

CREATING NEW PLACES FOR NEW PEOPLE



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DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church



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THE SEVEN SEASONS OF PLANTING

When planting new churches, we seek to help congregations grow through a series of seasons. From the early days of planting, through the time when weekly worship begins, we move faith communities toward the ideal of multiplying ministries. These healthy churches multiply to form other new faith communities that reach even more people.

THE BASIC SEASONS OF PLANTING CHURCHES ARE:

1. Discerning
2. Visioning
3. Gathering
4. Discipling
5. Worshiping
6. Maturing
7. Multiplying



DISCERNING: PLANTER OR PARTNER?

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
(Romans 12:2 NRSV)

The discernment process begins when a prospective planter (or potential partner congregation) senses God's calling to plant a new church. Such a divine calling is greater than simply a desire to start a new community of faith. This calling is affirmed by others who assess the necessary gifts for this ministry. Ongoing discernment could occur through training and assessment events, personal or corporate study, prayer, and conversations with experienced church planters or partnering congregations.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- Are you called to be a church planter?
- Are you called to be a partner church?
- Is there confirmation from God? From others?

SCRIPTURES FOR DISCERNING: BY STUDYING THESE PASSAGES, WHAT LESSONS DO YOU LEARN ABOUT DISCERNMENT?

- Matthew 3:13-17 (John baptizes Jesus)
- Luke 7:18-28 (John's disciples ask Jesus if he's "the one;" Jesus tells them to report what they see)
- Matthew 16:13-20 (Peter declares Jesus is Christ; Jesus tells Peter that he is going to build his church on this rock)
- 1 Samuel 1-3 (God answers Hannah's prayers for a child, Samuel; she dedicates his life to the Lord and he begins to discern his calling as a prophet, through Eli's teaching and God's call on him by name)



VISIONING: CONNECTING TO THE MISSION FIELD & GOD'S DREAMS

Then the Lord answered me and said, write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. (Habakkuk 2:2-3 NRSV)

The soil in which God sows the seed of a new church is in the planter or planting church's heart. Vision offers a shared picture of a preferred future, inspired by God and often first articulated by leaders and then affirmed by God's people. A vision for starting a new church may arise from a need to reach a geographical area, cultural group, or specific community of people. Energized by this vision, leaders

motivate others to develop strategic plans and begin to enlist teams of persons to help that vision become reality. Visioning happens early in the planting process, often during the season of discerning or just beyond.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- What is God’s dream for you? For the people of your church? For your community?
- How will you begin to share that vision with others?

SCRIPTURES FOR VISIONING: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CAST A CLEAR AND COMPELLING VISION?

- Luke 4:14-30 (Jesus declares his fulfillment of a prophet’s vision)
- Matthew 9/Luke 10 (send laborers to the harvest)
- Acts 10 (Peter and Cornelius: Peter is open to God’s leading and vision; converts an entire household because of a new definition of “clean/unclean”)
- Nehemiah 1-2 (lay person following God’s calling and vision to rebuild Jerusalem)



GATHERING: FINDING PEOPLE TO FULFILL A NEW CHURCH’S VISION

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

(Luke 10:1-2 NRSV)

Engaging people to help plant and nurture a new church (including members from a partnering church, friends, family and inquirers in the community) requires a great deal

of invitation, networking, and relationship-building. Church planting is never solo work. The planting team's first and most important task is to connect people to Christ, to the planter, to the vision, to each other, and to opportunities to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Gatherings of small groups, fellowship events, and preview worship experiences can ensure a critical mass of people necessary to plant and firmly establish the new faith community.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- How do we engage a critical mass of people?
- What are we doing to connect people to the planting team, vision, Christ, and the mission of the church?
- What difference does our congregation's presence make in the community?

SCRIPTURES FOR GATHERING: HOW DO GOD'S PEOPLE GO ABOUT GATHERING OTHERS TO BE ON GOD'S MISSION WITH THEM?

