



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

PASTOR

*Connecting vision to ministry
through spiritual leadership*

*Written by Gerald Richardson
General Board of Discipleship*

PASTOR

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This book is printed on elemental-chlorine-free paper.

ISBN 0-687-03535-X

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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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.

A Special Note from the Editor

A new quadrennium, new structures, and a new look to the Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation. Everyone connected with the Guidelines series, however, intends that it be deeper than a new look. It is a fresh opportunity to help your congregation become excited about a vision of what your congregation is called to be and to do. It is an opportunity to help persons in your congregation see they are involved in ministry—not just time-consuming busywork.

As pastor, you are the key to helping your congregation identify and sharpen its vision in response to God’s call. You are the key to helping initiate the processes that will help your congregation’s leaders understand *why* your congregation exists, *what* it is called to be, and *how* it can best fulfill its vision and mission. Here are some suggestions to help you.

- You have already begun by picking up this booklet. Start with the article, “Our Identity, Call, and Mission.” That article appears in every book in this Guidelines series. It can help ensure that you and the key leaders of your congregation all have the same “road map.”
- Finish reading the rest of this booklet.
- Be certain that the appropriate Guidelines booklets are given to the key officers, chairpersons, and other leaders in your congregation.
- Read—or at least scan—all of the other booklets in this series, so you can support the leadership in its work.
- Encourage attendance at district or other workshops that are designed to help leaders understand their jobs.
- Have a special meeting—a retreat would be even better—involving key leadership to discuss the key concepts of mission, vision, and ministry. Pray for—that includes *listening* for—God’s guidance.
- Organize and act with the assurance that you are not alone. You are part of a connectional church with understanding leadership and valuable resources available to you.

Know that you have the prayers and blessings of all who have worked on this series.

Grace and peace,

Branson L. Thurston, Editor

Leading as Pastor

It is an exciting and energizing time to serve as a pastor within The United Methodist Church. Opportunities exist today to proclaim the gospel and lead persons into meaningful spiritual experiences that were not even imagined just a few short years ago. Also, a spiritual current is running through our culture that cries out to be tapped into and channeled in positive directions that lead to wholeness in the lives of people. Pastors are in unique positions to have a hand in shaping that spiritual current. People are hungry for what is available through the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our challenge to make this gospel accessible to them in ways that are meaningful and relevant for the living of their lives.

At the same time that it is exciting and energizing, it is probably also true

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that being a pastor is among the most difficult work any person can do in the world today. This statement is not intended to discourage persons who are, or would be, pastors. It is intended to call attention to a reality that is too often overlooked. To be an effective pastor of a local congregation in today's world is a calling that offers challenges and difficulties that were largely unknown just a generation or two ago.

Pastors and local congregations compete with a whole array of options that vie for the attention of our congregation members and others whom we wish to serve. We live in a world of almost unlimited and never-ceasing entertainment. Something else is always going on that people could do rather than participate in church activities. Sporting events, music concerts, limitless television channels, surfing the Web, and much more threaten to take people's attention away from the church.

In addition to all the entertainment possibilities, people are busier than ever before with work, civic and community responsibilities, children's activities, home duties, and more. With all these things to do it is hardly shocking that church tends to be seen more and more as an optional involvement rather than an experience that is at the very heart of the human life.

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There is another reality that, when added to all the above concerns, makes the work of the pastor daunting. It is that when people do become involved in a church today they bring with them a very high level of expectation as to the quality of the experience they find there. It is no longer possible (if indeed it ever was) for a pastor to expect people to make a positive response to a *fair* sermon in the midst of an ordinary worship service that never or rarely changes. It is also unrealistic to assume that most people will feel good about and wish to continue involvement in a church system that insists on a 1950's model of endless committee meetings that accomplish little beyond deciding when and where the next committee will meet.

When people do become involved in a church today they bring with them a very high level of expectation as to the quality of the experience they find there.

How then, is the modern pastor to respond? Where do we begin to tap into this excitement and energy for which we long in the church? How can we claim our ministry with integrity while touching the hearts and spirits of people in our communities whose interests are diverted in dozens of direc -

tions? How do we maintain a level of satisfaction on the part of those who have been with us for years, while at the same time reaching out to others who are unchurched, and who have little or no interest in the cherished traditions of our past?

These questions and more will be addressed within these pages. Of course, there are no simple and fail-proof answers. Pastors must be constantly on the lookout for new possibilities that improve the quality of ministry in their particular location while recognizing that one size does not fit all. The following quote from *The Book of Discipline*, 2000, may help to clarify the role of the pastor in the local church.

The pastor(s) shall oversee the total ministry of the local church in its nurturing ministries and in fulfilling its mission of witness and service in the world by: (1) giving pastoral support, guidance, and training to the lay leadership in the church, equipping them to fulfill the ministry to which they are sent as servants under the Lordship of Christ; (2) providing ministry within the congregation and to the world; (3) ensuring faithful transformation of the Christian faith; and (4) administering the temporal affairs of the congregation. (¶331)

We Begin with the Mission

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. “*The local church provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.*” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2000, ¶201)

It would be difficult to see how the mission of the church could be clearer to United Methodist Christians. We are called to be about the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Whatever we do within the construct of our institutions should be in some way connected to the accomplishment of that mission. The local church is on the front line of that mission, and pastors are called and appointed to provide leadership appropriate to that mission. While it is true that other persons within local churches give leadership, and their leadership is vital, it is the pastor who carries the bulk of the leadership responsibility. Without effective pastoral leadership it is very unlikely that a local United Methodist church will get very far in accomplishing its mission.

