

## **Using The NOW Model For Effective Ministry In Small Congregations**

by William F. Appleby

*Models for Ministry in small membership churches are occasional publications of the Hinton Rural Life Center and demonstrate examples of programs, organization or procedures that have provided effective ministry and mission in small membership church settings. The models are suggestions by which a local church may gain insights for strengthening their own ministry and mission.*

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### **Introduction**

D.T. Niles said, "The Church exists for mission, as a fire exists for burning!" The Church's reason for being is to fulfill God's mission and ministry in the world. The local congregation is a body of baptized believers who are committed to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and who are seeking to be God's people on God's mission in God's world!

The Church receives directives for its mission and ministry from the teachings of Jesus and the Holy Scriptures. There are many references that could be explored to help us understand who we are and what we are called to do as the Body of Christ (*I Corinthians 12:27*). Let us look at a few of these key passages.

We take our cue from Jesus when he began his ministry in Nazareth. Jesus made known his mission and ministry when he read from the Prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (*Luke 4:18-19*)

Jesus commissioned his disciples at the close of his ministry, "Go....make disciples of all people, baptizing them....teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (*Matthew 28:19-20*). Then before he ascended, Jesus told his disciples, "...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (*Acts 1:8*)

The book of Acts records the work of the early church as it took form. Acts 2:42-47 give us a description of the church's components: "They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers...Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."

Paul describes the Body of the Church in I Cor. 12:12-27, pointing out there are "many members" and each has its particular function, but all compose "the Body." In his letter to the church at Ephesus (Eph. 4:11-16), he writes about the various **roles** members may have, as well as the

- **functions** ("to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up of the body of Christ...");
- **relationships** ("knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped..."); and

- **objectives** ("... the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the maturity, to the measure of the stature of Christ, ...the body's growth in building itself in love").

These scriptures and others help us form a biblical foundation for our understanding of the mission and ministry of the church.

### **The Local Church in United Methodism**

United Methodism recognizes the local church as central to ministry.

It is primarily at the level of the local church that the church encounters the world. The local church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society. The function of the local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is to help people to know Jesus Christ personally and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God. (*The Book of Discipline*, π202)

And as to its responsibility to those who comprise the local church, its members, "Each local church shall have a definite evangelistic, nurture, and witness responsibility for its members and the surrounding area and a missional outreach responsibility to the local and global community." (π204) In other words, every United Methodist Church, regardless of size or location, shares the responsibility of inviting persons to respond to God's gracious love by:

- committing their lives to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (*witness*)
- practicing regularly the disciplines of Christian living, supported by the Christian community and empowered by the Holy Spirit (*nurture*)
- approaching all experiences of life as opportunities for faithful discipleship and service (*outreach*)

There is a statement in *The Book of Discipline* that affirms the church's mode of operation.

“The local church shall be organized so that it can pursue its primary task and mission in the context of its own community - reaching out and receiving with joy all who will respond; encouraging people in their relationship with God and inviting them to commitment to God's love in Jesus Christ; providing opportunities for them to seek strengthening and spiritual formation; and supporting them to live lovingly and justly in the power of the Holy Spirit as faithful disciples.” (π243)

### **Functions of the Congregation**

“The Church Council is the primary way in which a church is organized for ministry. “The Church Council shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness, and resources in the local church. It shall also provide for the administration of its organization and temporal life....Nurture, Outreach, Witness, and Resourcing – these are the functions of a congregation in ministry.” π252

(π252) **The Nurture function focuses largely on the internal needs of a congregation - *what we do for those who come to the church.***

Nurture is teaching, preparing, and equipping the people of that church for ministry within their community and the world. Through fellowship, worship, Sunday School, small-group ministries, and other nurturing experiences, people will grow in their Christian faith, understand the principles of stewardship, and will be equipped to serve as faithful disciples.

**(π252) The Outreach function focuses on Ministries beyond the four walls of the church building - what we do for those who don't come to the church.** Outreach is three-fold:

*Ministries of compassion* involve a congregation in addressing the immediate needs of individuals, families, and communities. The congregation may respond to local community needs and provide food, clothing, emergency housing, counseling, and employment opportunities. Community ministries of concern and advocacy call for a congregation's involvement in the enrichment of community life.

*The church should be an advocate* for justice-related changes in their community related to welfare, housing, drug abuse, education, economic development, health, and other community concerns/ issues.

Regional, national, and global outreach ministries call a congregation to engage in the structures and values of society by *moving toward justice and righteousness in public policies*. This should include human rights, land use and control, the environment, peace, and the world's economic systems. The congregation should give support and participate in the denomination's mission projects and programs.