- Matthew 4:18-22 (Also Mark 1:16-20; John 1:35-51; Jesus calls the disciples)
- Luke 6:12-16 (Jesus chooses the Twelve)
- Acts 3 (Peter heals and preaches)
- Exodus 3-5 (God calls Moses and Moses brings along Aaron for the job of addressing Pharaoh)



DISCIPLING: CREATING A CULTURE OF MULTIPLYING DISCIPLESHIP

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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 28:18-20 NRSV)

This season requires the planter to focus on leading, teaching, guiding, and growing the planting team both in size and spiritual depth. No new church needs to be encumbered with heavy systems and structures. However, simple organization needs to be in place to enable others to multiply themselves and mentor others in the faith. A Wesleyan model of church planting intentionally incorporates small groups for mentoring and multiplication. Spiritual growth and leadership development are the building blocks of a healthy faith community.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- What process do we have to help people discover and release their God-given gifts for ministry?
- How do we encourage people to grow and multiply themselves and their small groups?
- How do we create new faith communities that bring hope to our world?
- How will we make disciples who, in turn, make disciples?

SCRIPTURES FOR DISCIPLING: HOW MUCH OF DISCIPLING IS TAUGHT AND CAUGHT?

- John 3 (Jesus and Nicodemus; teaching about eternal life and new birth; life-long learning)
- Mark 9:14-50 (healing/prayer: little one with the spirit disciples could not cast out; teachable moments about greatness in kingdom of God; sanctification)
- Deuteronomy 4:5-14 & 11:18-25 (teach God’s word to all of Israel)
- Acts 13:13-53 (Saul and Barnabas teach in Antioch of Pisidia)
- Matthew 5-7 (Sermon on the Mount [on the Plain in Luke 6] - principles for living)



WORSHIPING: PUBLIC LAUNCH & CONGREGATIONAL GROWTH

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.
(John 4:23-25 NRSV)

We were created to be in relationship with God and one another. As human beings we have worship embedded in our very nature. One of God's great commandments to Israel set the tone for how we express that deep-seated love and worship of God: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV). How we begin a church's public expression of worship requires careful planning and timing (not too soon and not too late). Worship styles vary greatly among cultural contexts, areas of the country, and age groups. Let the mission field guide your decision-making. Seek to meet their needs and interests. Experiment to see what will work in your setting. Worship is central to the church's launch and to life itself!

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- What does worship mean to us?
- When and how do we start worshipping together as a new church?
- When (if ever) does worship become a public weekly experience?
- How will we help people learn worship as "lifestyle" and not as Sunday event?

SCRIPTURES FOR WORSHIPING: WHAT DOES RELEVANT, SPIRIT-FUELED WORSHIP LOOK LIKE IN OUR CONTEXT?

- John 4 (“Worship in spirit and in truth”; woman at the well)
- Acts 2 (temple courts and house to house; both public and private worship)
- Acts 17 (Paul notices all the worship options and “unknown god” and uses that as an entry to preaching)
- 2 Chronicles 34 (Josiah consults the Law and prophets and restores Covenant)
- Luke 2:41-52 (Jesus at age twelve; compelled to be in worship and study)



MATURING: GROWING PEOPLE WHILE DEVELOPING HEALTHY SYSTEMS

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:11-14 NRSV)

As a congregation continues to develop and grow, it becomes viable, sustainable, and poised for multiplication. Growing people and developing healthy systems (leadership development, financial sustainability, structure, and discipleship) will help the church grow spiritually, multiply its mission and ministries, and prepare itself for inevitable leadership transitions. Building a fruitful and multiplying church requires recognizing and honoring each person’s God-given gifts, especially those that complement the planter’s gifts. Recognizing your dependence on God, maintaining a consistent corporate life of spiritual discipline, and faithfully

exercising the gifts of the Holy Spirit mean you will take big risks for Christ and experience personal and corporate growth and maturity.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- What needs to happen next to grow people as servants?
- What systems do we need for sustainability?
- How are we developing leaders who “equip the saints” rather than doing ministry on their own?

SCRIPTURES FOR MATURING: WHAT LESSONS ABOUT GIVING MINISTRY AWAY CAN WE LEARN FROM SCRIPTURE?