We are called to be about the work of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

The mission of any organization might be defined as that which gives it reason for existing. In other words, if the mission were not present then there would be no reason for that organization to exist. Another way of saying this would be that if the mission of the organization were to change, then the very heart and nature of that organization would be fundamentally different. It is impossible to overstate the importance of being clear about the mission and of having a pastor as leader who embraces that mission and continually holds it before the organization.

Ask the right questions . . . and listen. In every organization, including the church, it is often helpful to spend time focusing on questions that will go to the heart of the organization. In the church, the laity and the clergy together should work on these questions. At first it may be tempting just to assume that everyone knows what we are about and that there is full agreement on the agenda of ministry. *While it is possible to achieve a high level of agreement on essential issues, it is very often true that such agreement is not present at the start.* People need to feel free to share their concerns and disappointments. When adequate attention is paid to these matters through caring, attentive listening, then arriving at a shared vision is much more probable. The laity will feel empowered by this kind of sharing of ministry priorities with the pastor, and they will not only be more supportive, but will also provide a real strength to the overall ministry goals. Examples of some of the questions that may be used to launch these discussions include:

1. What are the core values of our congregation? How do they propel us toward the fulfillment of the mission of the church?
2. Are there particular ways that we in this place at this time can have a unique effect on behalf of the mission? What are they?
3. Are there particular persons or groups whom we might be uniquely suited to serve? Who are they? What strategy do we use to reach them?
4. Is God calling certain persons to serve in particular ways? If so, how can we equip them to serve with effectiveness?
5. Are there extraneous activities that claim an inordinate amount of our time and energy and space and do little or nothing to propel us toward our mission? How do we extricate ourselves from these activities?
6. What are the constraints, both internally and externally, that could keep us from effectively moving toward our mission? How can we deal with them?

These certainly are not exhaustive questions. They are illustrative of the kinds of issues that might be raised when clergy and laity are working together to establish ministry. Working with these questions, or similar ones, may be a way of beginning to get a congregation to focus on its mission.

The pastor must work hard to keep the congregational leaders focused on the mission. The tendency will always be to go off in other directions. The pastor must be clear enough in her or his own mind about the mission that “chasing rabbits” is avoided. The pastor must be willing and able to continually call the group back to its focus. Many good things could be done. The question must always be, “Does it lead us toward our mission?” If the answer is yes, then we are on the right track. If the answer is no, then adjustments must be made. It is the mission that remains before us. It is our guiding star that leads us to our ultimate goal.

The pastor must be willing and able to continually call the group back to its focus.

Dick Wills, pastor of Christ United Methodist Church, Fort Lauderdale, Florida, explains that his congregation has defined its key focus of ministry:

- 1) introduce people to Jesus in positive ways;
- 2) make disciples through small groups;
- 3) relieve suffering.

It is the mission that remains before us. It is our guiding star that leads us to our ultimate goal.

For this congregation these three essentials, provide the primary measuring instruments to determine what goes on at their church. Whatever events, groups, experiences, or encounters further those values are understood to be means of fulfilling the mission of the church. At the same time, whatever events, groups, experiences, or encounters that cannot be shown to further those values are understood to be outside of their mission. They may have value in other settings, but they are not part of the *mission* of Christ United Methodist Church.

Every United Methodist church needs its own set of defining questions. The questions will surely be different from one congregation to another. The issues raised will vary from place to place. Nevertheless, all should lead to fulfilling the mission of the church in that time and place.

The Visioning Process

Once there is clarity about the mission of the church, then it is important that each congregation develop a mental image of what that mission will look like in its particular setting. This is called the visioning process, or developing a vision for the future. While the mission is universal, the vision is particular. In other words, fulfilling the mission may look very different from one place to another depending on a variety of factors. Some of these factors include: (1) the needs of the people the church is trying to reach, which will depend on characteristics such as age, economic circumstances, interests, and level of spiritual maturity; (2) the resources within the congregation; and (3) any particular aspects of the life of the congregation that make it uniquely fitted to a certain kind of ministry. All of these issues, and perhaps more, will have an impact on the vision for ministry within any given congregation. There are three stages for the *visioning process*.

First, the visioning process always begins with developing a clear understanding of “current reality.” In other words, what is the real situation within the local church right now? Without an adequate answer to that question the vision will almost surely be distorted. Critical questions must be raised at this point, and they should be addressed within the total life of the congregation. No one person (not even the pastor) or one group should presume to provide all the reflection on the questions of current reality. Questions that can lead to greater awareness of current reality include:

- How clearly have we identified our defining questions? (See above.)
- How well do they propel us toward fulfilling our mission?
- How effectively do we embrace diversity within our church?
- How well do we share leadership?
- Do we have a permission-giving or permission-denying organizational structure?
- How are we perceived by our larger local community?
- How well are we currently doing in making disciples?
- How are we doing in reaching out beyond ourselves?
- When people visit our church and decide to go elsewhere, do we know why?

- Are we clear that every member is a minister, not just the paid staff?
- Is there clear understanding of the church finances? Are there unrealistic perceptions?
- Do we comprehend the perspective of those outside our church?
- Are there local community dreams of which we are not fully aware?

