



# A Planning Guide For United Methodist Congregations To Fulfill Our Mission

The Alabama West Florida Conference is being invited to join United Methodist Churches across the denomination to grow the number of vital congregations that are effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

We encourage each local congregation to engage in a strategic planning process that sets reasonable, accessible and achievable goals based upon its individual context. This process equips and resources local congregations to meet their goals.

<http://umvitalcongregations.org/>

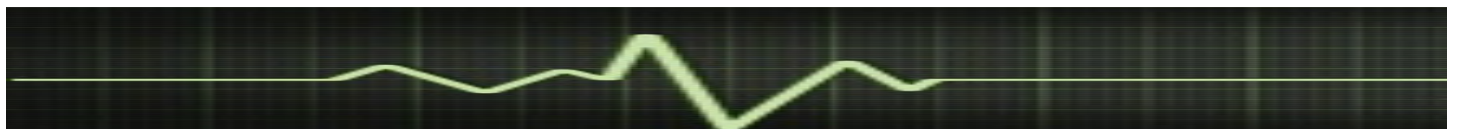
[www.awfumc.org/vitalcongregations](http://www.awfumc.org/vitalcongregations)





A **VITAL CONGREGATION** is a local church which has inspiring and inviting worship, engages disciples in small groups, missions and outreach, possesses gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership and an effectively equipped and inspired clergy leadership. In the first century church, Christ's ministry took root and grew as congregations were established. These congregations became the *body of Christ*- transforming lives and communities through "*works of piety*" and "*works of mercy*".

**VITAL CONGREGATIONS** transform the world as a part of a spiritual journey. The Holy Spirit empowers and guides members of the body of Christ in an engagement of the Wesleyan understanding of the means of grace.



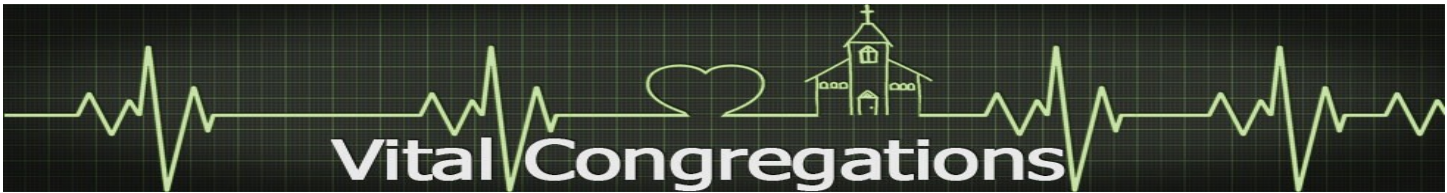
## **A MINISTRY ACTION PLAN FOR CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY AND FRUITFULNESS**

**BEGIN** with prayer, take time to study the scriptures (see resource page for suggested bible passages), and then use this planning guide to develop your Missional Action Plan for the Way Forward.

**A LOOK BACK.** When did your church start? What was the setting? Why did your church start? What are the core values on which your church is built? How is your ministry going? Use the UM Vital Congregations web site to look at your recent trends in terms of worship attendance, professions of faith, small groups, engagement in mission, and missional giving.

**THE PRESENT:** Your context for ministry – the community and people God has called you to serve

1. **YOUR COMMUNITY** – Use the community demographics information provided by Percept (see resource page) to better know your community – population, age, ethnicity, etc  
What are the current needs in your community?  
What changes are occurring in your community that may impact your future ministry?
2. **YOUR CHURCH** – What are the talents, abilities, and gifts of the people in your church?  
What values guide your congregation?  
What are your greatest ministry strengths as a church?  
What are the greatest challenges you face as a church?  
If you ceased to exist as a church, who outside those in your congregation would miss you?  
What does your community think of when the name of your church is mentioned?  
What are the opportunities before you given the talents and giftedness of your congregation and the strengths of your ministry?