- Acts 5:17-42 (Gamaliel urges Jerusalem Council to leave the believers alone and see what happens)
- Acts 6:1-7 (Stephen and others distribute food to widows so apostles can keep preaching the gospel)
- Acts 15:1-35 (Jerusalem Council offers guidelines for Gentile believers)
- Exodus 18 (Jethro observes Moses and advises him)
- Romans 12 (be transformed by the Spirit and grow in faith together)
- Corinthians 2:6 (maturing breeds wisdom)
- Ephesians 4:13 (our goal is becoming like Christ in all ways)
- Colossians 4:12 (prayer is crucial for maturing faith)
- Hebrews 5:14 (training oneself and others to distinguish between good and evil)
- James 1:4 (the place of perseverance in the journey of faith and maturity)



MULTIPLYING: REPRODUCTION OF OTHER NEW PLACES FOR NEW PEOPLE

He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (2 Corinthians 9:10-11 NRSV)

Healthy organisms reproduce and multiply and so do healthy churches! Healthy churches multiply disciples, leaders, ministries, and congregations. Reproduction begins from day one and manifests itself throughout the various aspects and stages of church life. With multiplication in the DNA of a new church, reproduction happens more naturally. The gospel of Christ mandates churches to be healthy, grow in ministry and mission, reach new people for Christ, and reproduce. Through multiplication we build new bridges to the culture around us, introduce more people to Christ, and continue in ministry in fresh and vital ways.

SOME QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER DURING THIS SEASON:

- How do we reproduce to build God's reign in vision-replicating, resource-honoring ways?
- What can we do to ensure that multiplication remains in our church's DNA?
- Why do we need to multiply healthy ministry?

SCRIPTURES FOR MULTIPLYING: WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT MULTIPLYING AND WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T?

- John 6:1-14 (Jesus feeds five thousand)
- Matthew 25:14-30 (Parable of Talents)
- Matthew 13; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8 (Parable of the Sower)
- Deuteronomy 6:1-3 (faithfully observe the law and you will multiply)



BEST PRACTICES FOR CHURCH PLANTING

Healthy church multiplication systems have “best practices” that produce fruit. Path 1 has developed a core process and system that support the best practices of church planting. Our core process is to find leaders, equip teams for effectiveness, plant sustainable congregations and multiply new faith communities. **Path 1 New Church Strategists are available to help you develop these practices within your ministry territory.**



FIND

1. Invite and challenge a broader base of people to hear a personal call to plant new congregations—including **clergy, laity, young people, and more diverse people.**
2. Develop **a reliable planter assessment and discernment process, aligned with the particular planting strategies being pursued...**
 - to determine gifts and calling of potential church planters
 - to help match potential planters with strategies and teams that fit with their gifts and affinities
3. **Create a pool of prospective planters, both clergy and lay...**
 - who have participated in an assessment and discernment process
 - who have received some basic training in new church development and multiplication (such as a Launchpad event, Exponential, Bootcamp, or regional New Church Leadership Institute)
 - with customized plans for all prospective planters to develop their skills and to monitor their ministry fruitfulness

4. **Support and challenge local churches** to lead in planting new churches and multiplying their healthy congregations. Utilize resources to assess and increase readiness for effective planting.



EQUIP

5. Provide **training for all planters once they have been assigned to specific planting projects**, making use of Basic Training for Church Planters or the Path 1 Launchpad events.
6. Where possible, **deploy or connect these high-potential leaders to serve on a successful planting team or within the leadership team** of a vibrant, growing congregation before beginning their work as lead planter for a new church. **This experience will help you to assess their potential, and reinforce behaviors found in vital congregations.**
7. Assign a **qualified new church development coach** to the project for at least three years to work with the planter, the local partners and the district superintendent. Consider working with a Path 1 recommended coach for this critical role.
8. **Develop appropriate benchmarks** before the planting project starts, in conversation with the coach, planter(s), connectional partners, district superintendent and conference staff person for new church starts. Plan to review and possibly adjust the benchmarks about six months in.



