600, FAX (202) 488-5619
<http://www.umc-gbcs.org>
- General Commission on United Methodist Men Office of Civic Youth Serving Agencies/Scouting, PO Box 859, Nashville, TN 37202, 1-800-509-4563 <http://www.ummen.org> [084] United Methodist Publishing House Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591.
- Cokesbury Service Center, 1-800-672-1789. [Http://www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com) United Methodist Communications, PO Box 320, Nashville, TN 37202. (615) 742-5400 <http://www.umc.org> EcuFilm, 1-800-251-4091 InfoServ, 1-800-251-8140

Print Resources

- *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: 2001-2004*, The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000.
- *The Buck Stops Here*, Mary Logan, Discipleship Resources, 2000.
- *The Christian as Minister*, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, 1997.
- *Church Leadership*, Lovett Weems, Abingdon Press, 1993.
- *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- *Culture Shifts—A Group Bible Study for Postmodern Times*, Craig Kennet Miller and Lia Icaza-Willetts, Discipleship Resources, 1998.
- *Facilitation Skills for Team Leaders*, Donald Hackett and Charles L. Martin, Crisp Publications, 1993.
- *The Faith-Sharing Congregation*, Roger K. Swanson and Shirley F. Clement, Discipleship Resources, 1996.
- *Faith Quest*. Contact the General Board of Discipleship.
- *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation: 2001–2004*, Cokesbury, 2000.

- *Lay Speaking Ministry: Basic Course*, John P. Gilbert and Nancy C. Zoller, Discipleship Resources, 1997.
- *Lay Witness Mission Handbook*, Shirley F. Clement, Discipleship Resources, 1993.
- *Leading Change in the Congregation: Spiritual and Organizational Tools for Leaders*, Gilbert Rendle, Alban Institute, 1998.
- *The Learning Congregation: A New Vision of Leadership*, Thomas R. Hawkins, Westminster-John Knox, 1997.
- *A Ministry of Caring*, Duane A. Ewers, Discipleship Resources, 1999.
- *Partners in Ministry: Clergy and Laity*, Roy W. Trueblood and Jackie B. Trueblood, Abingdon Press, 1999.
- *Postmoderns—The Beliefs, Hopes, & Fears of Young Americans (1965-81)*, Craig Kennet Miller, Discipleship Resources, 1997.
- *Quest: A Journey Toward a New Kind of Church*, Dan Dick with Evelyn Burry, Discipleship Resources, 1999.
- *Revolutionizing Christian Stewardship for the 21st Century: Lessons from Copernicus*, Dan R. Dick, Discipleship Resources, 1997.
- *Ten Steps to A Learning Organization*, Peter Kline and Bernard Saunders, Great Ocean Publishers, 1998.
- *Understanding Your Congregation as a System*, George Parsons and Speed Leas, Alban Institute, 1993.
- *The United Methodist Way*, Branson L. Thurston, Discipleship Resources, 1998.
- *Walk to Emmaus*. Contact the Upper Room, P.O. Box 34004, Nashville, TN, 37203-0004; e-mail: emmaus@upperroom.org.
- *The Wisdom of Teams: Creating the High-Performance Organization*, Jon R. Katzenbach and Douglas K. Smith, eds., Harvard Business School Press, 1998.

There may have been some changes in *Discipline* paragraph numbers or wording after this Guideline was printed. We apologize for any inconvenience.