These kinds of questions do not have simple, *fill in the blank* answers. In most cases they will require significant dialogue and struggle on the part of many people within the congregation. The tendency often is to avoid that struggle and try to move to quick answers that may be too shallow and incomplete. In fact, different people will have different perspectives on the current reality of the church. *The goal is not to see how satisfied the different segments of the church are in terms of their own desires, but to discover current reality in terms of the mission.* The challenge for the pastor at this stage is to encourage the participants to remain focused on the task and to keep moving deeper and deeper into the places where the questions might lead. *Remember that it is impossible to get to any desired destination without knowing where you are when you begin the journey.*

The second part of the process is visioning the “desired reality.” When a congregation understands what is real about itself in light of its mission, it then is ready to ask the questions related to its desired future.

- Where would the church like to be next year? five years from now? twenty-five years from now?
- Is there a vision for the future that offers a clear picture of the desired reality?
- Is that vision shared by a large percentage of the church leadership?
- Does the vision reflect the real ministry needs in the locality?
- Is the vision exciting? Does it energize the people?

The vision is a mental picture of the desired reality. When there are large numbers of people in the church who have that mental picture of the future, then it is much more likely that they can be motivated to do the work and make the changes that are necessary to bring about the vision.

Visioning the desired reality in a congregation is hard work. There will always be the temptation to short-circuit the process because people will grow weary, there will be the potential for conflict, and to some, the task will seem just too daunting. The challenge for the pastor is to gather fragments of the vision as they develop and to begin to articulate them into some kind of whole that the people can begin to embrace. There may be many twists and turns along the way. The ultimate vision may differ from that which appeared to be developing in the beginning. But with prayer, persistence, and faithfulness to the work, any church has the ability to develop its vision for the future.

The third stage of the visioning process is that of discovering the bridges that carry the congregation from current reality to desired reality. In other words, this is the stage in the process when the question “How do we get there from here?” becomes relevant. Some of the questions the congregation needs to ask at this stage of the process are as follows.

- Are there opportunities for practicing intentional spiritual disciplines that will lead to discernment?
- Is there a willingness to enable people to practice acts of justice and mercy as part of their ministry within the church?
- Is there a process of spiritual accountability within the congregation that offers leaders a place to grow in their spiritual lives?

When these kinds of questions are addressed in a positive way it is surprising how many bridges of ministry into the future will emerge in the life of the congregation. The vision then becomes something that is owned by all the people and thus can be effective in fulfilling the mission of the church. The key role of the pastor in leading this visioning process is significant. Pastors who feel the need for additional help in leading such a process may look to the following sources.

Quest: A Journey Toward a New Kind of Church, by Dan R. Dick with Evelyn M. Burry. (Discipleship Resources)

FaithQuest Bible Study, by Dan R. Dick. (Discipleship Resources)

Leadership and the New Science, revised edition, by Margaret J. Wheatley. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco)

The Leadership Role of the Pastor

Throughout all the processes in the life of the congregation the pastor clearly plays an important leadership role. It is a changing role, and often it is one that pastors must learn anew, even if they have been serving effectively for many years. There was a time when the pastor acted as a sort of *solo star*, doing the ministry of the church, meeting the needs of the people, and pretty much functioning as the local “religious professional.” That time is passed, and pastors who continue to try to work in that style will often find themselves burned out, unappreciated, and disappointed in ministry.

The new leadership style for pastors is one that includes collaboration, continuous learning, and equipping laity for performing ministry in the world. In the structure of The United Methodist Church there are particular lay positions with which the pastor must work closely in order for there to be effective ministry. These include the following.

- **Lay Leader:** The lay leader in the congregation should be a person of mature faith and deep spiritual commitment. This should also be a person who is held in high esteem by the members of the congregation. The pastor and lay leader should confer regularly on ways of increasing the involvement of the laity in the ministry of the church. Care should be taken that this not become an exercise in getting more people on committees. *Keep the focus on ministry, and work together to identify gifts of the church members that coincide with the vision.* (See Guidelines: *Lay Leader/Lay Member.*)
- **Staff-Parish Relations Committee Chair:** The role of this person is to chair the committee that has responsibility for maintaining good and open communication between the pastor and the congregation. Christian maturity and deep faith are required in order to perform this job well. The pastor and the staff-parish chair have a responsibility to work together in matters of staffing needs. This is especially important at a time when some kind of staff change is being anticipated. Failure of the pastor and staff-parish chair to communicate in these matters can result in devastating conflict in the church. Once again, it is essential to remember that the vision for ministry is what is most important. (See Guidelines: *Pastor-Parish Relations.*)
- **Finance Committee Chair:** Too often in our churches finances determine ministry rather than ministry needs determining finances. The pastor and finance committee chair should work to attain a prayerful and committed relationship that is focused on serving the ministry needs of the congregation and community. Time should be spent in arriving at consensus on

financial priorities for the church. When the pastor and finance chair can agree on the matters ahead of time many conflicts in committee meetings can be avoided. (See Guidelines: *Finance*.)

- **Trustee Chair:** The buildings and property of a local church certainly have an impact on its ministry. The pastor and trustee chair can work together so that facilities are maintained primarily for doing ministry. It can be far too easy for church buildings to become the end of ministry rather than a means to an end. (See Guidelines: *Trustees*.)
- **Church Council (Administrative Board and Council on Ministries) Chair(s):** In The United Methodist Church, more and more local churches are moving to the single administrative body structure of the church council. It is still possible to organize along the lines of a Council on Ministries with an administrative board. Whatever the structure, the pastor and chair of the administrative body must be in close contact and work together for the ministry of the church. (See Guidelines: *Church Council*.)