PLANT

9. In project planning, **think first in terms of the people we seek to reach with the Good News of Jesus Christ**, taking into consideration the generational, cultural and theological contexts. This site selection task is much more important than putting a point on the map.
10. When planting **racial-ethnic and multi-ethnic faith communities** consider specific recommendations for effective partnering that may differ from common assumptions or Anglo-majority planting experiences. Contact New Church Strategists for Path1 resources for specific racial/ethnic planting constituencies.
11. Always seek to plant with a well-developed **connectional partnership** – a partnering congregation, a partnering group of congregations or some other dependable resources (people and seed funding) to help begin an effective launch team quickly. If you need to delay a year or assign the pastor to the staff of the partnering church until a local launch team has been cultivated, please wait.
12. Develop a plan tailored to each community context, with these considerations: **financial streams, stewardship development, connectional giving and sustainability**. Financial streams include funds from launch team and planter tithing and may also include individuals, connectional partners, district and annual conference. Build into the budget the congregation's giving back to the conference. *Consider creating a **Path 1 Missional Planting Zone** in areas where conventional strategies are not feasible or likely to succeed.*
13. Be sure the **planter appropriately matches** the needs and challenges of the community. If the planter is new to the area, **look for ways s/he might live and serve in the community** before the planting appointment formally begins.

14. Only assign planters to projects after they have **completed assessment and discernment processes, where their gifts, affinities, and previous experiences appropriately match** their particular planting challenges. Upon assignment to planting projects, ensure that planters receive ongoing support and appropriate training, such as prayer partners, formal and informal peer support groups, coaching and accountability. Consider funding training opportunities for the planter and key leaders for a specified length of time.
15. Provide a **clear line of communication** from the planter to the district superintendent and others involved with conference congregational development and offer a **safe, confidential environment** in which the planter can share concerns, frustrations, and ministry successes.
16. Build an **infrastructure of small groups, mission teams and ministry teams within the planting team** before launching weekly public worship. Small group multiplication and discipleship systems lay the foundation for success and sustainability of a new church.
17. **Resist the temptation to launch weekly public worship prematurely** or to wait too long. Right timing depends on the leadership of the Holy Spirit, critical mass, momentum and cultural context. Churches that launch weekly public worship too soon often get stuck as very small, cash-dependent fellowships with reduced chances of growth and financial self-sustainability.
18. When, eventually, a **succeeding pastoral assignment** occurs (either the assignment of a new lay pastor, the assignment of a new campus pastor within a multi-site church staff or the appointment of a new pastor by the bishop), those in oversight pay extremely close attention to gifts, affinities, and calling of the second pastor, as well as the unique culture and growth (or lack thereof) of the new faith community. When a clergy appointment is involved, the cabinet **works collaboratively with the church and founding planter** in the appointive process.



MULTIPLY

20. **Think “multiplication” from the start.** Create a culture for multiplication of leaders, ministries and congregations in existing churches and new church starts. Include a focus on leaders and team members constantly mentoring new leaders and team members.
21. **Protect the planter’s time** by releasing her/him from annual conference committee work and other connectional leadership demands that steal focus from the church plant. Specifically, planters serving in their first three years at a new church should not serve on conference board overseeing church planting. This type of distraction sometimes involves conflicts of interest.
22. **Leave the planter long enough** in the new church appointment to stabilize the new church. If the new church has good potential to grow into a high-attendance congregation and to multiply, plan for the planter to remain long-term with the church.
23. In reaching new people for Christ, **keep existing congregations from blocking or undermining** the efforts to plant a new church. In many communities, the diversity and sheer quantity of people require more and varied congregations to increase the share of the population connected to The United Methodist Church. New approaches and creative, missional faith communities will appeal to different people groups and serve new populations.
24. When existing churches close, **before disposing of the site, evaluate its potential as a new church site. If sold, designate a significant portion of the assets** toward new church development in the annual conference. Annual conferences that employ such a policy typically keep a good reservoir of funding for new church start projects.

For additional information or support exploring or implementing these best practice recommendations, please contact any of the New Church Strategists on the Path1 staff.



CHURCH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

In the early decades of the 21st century, United Methodists will use a variety of strategies and tactics for planting new congregations in the United States. Below you will find several of the most common strategies used within our denomination. We have ordered these from most to least pervasive along with some benefits, challenges and tempting shortcuts associated with each. Please note that this is not intended to be an exhaustive list and that United Methodists will likely plant hundreds of new churches by intentionally blending two or more of the strategies. Lay or clergy planters serving full-time or in bi-vocational assignments could lead each of the following strategies. Depending on the planting context any strategy could be right for almost any people group.