**(π252) The Witness function gives people an opportunity to share their faith in word and deed - how we share our experience of the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ.**

Caring, sharing, listening, visiting, preaching, praying, hospitality...all we do out of our experience of God's love in Christ is our witness, our work for justice, righteousness, and redemption of the world.

**The Resources/Administration function effectively utilizes the human resources, economic support, facilities, organization and administrative processes of the congregation.** It is important that the linkages with the United Methodist connection and the church universal be maintained.

## **TOUCHING ALL THE BASES**

While no analogy is perfect, the baseball diamond helps to illustrate and visualize the church's organization functions, roles, and responsibilities. The diamond represents the local church, the playing field. Sometimes the pitcher has to make the tag: the order of the functions may fail to play out as they are shown here. Sometimes the shortstop covers a base; the roles and responsibilities may not be as clearly defined and expressed. In order to score a home run, the runner must touch all the bases. When a congregation "touches all the bases," the local church, as the Body of Christ, is enabled to more effectively fulfill God's call to them to mission and ministry in the community and world.

### **Organizing the Church for Ministry**

These four functions of Nurture, Outreach, Witness, and Resourcing/Administration represent what God calls all local congregations to be and to do. Here *The Discipline* also provides guidance and standards:

In carrying out its primary task, (the local church) shall be organized so that adequate provision is made for these basic responsibilities:

- (1) planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach and witness for persons and families within and without the congregation;
- (2) providing for effective pastoral and lay leadership;
- (3) providing for financial support, physical facilities, and the legal obligations of the church;
- (4) utilizing the appropriate relationships and resources of the district and annual conference;
- (5) providing for the proper creation, maintenance, and disposition of documentary record material of the local church;
- (6) seeking inclusiveness in all aspects of its life. (π243)

## **The Church Council**

The Church Council/NOW Model for Ministry is designed so that congregations with small memberships can be organized to "touch all the bases" and carry out the functions and responsibilities with as few as eight members and the pastor. The model is functional, flexible, and focused to enable a congregation to plan and implement an effective and meaningful program of ministries.

However, a Church Council is certainly not limited to eight persons. If the resident membership is large enough or growing so as to need more leaders, it may involve more members, elected and/or designated to serve in leadership roles on the Council. This would keep those elected from having to wear several hats. Members of the congregation might be enlisted to serve on a Task Force to plan and implement a specific ministry of Nurture, Outreach, or Witness. When the task has been completed, the Task Force would then be dissolved.

The Church Council ( $\pi$ 252) is the governing body of the local church. It gives oversight both to programmatic ministries and administrative concerns. By serving in several roles, as few as eight people can fill the leadership roles necessary to be an organized church, with a primary focus on ministry (Nurture, Outreach, Witness and Supportive Ministries). This model can be expanded to involve more persons in the decision-making process.

Although monthly or bimonthly meetings allow the Council to be more current in their appraisal of what the church is doing and thus to be more effective, the Council must meet at least quarterly. The first order of business at each meeting should be the consideration of the NOW components for ministry. Nurture, Outreach, and Witness Ministries are the heart beat of the congregation's life! The mission and ministry of the congregation should be given priority on the agenda.

If the agenda is planned otherwise, finance and property concerns will dominate the discussion and the attitude of the Council meeting, leaving little time, energy, or vision to consider the congregation's ministry. The church's finances are important, but they are a means of supporting the mission and ministries of the church.

### **FIRST BASE: LEADERSHIP**

First base in our baseball analogy is *Leadership*. Without a doubt, lay and clergy leadership is the key to a church's effectiveness and vitality.

Although there may be only a few laypersons from which to select the Church Council offices, it is important that people be placed in positions where they may give the best leadership. This is the responsibility of the *Committee on Lay Leadership* (formerly Nominations and Personnel). This committee is composed of three to nine members elected from the Charge Conference, plus the pastor (chair) and the lay leader. The Committee on Lay Leadership nominates people to serve on the Council *and instructs them as to their task*.

The *Committee on Pastor-Parish Relations* is composed of five to nine members plus the lay leader and the lay member of the annual conference. See  $\pi$ 259.2 for a discussion of the role and responsibilities of this vital group. In a multi-church charge each congregation has representation. The title spells out some of the role and responsibility of this group, which relates to the pastoral (and staff) leadership of the church. Meetings should be held at least quarterly, and again, effective ministry is the focus.