Of course there are many other offices and positions of leadership in the church with which the pastor will be working from time to time. All are important, and all will benefit from a shared understanding of the work that is to be accomplished. The positions mentioned above represent some of the key administrative positions in the church. When the pastor develops a healthy relationship with persons in these areas then the work of the church will go much better, and there will be a greater likelihood that the vision will be realized.

The Church Is a System

Every local United Methodist church is a system with definite responsibilities for mission and ministry within the community in which it is located. It is always the mission of the church to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Within the context of that mission are numerous ministries and services that are unique to a particular place and time. The organization of the church in response to these unique ministries constitutes a system. It is the function of the local church to equip laity for the work of ministry in the world. The system in place in the church should be the result of shared communication and development. It should emphasize the gifts of the people, and it should be responsive to the callings and claims of God that the people feel upon their lives. The pastor's role is to provide leadership, which enables the system to do its work. In order for the pastor to provide effective leadership in any local congregation, he or she must be able to look at the system as a whole to see what is working well, what is working at less than full efficiency, and what is working poorly or not at all.

The organization of the church in response to these unique ministries constitutes a system.

The pastor's role is to provide leadership, which enables the system to do its work.

It is important to remember that not everyone in the church is necessarily looking at the entire system all the time. Many people have interests in one particular part of the church and fewer interests in some other parts. Perhaps they have young children and they are concerned that the church provide outstanding children's choirs, Sunday school classes, and nursery facilities. Perhaps there are single, older adults who are concerned that there be ample provision for fellowship and learning experiences that meet their needs. Perhaps there are families with children of various ages, and they want to be sure the church provides full ministry to people of all ages and stages in life so that the entire family will receive what it needs from the church experience. Perhaps they are concerned about evangelism, and they want to be sure the church is doing everything it can to reach new people and gain new members so that church growth is always happening in the congregation. Perhaps their interest is in worship, and they want to be sure that every service is vibrant and alive with the power of the presence of God.

Of course, the list could go on with the possibilities that individuals or groups of individuals might see as priorities for life in the church. All of the ones listed above and many more are good. They have the potential to minister to people and move the church toward fulfilling its mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ. The important thing, and the crucial job of the pastor, is (1) to hear the longings of the congregation and the community and (2) then work together with other leaders to provide a *holistic ministry* that makes the best possible use of facilities and resources in order to accomplish that mission of the church in that place.

This holistic approach is known as a "systems approach" to organizing the church: *the pastor is careful to see the whole picture of the ministry of the church and not just a variety of unrelated parts*. Looking at the whole picture helps keep the focus on the mission. When we look only at the parts we run the risk of having our focus become too narrow. The means become the end, and the mission gets lost amid the many things that, while good, may not be essential.

Looking at the whole picture helps keep the focus on the mission.

Perhaps there is no better or more pertinent reference to a systems approach to ministry than that which is found in the first of the seven letters to the churches in the book of Revelation. In this letter John commends the church at Ephesus for the many good things that they are doing. He says he understands the sacrifices and hard work they are enduring for the sake of their faith, but he says he has one thing against them, “. . . you have abandoned the love you had at first” (Revelation 2:1-7). In other words, they were working hard at the parts, but the system had lost its focus. They had lost their concentration on what they were really about. In the long run this could only lead them into chaos and confusion.

One of the best resources available for churches wishing to work on the systems approach to ministry and put it into effect in their local congregations is *FaithQuest Bible Study*. This seventeen-week study of Scripture and the writings of John Wesley provides an insightful means of getting at the heart of systems thinking in the church. A pastor might select a group of church leaders who would work through this study together. It would provide many opportunities for reflection on ways the local church can be seen as a system and can function in a way that keeps the focus on the mission.

Understanding the Local Situation

It is true that every United Methodist church is connected to every other in important and powerful ways. This connection is at the heart of who we are as United Methodists. A thorough understanding of it is vital to the total mission of the church in the world. It is also true that every local church is unique. There are characteristics in every church that set it apart and make it different in some way from every other church. It is to these differences that pastors must be carefully attuned.

Every United Methodist church is connected to every other in important and powerful ways.

Some churches may have a particular ministry that is important to it because of its setting in the community, or because of a unique historical pattern. For example, a church located near a college campus may see itself as especially called to minister to the community of students and faculty who are nearby. Another church in a different part of town may see itself as called to minister to the inner city, or to blue-collar workers. Churches in rural areas may find their ministry in working with farmers. The list is almost endless, and even within these categories there is room for much variation in terms

of the kinds of ministry and the way that ministry is accomplished. The point is that every local church has the responsibility of finding its special ministries within the Body of Christ and then working to achieve them. Each is unique, and God values them all. The important thing for the pastor to remember is the need to be sensitive to these realities and to work with congregations to effectively carry out the work to which the church has been called.

Of course, this is not to say that new things should never be attempted. It is to say that pastors should be attentive to congregational reality, should be in frequent consultation with laity, and should pay careful attention to historical perspective so that the church's identity is not called into question and unnecessary conflict aroused.

Understanding the local situation also involves being perceptive about particular relationships and personal characteristics that exist within a congregation. Some small churches are made up of just a few large families. There are relationships and connections that may not at first be understandable to the new pastor, but that are very clear, and perhaps very important, to the church members. Pastors should enter these new places with a willingness to show a healthy respect for the relationships in the church that might go back for several generations and hold special significance to the people there. To fail to pay attention to these realities can be a painful mistake in the beginning of a ministry and can lead to difficulties for a long time into the future.