IMPORTANT FUNDING NOTE:

\$ denotes costs associated with these strategies:

Fewer \$ = lower conference investment

More \$ = greater conference commitment of resources

Most new congregations will become financially self-sustaining. However, some churches – especially those who minister to low-income populations, may require long-term subsidy – which may be justified if they continue to bear good fruit. We caution against the use of the conference budget as a major funding source for long-term subsidy. We encourage the conference to

develop streams of funding beyond the conference budget (from local churches, from individual donors, foundations, etc.), when long-term subsidy seems necessary. If we expect that a church will require many years of development before attaining financial self-sufficiency, it makes sense to plant such a church with the support of strong and committed connectional partners.



I. PARTNER CHURCH/MULTIPLE “PARENT” STRATEGY

An existing United Methodist congregation – or, perhaps, several churches come together – as an anchoring, sponsoring or parenting force in launching a new church. This could be a cluster of partner churches or a combination of partner church(es) and another entity: a United Methodist campus ministry, retirement home or church agency. Each partner must have clarity about its role. In some cases, potential partner churches will need a year or more of preparatory time to be ready for the role. Also, each partner needs to be included in benchmarking updates. The planter often will serve briefly as associate pastor at a partner church or will come from the staff or lay membership of a partner church. The partner churches typically will provide some funding and launch team members. Exceptions to this member-sharing practice would arise when launching a church with a different racial-ethnic audience. In these cases, significant cross-cultural awareness and training will be important for all involved.

- **Benefits** – These types of plants have a higher than average incidence of success. The more credibility the planter has with the partner congregation(s) and the more the planting congregation(s) are willing to invest in the

project, the stronger the new plant will be from the start. The planting project will be well connected to the United Methodist community, helping to facilitate various kinds of support from the partners, without sole reliance on any. Launch team members can be cultivated from each partner, in addition to the general community.

- **Challenges** – The planter may end up with too many chefs in the kitchen, essentially navigating competing visions among the partners. Partner church leadership may seek to limit how many members go to the new church or to backtrack on promises made. It is important for the district superintendent or conference staff to review with the partner churches all agreements being made prior to commencement of the planting project. Covenants should be carefully discussed and preserved in writing. In the instance of multiple “parents” the partners may shrink back from total commitment, counting (mistakenly) on another partner – with the result that the new church’s leader ends up feeling and functioning more like a “parachute drop” (see 2. “Classic Missionary Strategy” below) than a partnered plant.
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – The cabinet may rush a planter appointment forward based simply on the casual interest of potential partners. It is essential that a detailed planting plan be developed, with special attention to assessment, funding, conference expectations, and the relationship of the planter to the partners. If several United Methodist entities are embracing the idea of the plant, the district superintendent or conference staff may not insist on bringing all partners to the table to discuss roles, responsibilities and specific commitments regarding the plant. Also the cabinet may fail to consult with partner church leadership about characteristics they believe are essential for the planter’s success. These kinds of plants work best when the planter aligns with the culture of the partner churches in key ways (although we also want her/him to fit the culture of the target mission population).



II. CLASSIC MISSIONARY STRATEGY (\$\$\$\$)

This strategy (sometimes known as “Parachute Drop”) reaches all the way back to Paul’s planting adventures in the first century. Any version of this approach, by our United Methodist polity, will be connectional in nature, unlike what may be experienced in other denominations. This type of plant happens when a cabinet sends a planter into a territory to plant a church and (1) that planter is not from that territory plus (2) there are no active partnerships in place with other United Methodist churches or institutions in the area. Many of the famous examples in United Methodist history that have worked in fact were not pure parachute drops – if, for example, the planter had some relationships already established in the community or grew up nearby. Or perhaps the planter discovered a very rich local source of prospective members that would not exist in just every community. When the planter has an informal network of relationships and support within the community, but proceeds without an official partner church, we could call this a modified missionary strategy.

- **Benefits** – in communities where no United Methodist congregations are ready or able to provide healthy partnership, this strategy offers a way to move forward. If the church we are planting will differ markedly in its congregational culture from any other United Methodist churches nearby, this approach can offer the necessary space and freedom to color outside the lines of local convention. Some leaders have strong and magnetic personalities and this strategy enables them to collect people (what they do best), without having to negotiate constantly with partner churches (negotiation possibly being something the planter doesn’t do well). Many of our largest and fastest growing new churches began in this way.
- **Challenges** – this is a risky strategy, with a high rate of project failure in the first three years. For this reason, some conferences with limited resources may choose not

to employ this strategy. If the project involves an elder in full-time appointment, it is also a very expensive strategy – since there are no people to share the planter’s salary expense for quite some time. Assessment of the planter is of paramount importance, as well as assessment of community readiness and of the match between the planter and the community. Clergy families that survive this type of plant will almost universally testify that this is stressful business – and not recommended for any but the heartiest marriages. Planters and their families may become isolated from others in the United Methodist connection and need to make a special effort to maintain supportive relationships.