The *Church Council* also includes people who represent the program ministries of the church as outlined in  $\pi$ 243. The membership includes but is not limited to the following:

- 1) Chairperson of the church council;
- 2) Lay leader;
- 3) Chairperson (or representative) of the pastor-parish relations committee;
- 4) Chairperson of the committee on finance;
- 5) Chairperson of the board of trustees
- 6) Church treasurer
- 7) Lay member to annual conference
- 8) Representative of the UMW
- 9) Representative of the UMM
- 10) Representative of the UMYF
- 11) Pastor
- 12) Representatives of the nurture, outreach, and witness ministries of the church

### **SECOND BASE: NOW MINISTRIES**

When a runner is on second base, the chances of scoring are greater. Second base is the NOW Ministries of the church. Remember, *ministry is the heart of the church!* Where a congregation has claimed a vision for its mission and ministry, there is new life and vitality!

1. The **NURTURING MINISTRIES** give attention to needs of the congregation, including education, worship, Christian formation, and stewardship. (See Functions above.)
2. The **OUTREACH MINISTRIES** give attention to the local and larger community ministries of compassion, justice, and advocacy, which can take many forms. (See Functions above.)
3. The **WITNESS MINISTRIES** give attention to evangelistic outreach and sharing of faith stories, communications, lay speaking ministries, and other means that express witness for Jesus Christ. (See Functions above.)

### **THIRD BASE: SUPPORTIVE RESOURCES**

Third Base represents the supportive resources component, which plans for financial support, upkeep of physical facilities and the care of legal matters. Two committees provide leadership in these important areas: Committee on Finance and Board of Trustees. These two groups may function as one in churches of very small membership.

1. **The Committee on Finance** ( $\pi$ 259.4) has responsibility for developing annually a complete budget for the church's ministry and operation, which is presented to the Council for review and adoption. It also has the task of developing and implementing plans to secure sufficient income for the budget. The committee oversees the process of receiving and, through the Treasurer, disbursing funds according to the direction of the Council and makes a report on the financial status of the church at each Council meeting. The minimal membership of the committee would include the chairperson, church lay leader, Church Council chairperson, treasurer, and pastor.
2. **The Board of Trustees**, the legal voice of the church, is organized and functions according to  $\pi$ 2524-2551 in *The Book of Discipline*. This body is entrusted with the care and supervision of the real and personal property of the local congregation. A minimum of three members no more than nine serve as trustees, with the chairperson being a member of the Church Council.

## **HOME PLATE: FULFILLING GOD'S MISSION & MINISTRY**

United Methodism has a system of connectional relationships with the district, annual conference, jurisdiction, and general church boards and agencies. This network of relationships provides resources and leadership to enable a congregation to be faithful to its calling and to participate in the global mission of the United Methodist Church – to get to Home Plate.

*General church apportionments give every congregation the opportunity to be in ministry throughout the world!* Although any given congregation may be small numerically, it can be large in its vision, sense of mission, and quality of ministry. The Charge Conference is the basic unit through which a local church is linked with the other levels of the connectional system.

By “touching all the bases” and seeking to be faithful to what God is calling the church to be and to do, a congregation can have an effective ministry, regardless of its size.

### **Conclusion**

( $\pi$ 252.1) *Ministry does not just happen!* Planning is the key. As someone has said, “To fail to plan is to plan to fail.” For that reason the Book of Discipline includes in its description of the purpose of the Church Council in  $\pi$ 252.1 this important mandate:

*“The Church Council shall provide for planning and implementing a program of nurture, outreach, witness and resources in the local church.”*

Vision, planning, implementation, and evaluation are all part of the whole of ministry. To see where you are going, to plan how to get there, to go, and then to pay attention to and learn from what happens along the way are all critical.

Church organizational structures were never meant to be an end in themselves, but always a means to an end. The question is always, *“What does Jesus Christ want the church/OUR church to be and do?”* As a congregation works together with God (*I Cor.3:9*), the church will have spiritual vitality, dreaming God's dream and finding fulfillment as they live out their individual and corporate discipleship.

In “Our Theological Task,” *The Book of Discipline* concludes with these thoughts on our ministry and its potential: “Evangelism, nurture, and mission require a constant effort to integrate authentic experience, rational thought, and purposeful action with theological integrity. A convincing witness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can contribute to the renewal of our faith, bring persons to that faith, and strengthen the Church as an agent of healing and reconciliation.” ( $\pi$ 104, p 85) Organization that is intentional, effective and inclusive can contribute greatly to that “convincing witness.”

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### **RESOURCES**

*[All scripture quotes are from NRSV.]*

1. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2004*, UM Publishing House
2. *Mobilizing the Small Church for Ministry*, from *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation*. Abingdon Press.
3. *The Small Membership Church: A Mustard Seed, Not an Acorn* by Sharon L. Schwab