In every local church there are certain unique personalities and structural realities with which the pastor must work. These may be different from those in the previous appointment or from those in the church where the pastor was once a member. The important thing is to remain focused on the mission of the church and the pastor's responsibility to see the whole system. *Structure is not nearly so important as system thinking.* Remaining focused on the mission is a good way to care for the whole ministry of the church and not become bogged down in structural manipulation. There are times when structural changes are appropriate. These are usually best made in collaboration with church leadership rather than arbitrarily by the pastor.

The Pastor as Custodian of Institutional Integrity

It is hardly possible to overstate the importance of the role of the pastor in maintaining the institutional integrity of the congregation. Institutional integrity is represented by those qualities that present the

congregation to the community as a place of honesty, safety, hope, and reconciliation. When the church misses the mark in this regard serious harm can result for the witness of the Christian faith.

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The handling of money must be done with the highest regard for honesty and clarity so that persons may feel confident that their gifts to the church are treated with the respect that is deserving of expressions of Christian stewardship. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* contains clear guidelines for the ways offerings are to be handled from the time of collection until their deposit in a bank. The pastor of the local congregation is responsible for guiding the committee on finance in establishing proper structure and procedures so that the guidelines are followed and funds are used in the manner and spirit in which they have been given.

Safety in the church is a major concern. The pastor and congregation should work together to see that risk management procedures are in place to ensure that when people come to church they will be safe from any kind of physical or emotional harm. Sadly, the abuse of children is a growing concern among churches all across America. Part of the reason this tragic activity is becoming such a problem is that many churches have no policies in place to prevent child abuse or to deal with it once it has occurred. Working with the trustees, children's council, educational committees, and other pertinent groups, the pastor should take the lead in establishing policies to reduce the risk of any kind of abuse of children while they are in the care of the church. The book *Safe Sanctuaries* by Joy Thornburg Melton, published by Discipleship Resources, provides excellent and practical guidance for any congregation that wishes to seriously address this problem and take steps to prevent it.

The church can be an agent of hope and reconciliation for people who often find themselves overwhelmed by the concerns of their lives and the condemnation that can come from so many sources in our culture. Through her or his role as custodian of institutional integrity, the pastor can take the lead in providing that safe and honest place where spiritual and emotional wounds can be healed and life can be restored.

The Pastor as Preacher, Teacher, Worship Leader

The worship committee and other laity groups within the church can be of significant help in developing worship services and preparing sermons that touch the lives of people with the transforming power of Christ. (See the “Quick-Start Tips” in the *Worship* booklet in this Guidelines series.) Laity groups might be consulted regularly for their responses to certain Scripture passages, hymns, and prayers. One pastor had a regular weekly meeting with laity. They would look at the text for the next Sunday, and the pastor would ask for the people’s impressions concerning the text. She would also ask for suggestions for a theme for the service with this text being central. She might ask what hymns seemed to go well with the text. This weekly exercise provided a rich minefield of ideas, concerns, and ways that the worship might be more meaningful. The pastor surrendered neither the authority nor the responsibility for prophetic ministry in the congregation. But she did create a fertile place for helping laity develop their faith. When the pastor returned to the study to make final plans for the worship, she did so full of awareness of the people’s needs.

Perhaps there is no greater concern among the laity than that of having a pastor who is effective in the pulpit, in the leadership of worship, and as a teacher of Christian doctrine. These qualities go straight to the heart of the work of the pastor, and as such they should receive a major portion of the pastor’s time and effort. This is true in every congregation, and the larger the congregation the more true it becomes. For many people, their primary, and in some cases only contact with the pastor is in worship. When this is the case, the pastor’s effectiveness in this regard is of highly significant importance.

Effective preaching requires time. There is just no way to avoid this reality. In order to preach effectively, the pastor must spend time in spiritual preparation, in theological and biblical preparation, and being in tune with the cultural realities into which the sermon will be preached. A pastor who is not familiar with the people and the culture in which the pastoral work is done will be less than effective in the pulpit.

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Preaching the common lectionary is one means by which pastors may increase effectiveness in the pulpit (*The United Methodist Book of Worship*, pages 227-37). The lectionary provides Scriptures for each Sunday in the

church year, and there are ample commentaries and helps available for preparing sermons on these texts. One very important advantage to using the lectionary is that when followed faithfully it will lead the congregation through the heart of the Scripture and of the Christian faith. It leads one away from the temptation of preaching repeatedly on favorite texts or themes and provides a system by which the Scripture can be preached in a full and complete manner.

In the leadership of worship the opportunity is afforded to tell the story of the Christian faith through the experience of worship throughout the year. The work of worship preparation and planning can be shared with members of the worship committee or others who are designated to be part of planning. Pastors should be familiar with *Guidelines: Worship*. Different worship task groups might be assigned to work with the pastor on particular parts of the church year. This provides an excellent means of teaching as well as giving many persons within the congregation a chance to feel they have been involved in a significant work in the life of the church family. It is also true that involving laity in worship planning has a tendency to bring a diversity and life to the weekly service that it often lacks when only one person is doing it all. The pastor, through the regular work of worship planning, has a wonderful opportunity for teaching the Christian faith.

Observing the sacraments in worship offers meaningful opportunities for the pastor to exercise her or his role as teacher as well as worship leader. Baptism and the Lord's Supper have a beautiful way of telling the story of the Christian faith. The manner in which the sacraments are observed and the seriousness with which they are taken by the pastor will go a long way in teaching the congregation the faith story and how it is intended to be lived out in community. *By Water and the Spirit*, a study considering the United Methodist understanding of baptism, is an important teaching resource on the sacrament.