- ***Tempting Shortcuts*** – When these projects succeed, they often succeed big – and it is tempting to model other projects after a very big and splashy success, assuming that we have discovered the eternal secrets of church planting. In reality, however, the highly successful parachute drops are rare. Most church plants will not grow as fast as the churches on the “planting legend” grapevine. Many church plants with excellent leaders will not take root at all, even when the leaders appear to be doing all the right things. A few among us truly have the gifts to pull off such an endeavor, and then only in the right circumstances. Diligent assessment and discernment by the appointive cabinet is critical.



III. MULTI-SITE EXPANSION STRATEGY (\$) ---

This strategy may look (at first glance) much like a Partner Church strategy where the partner church is simply very engaged. The difference here is that the new faith community meeting at the new site remains part of the original church, even as they may develop a distinct staff and ministry team system. Multi-sites may open up in other United Methodist

buildings, in facilities purchased, leased or constructed by the congregation or in space that is essentially borrowed for a couple hours a week (e.g., movie theater, civic auditorium, school, etc.). Multi-sites vary in pastoral and staffing strategies. They typically have a site pastor – who may or may not be the lead preacher at the site. Some multi-sites utilize large video projection of sermons recorded by the senior pastor of the church at another campus. In some cases, cabinets appoint pastors to the site directly. In other cases, cabinets appoint simply to the church, which then deploys its staff and pastoral resources among its various sites.

- **Benefits** – This strategy enables healthy congregations to multiply their ministries and rapidly plant new congregations. Since the people of the original campus will remain organizationally connected to the ministry of the new site, it is often easier to raise local funds for the multi-site than for projects that will not carry the name of the original congregation. It may also be easier to share administrative resources, staffing expertise, etc., with the new campus when there is a perception that “we are all one church.”
- **Challenges** – The relationship between the pastors of the campuses is critical. Most multi-sites (beyond The United Methodist Church) attempt to utilize staff members from the original campus, who already have loyalty to the senior pastor and know how to team with her/him. Whenever the cabinet appoints a planter to a multi-site project, that planter is typically an associate pastor. It is absolutely critical that the senior pastor of the church be consulted in the appointment. If there is a plan for the multi-site possibly to become a chartered congregation at some point in the future, this must be documented clearly from the outset. Otherwise, all parties (and pastors) should proceed with the expectation that the sites will remain bound together as one congregation permanently. These projects simply do not work when the pastors get caught in power struggles.

- ***Tempting Shortcuts*** – Because the funding and leadership may emerge mostly from within the congregational system, the district superintendent and conference staff may assume that no external help is needed. In fact, coaching is as critical with multi-site projects as in any other strategy – and the coaching relationship should involve both the senior pastor and site planter. Also, we should not assume that the local church is able to fund every expense needed for an optimal launch. The conference may need to make an investment alongside the local church. Finally, the local church should not try to stretch the staff from the original campus to cover ministry on two or more campuses. New staff must be added.



IV. CHURCH-WITHIN-A-CHURCH STRATEGY

In a world of very expensive real estate, many new churches will share space with other churches (both partner churches and other collegial congregations). Existing congregations choosing to share property may find that new churches may better serve their immediate neighbors, especially when the new church specializes in a certain racial-ethnic culture and/or a certain generation or social group.

- ***Benefits*** – This strategy enables us to re-establish or renew United Methodist ministry within established neighborhoods and to utilize church property that may have become under-utilized in recent years as neighborhood populations changed. This strategy enables us to plant urban churches much more economically than if we had to buy or secure ministry space. Churches that serve economically challenged populations may discover the shared facility strategy as a pathway to financial sustainability.
- ***Challenges*** – Sometimes the mission field will best be reached in a setting outside the church building. If the

new church is a United Methodist congregation, the host congregation should treat them as family, not renters. This means that negotiation of a reasonable building impact fee (sharing specific costs) makes more sense than a rental agreement. The new church does not exist to help the older church pay its bills, but rather to assist the older church in making disciples of Christ for the transformation of the neighborhood. Where the relationships fall into “us/ them” and paternalistic patterns, trouble follows. It is critical that effective cross-cultural training be done before the start of the project.