**THE WAY FORWARD** – Clarify your mission. Why does your church exist? Do you have a mission statement? Are you mission driven? Are you externally focused? The mission sets the parameters and scope of your ministries. In all you do use the phrase, “so that”. For example, “we have Sunday school, so that... we have a food pantry “so that”...we tutor school children, “so that”...Who is God calling you to be passionate about reaching in your community?

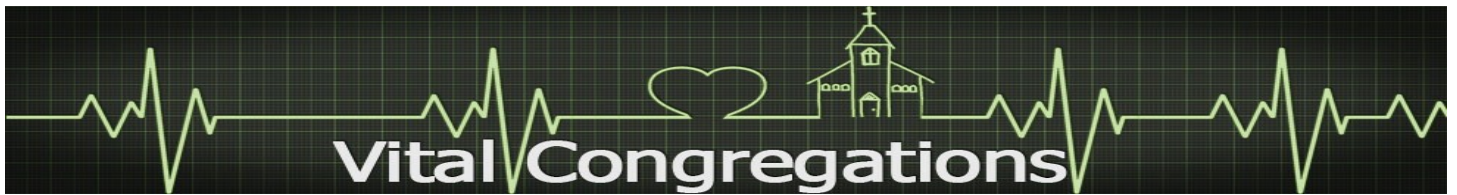
*Focus your vision.* What is God’s vision for your church? The vision is a picture of your preferred future. Vision is about the direction you are going. Vision must be clear, compelling and captivating. Vision must be continually cast. *Develop ministries that reflect your mission and vision.* Look at what you are currently doing that is in keeping with your mission and vision. Given the needs of your community and your vision for the future, what ministries do you need to engage in order to fulfill your mission? As you go forward join United Methodist churches across the Alabama-West Florida Conference and across our denomination that are setting Vital Congregation Goals.

Set your vital congregation goals in the five areas below. These goals will be gathered and presented to General Conference as an offering from your congregation.

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

**ACTION:** What actions will you take to engage more people in worship? In what ways will you intentionally seek to make disciples? What disciple making process will you use in small groups? How will you be more missional, more outreach oriented? How will you be more intentional in encouraging missional giving? What will you specifically do to develop more laity to be effective spiritual leaders? What will you specifically do to support and encourage your pastor to be a more effective spiritual leader? Cultivating the most effective and fruitful clergy and lay leaders is essential to the way forward for the church. How are you going about leader development in your church?

**Cultivating fruitful leaders and congregations who make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.**



## RESOURCES:

- <http://umvitalcongregations.org/>
- Bible passages:  
Matthew 28:18—20; Matthew 22:36—40; Acts 2;  
1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:10—13; Galatians 3:28;  
Luke 10:25—37; Micah 6:8; and Luke 4:17—21
- Conference Board of Congregational Development  
Percept – local church and community demographic information.  
Contact Sandy Gutting [sgutting@mchsi.com](mailto:sgutting@mchsi.com)  
Natural Church Development  
Becoming a More Inviting Church Workshop
- 2011 STATE OF THE CHURCH REPORT. [www.umc.org/sotc](http://www.umc.org/sotc), download pdf.
- School of Congregational Development Ministry Guidelines  
<http://gbgm-umc.org/scdlive/>. Download 2011 Live Guidebook, Ministry Plan, pages 5—9
- Harding, Kevass J. *Can These Bones Live? Bringing New Life to a Dying Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007
- Rasmus, Rudy. *Touch: The Power of Touch Transforming Lives*. Friendswood and Houston, TX  
Baxter Press/ Spirit Rising, 2006
- Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations, resources and workshop.
- Academy for Congregational Excellence
- Alpha Course—[www.alphausa.org](http://www.alphausa.org)
- Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Framed (SMART) Goals [www.goalsettingstrategics.com](http://www.goalsettingstrategics.com)
- Missional Church Resources: [www.forgeamerica.org](http://www.forgeamerica.org)
- **HIGH 5**, ingredients of highly successful churches—[www.umcgiving.org](http://www.umcgiving.org)
- "The Externally Focused Church" by Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson
- [www.gbgm-umc.org](http://www.gbgm-umc.org) and [www.umvim.org](http://www.umvim.org)

For more information or to schedule a  
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