Making disciples of Jesus Christ is in many ways an activity of teaching. Pastors need to be effective teachers and need to be involved in the teaching ministry of the church. The committee on education in the church can be a valuable partner in providing the total learning experience for the congregation. They should be encouraged to develop a plan of education that includes all of the many possibilities that exist for learning and growth in the church. From the smallest child to the oldest adult, learning can be a profound means of disciple making. There are many excellent resources provided by The United Methodist Church to assist the pastor in the teaching ministry. Resources recommended for United Methodist congregations can be found in *Forecast*, which is sent to each local church.

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Also available are some in-depth studies that require a commitment to attendance and to preparation for weekly sessions. *Disciple Bible Study* (United Methodist Publishing House, 800-672-1789 or www.cokesbury.org) and the new *FaithQuest Bible Study* (Discipleship Resources, 800-685-4370 or www.discipleshipresources.org) are two excellent examples of the studies that are available. A new study entitled *Christian Believer* (United Methodist Publishing House, 800-672-1789 or www.cokesbury.org) is a welcome addition to this array of useful tools. These are somewhat long-term studies that last a number of weeks. Others are available that are of briefer duration, but that also offer significant opportunities for church members to grow in their faith. Courses on United Methodist history, doctrine, and polity are usually popular in the local church, and there are many resources that offer help in teaching these subjects. Every pastor should always be on the lookout for ways to enhance the teaching ministry in the local church. To do so is to honor the calling that belongs to us all to make disciples for Jesus Christ.

All of these very important activities afford the sensitive pastor with numerous opportunities for making disciples for Jesus Christ while doing the weekly work of the church. Preaching, leading worship, and teaching are at the heart of our calling as clergy. Doing them well will move the pastor toward accomplishing the mission of the church and toward a successful pastorate.

Developing a Leadership Style

Every personality is different. These differences give a richness to life and make it possible for many things to be achieved. This richness of diversity allows for a variety of leadership styles. There is no one way to be an effective leader. Every person who assumes leadership responsibility needs to lead out of the strengths and qualities that she or he brings to the task. This means being comfortable with who you are. One of the mistakes many people make in all walks of life, and especially in leadership roles, is that of trying to be something or someone they are not. This is a dangerous and ultimately ineffective way to live. It can be downright disastrous for the pastor. One of the main problems with trying to lead out of a personality that is not our own is that we simply cannot keep it up. Eventually, the real self will emerge; and when it does, the illusions we have been trying to create will come tumbling down.

Another danger in trying to be someone we are not is that we simply can never be as good or as effective playing a role as we can be when we are ourselves. God has given very special strengths to all of us. They are sufficient to the tasks that have been set before us if only we will use them to the very best of our ability and ask for the guidance of God in our efforts.

Being intentional about faithfulness to who we are does not mean that we should not do all we can to learn from others. Focusing on being yourself is not an excuse to stop growing and developing as a person, as a Christian, or as a leader. Indeed, the more we grow the more likely we are to discover new, untapped aspects of ourselves that can be used for even more effective ministry.

The following are some leadership insights that may help pastors develop their own individual style.

1) Be a Learning Leader

There is always something more to learn about your work, your calling, your faith, and even yourself. As you learn, you will discover new ways that your leadership can be affected for good. By setting the example of being a learning leader you will create a climate within the congregation that encourages learning on the part of others.

Clergy are fortunate to have many resources for learning. Great books are available on the subject of leadership that can be very useful to the pastor. Two that are of particular significance are *Church Leadership* and *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit* by Lovett Weems, president of St. Paul School of Theology. In his books, Dr. Weems provides clear and valuable help in the areas of leadership that are most vital to the pastor in today's church. The books are "must reads" for any pastor who is serious about enhancing leadership skills.

Most conferences offer several continuing education opportunities during the course of the year. These may range from Bible studies to spiritual formation events, to "nuts and bolts" workshops on ways to be a more effective pastor. All can strengthen the pastor's skill as a leader. Pastors should take advantage of as many of these courses as possible.

Seminaries, colleges, community and civic organizations, and other institutions often offer continuing education events that may be helpful to pastors. The pastor who wishes to grow in leadership skill should always keep an eye open for something that will contribute to that growth, and then take advantage of it when it comes along.

2) Be Willing to Take Risks in Leadership

It is very difficult, if not impossible, to lead any congregation without ever taking a risk. Sometimes the things we try do not work. It is important to do the necessary preparation in advance, and it is vital to give the project the best possible effort, but even then, not everything we try will prove successful. On the other hand, failing to launch out on risky adventures will likely keep the church from doing its mission as well as it might.

Every pastor would be well served to view the video *Everyday Creativity* from the Starthrower Corporation. This production reminds us of the value of continuing to look for the “next right answer.” There is always another one out there ahead of us. Looking for it may seem risky, but unless we take the risks we will never discover our full potential.

Although it can never be made foolproof, risk-taking does not have to be as threatening as it might first seem. Pastors can clearly affirm the intention to take risks with a congregation from the beginning. The congregation might even be invited to join in the adventure, and all can recognize that part of the challenge of growing is stretching the boundaries. It can be stated right up front that some things we try will work out well, and some probably will not. Nobody should be punished or criticized for taking a risk that was entered in good faith and with the hope of an outcome that would be beneficial to the whole church. This kind of thinking may be new to a congregation, and it may be new to the pastor. If it can be approached with honesty and integrity, and without judgment, it can bring a whole new way of thinking about and acting upon the future for a church.

3) Understand the Equipping Role of Pastoral Leadership

Every Christian is called to ministry to the world. Pastors are surely included in this call, but pastors are not exclusively called. Laity also have a calling from God to do ministry in the world. The work of the pastor is not to do ministry for laity, but to equip laity for doing their own ministries to which they have experienced a call. This concept of pastoral leadership has been seriously neglected over the past few generations. We have increasingly learned to depend on paid staff for doing the ministry of the church while too often ignoring the ministry of all the people. In preaching, in worship, in teaching, and by example, the effective pastoral leader will call the congregation to its own ministry and will train them and guide them into the realization of that ministry in their individual lives.

4) Leadership Involves Clear and Open Communication

Far too often in the church, problems arise because people have not received clear communication about some important aspect in the life of the church. “Nobody told me!” is the lament of people who have made a mistake that could have been, and would have been avoided had communication been clear. Effective pastoral leaders will see that the lines of communication are always open. This may mean giving attention to a simple newsletter that goes to the congregation on a regular basis. It may mean making sure that every voice has a chance to be heard in committee meetings. It surely means spending a lot of time in conversation with people and listening to their needs and concerns. It may be that there is no better use of a pastor’s time than that spent listening to the needs and longings of the members and visitors of the congregation, in addition to the community at large. Some pastors have employed the technique of neighborhood coffees or fellowship gatherings where small groups of people get together for discussion about the ministry of the church. These meetings need little or no agenda other than giving the people an opportunity to share their thoughts, their dreams, and their hopes for the congregation. Whatever methods are employed, the value of good, open, healthy communication can never be underestimated. When it is present, the pastor will have a better understanding of what needs to be done, and the people will better understand what is happening and why.

5) Effective Pastoral Leaders Keep the Focus on the Present Appointment

It is an unfortunate reality in our United Methodist system that many pastors often give in to the temptation to look longingly at the possibilities for future appointments rather than focus on the one they are presently serving. The results of this can be harmful to the congregation that fails to receive 100 percent of the pastor’s attention, and also to the pastor, who may find himself or herself in trouble in the current appointment. There is sufficient work in every place to keep us occupied with doing that to which we have been assigned. To drain away time and energy from this essential task is to hamper the work of God, and it will undercut the leadership of the pastor within the congregation.

6) The Effective Pastor Strives to Model the Christian Life in the Church and in the Community

Pastors are not called to be “super Christians” and certainly not “plastic saints” with a thin veneer of piety. This kind of posturing will quickly wear out in the midst of congregational life. Pastors are called to live as real

human beings engaged in the real struggles of life with a commitment to live as authentic and faithful persons. This kind of commitment should manifest itself in an effort to live with integrity and deal justly with all persons. It will also mean that at times the pastor will have to admit to mistakes. At times the pastor will be required to acknowledge that something may be beyond her/his expertise. There will be times when the pastor will lead with active strength and determination. Other times the pastor will show real strength by listening to and following the counsel of others. No person is perfect. None of us has all the answers. One of the best ways a pastor can model the Christian life is by being vulnerable enough to own his or her shortcomings and allow others to help. The good part about this approach to pastoral leadership is that it helps take away people's tendency to place the pastor on a pedestal and think of her or him in terms that are impossible to realize. Modeling the Christian life as a fellow journeyer striving to live out of a faith commitment is a crucial part of pastoral leadership.

The Spiritual Life of the Pastor

Serving as a spiritual leader for others is an awesome responsibility. It is also a joyous opportunity, which carries with it rich rewards in terms of the spiritual growth of the person who is doing the leading. Jesus spoke often of the truth that the only things you really have in life are those things that you give away. Surely, as we give to others of our own spiritual strength and maturity, we will discover that our giving returns to us in many ways.

It is essential for spiritual leaders to remember that we cannot lead others into places that we have never been. Therefore, attention to one's own spiritual life is a most important part of the work of any pastor. The extent to which we do this and the way in which we do it will have tremendous impact on the effectiveness of any pastoral ministry. The qualities of intelligence, skill, and ability are all very important. They can be useful tools in the work of pastoral ministry, but their usefulness is greatly influenced by the depth of the spiritual life of the person who employs them. Shallow spirituality can make intelligence look like arrogance. It can make skill look like performance. It can make ability seem hollow and empty.

The work of pastoral ministry can be a busy and active work. There are so many things to do and so many places to be that it can often seem as if there are just not enough hours in the day or days in the week to get everything done. There is always one more meeting to attend, one more person who needs to see us, one more hospital call to make, and the list goes on. There are sermons to write, Bible studies to prepare, worship services to plan, prospects to contact, community events to attend, and much more. Where is

the time to make sure the spiritual life of the pastor is receiving the attention it needs and deserves? If the pastor does not take care that such time is set aside and protected, it is not likely that anyone else will do it either.

What is universal is the need that exists within us all to have our spirits nurtured and our souls fed.

What does this mean in the case of an individual pastor? Every life is different. Every spiritual experience is deeply personal and involves a journey of the soul that is unique. What is universal is the need that exists within us all to have our spirits nurtured and our souls fed. Some pastors find the early morning the best time to attend to their personal spiritual life. Others find the late evening works best for them. For some it may be best to set aside time right after arriving at the office for a period of devotion and prayer. For others there is just too much activity going on at the church, and they find it better to work on their personal spirituality at another place.

Individual personalities have a lot to do with the way we attend to our personal spirituality. Some pastors are extroverts. They need and greatly value the presence of other people. They draw strength and energy from being around others. For extroverted pastors it may be best to develop some kind of group relationship with others so that spiritual growth can be a shared experience. For these pastors it is a good discipline to make sure there is at least some time for being alone, even though this is not their natural tendency.

Other pastors are introverts. For these persons the “mingling” aspect of pastoral ministry is the hardest part. They are much more comfortable being alone with themselves. They cherish the time they can spend in quiet meditation and reflection. They are very aware of their inner lives and feelings and tend to spend a lot of time pondering the implications of their inner spirits. These are persons who are likely to make sure that they have quiet time for their spiritual nurture. What they also need is the discipline of relating to others in some kind of interactive setting. It may be that the introverted pastor will need a group experience to round out spiritual growth in her or his life.

The point, of course, is that whatever the pastor’s need for spiritual growth and formation, time must be set aside to attend to it. It should be very intentional, and it should be directed not only at those areas where the pastor feels most comfortable, but also at those places where the pastor feels the need for further development.

Whatever the pastor's need for spiritual growth and formation, time must be set aside to attend to it.

The spiritual life of the pastor is nurtured not only by daily and weekly intentional experiences of devotion, but also by longer, more extensive times of personal growth. Paragraph 349 of *The Book of Discipline*, 2000 states as follows:

1. Throughout their careers, clergy shall engage in continuing education for ministry, professional development, and spiritual formation and growth in order to lead the church in fulfilling the mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ. This shall include carefully developed personal programs of study augmented periodically by organized educational and spiritual growth activities.
2. A clergy member's continuing education and spiritual growth program should include such leaves at least one week each year and at least one month during one year of every quadrennium. Such leaves shall not be considered as part of the ministers' vacations and shall be planned in consultation with their charges or other agencies to which they are appointed as well as the bishop, district superintendent, and annual conference continuing education committee.

This provision by the church for the pastor's continuing spiritual formation is a testament to the value placed upon this most important component in the life of any spiritual leader. Too often in the busy life of the pastor these concerns get overlooked. Failure to plan ahead for these extended periods of time will almost ensure they will not happen. It would be helpful if at the beginning of each new pastorate there could be clarity about the significance of this aspect of the pastor's work. With this clarity could come an opportunity for making long-range plans for this continuing formation. It could be built into the rhythm of the church year, and it could be seen as part of what is routinely done in order to ensure that the pastor will maintain spiritual health in order to provide the leadership that is essential. If this planning is supported by strong affirmation from the bishop and district superintendent then it is much more likely to happen successfully.

Failure to plan ahead for these extended periods of time will almost ensure they will not happen.

There are numerous resources that lend themselves to the support of the spiritual life of the pastor. Among them are: *Learning to Lead from Your Spiritual Center* by Patricia Brown; *Sabbatical Journey* by Henri Nouwen; *Memories of God* and *In Ordinary Time* by Roberta Bondi; *Under the Unpredictable Plant* and *Working the Angles* by Eugene Peterson; the newsletter "Leading from the Center," published by the General Board of Discipleship, and of course, many more. The point is to secure the resources that best meet your needs, do the planning and consultation, take the time, and make sure that the spirit is nourished. A pastor who fails to do these

things not only shortchanges herself or himself, but also is rendered ill-equipped to function effectively as spiritual leader in the congregation.

Conclusion

It is hardly possible to state with sufficient clarity the importance of the leadership role of the pastor in The United Methodist Church. It is a role that is pivotal if the congregation is to fulfill its mission of making disciples for Jesus Christ. The pastor is the one person in the church who is called to look at the whole of the organization and provide an overall vision that moves it toward its mission. When this work is done with consultation and collaboration, and with sensitivity to the views and needs of others, the work of the pastor will be effective and the mission of the church will be advanced. When this work is done in an inadequate or insensitive manner, the church system is likely to suffer.

Pastors are entrusted with the spiritual lives of the persons within the congregation to which they are assigned. It is a daunting and noble task. It requires the best of our time, our energy, our devotion, and our prayers. Its rewards are many in terms of witnessing the transformation of persons and the growth of the kingdom of God. May God bless all our pastors as they pursue the call of God upon their lives.

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 and mailed annually to each local church. Free additional copies may be ordered from Cokesbury.

Guidelines for Leading Your Church: 2001–2004 (Abingdon Press). A set of twenty-six booklets providing guidance for those persons responsible for the administration and program of the local church. Available from Cokesbury.

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.

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.

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Mel;ton, Joy Thornburg. *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in The Church*. Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999.

Nouwen, Henri J. M. *Sabbatical Journey: The Final Year*. New York: Crossroad, 1999.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1994.

Peterson, Eugene H. *Working the Angles: A Trigonometry for Pastoral Work*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1987.

Weems, Lovett H., Jr. *Church Leadership: Vision, Team, Culture, and Integrity*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Weems, Lovett H., Jr. *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.

Addresses and Phone Numbers

Cokesbury Service Center (for placing orders for curriculum and books, and for information on *Disciple* Bible Study): 800-672-1789.

Curric-U-Phone (for assistance in identifying and selecting curriculum resources for your church): 800-251-8591.

Discipleship Resources Distribution Center, P.O. Box 1616, Alpharetta, GA 30009-1616. Phone: 800-685-4370.

EcuFilm: 800-251-4091.

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