- ***Tempting Shortcuts*** – In the early days we may not work intentionally to build a positive relationship with our partners. Prayer for one another and regular communication are essential. The district superintendent might check in early and often to see how it’s going in the first months. Where strong, collegial relationships are formed, this strategy can work well.



V. THE “ELIJAH/ELISHA” STRATEGY (\$-\$-\$)

This strategy involves congregations who haven’t borne much fruit for past several years and/or who may be at the end of their natural life cycle. It requires a proactive discernment process with the district superintendent or conference staff. The congregation may either discover a new vision and recommit to fruit-bearing ministry or respond to God’s call to become an “Elijah” new church start (2 Kings 2:1-14 tells how Elijah passed on the legacy of his ministry to Elisha). Elijah churches intentionally choose either to (a) join another church and give their physical assets to the conference to reach a new group of people or (b) open their doors to a planter and launch team that takes over management of the facility to start a new congregation.

- **Benefits** – United Methodist ministry continues for another generation in a community where otherwise it would end. The Elijah church chooses to offer a way forward in God’s mission rather than a dead end. With thousands of churches teetering in survival-mode with just a handful of members left, this strategy offers a way to leverage untold millions of dollars in United Methodist resources for new church development.
- **Challenges** – If this becomes a well-known strategy in the conference, the prospective Elijah church may come to view their district superintendent as the “grim reaper.” Some congregations may not be ready to face the reality that they need to let go of the past to enable something new to grow in their changed communities. Some districts and conferences do not have a system in place to recoup the assets of church closures for new church development.
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – In some cases, the temptation is to delay rather than to rush this process, allowing buildings to decay and cash assets to be depleted, with little ministry to show for all the lost years.



VI. VITAL MERGER STRATEGY (\$)

Most of the time, mergers do not truly create new churches. Two declining churches typically agree to share one facility and decline together rather than alone. However, the Vital Merger strategy requires the merging churches to sell their buildings and relocate to a new location, worship in a neutral location from the day of the official merger, reset the new congregation’s focus to be on the mission field and begin new ministries that will reach the new mission field, receive a pastor that has been assessed and trained as a church planter, and choose a name that is not a part of the name of any of the merging churches.

- **Benefits** – This strategy may solve several problems and give us a fresh new congregation as well. The problems could be decaying buildings, buildings too large or too small or problematic locations. The problem could be existing congregations with inadequate resources to do the quality of ministry they long to do. In a situation where transformational leaders are in short supply, the merger also creates a prime place to send such a leader.
- **Challenges** – Ghosts can abound. Old patterns, old prejudices, old attitudes – even old office-holders – these realities can really slow any possible momentum from the outset. Also if the merging congregations remain significantly older or culturally different from the mission field, there must be a plan to infuse some younger, more indigenous community people into the mix.
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – Just because it is not a typical merger does not mean we can ignore the careful weaving of traditions and people that are essential to pulling off mergers. We also must not back down, once into the project, about selling all existing properties and utilizing a trained church planter.



VII. CLOSED/REOPENED FACILITY STRATEGY (\$-\$\$\$)

Similar to the above strategies, except that there is no church left to share its facility, turn over its ministry, or merge with another congregation to create something new. The new church begins to address the needs and culture of the community population.

- **Benefits** – There is an existing building, often strategically located with respect to a population currently underserved by The United Methodist Church.

- **Challenges** – There is an existing building, often with enormous structural issues and liabilities. Also, the community may still associate the facility with the former congregation; so the story of the new church’s birth must be carefully shared to engage and serve the community.
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – We may choose to re-open the building prematurely without engaging the community first. Or we may be stuck on re-opening a building, when the wiser path would be to sell the building and find another facility within the neighborhood.



VIII. HOUSE CHURCH STRATEGY (\$) ---

This may well be the oldest strategy for church planting that exists, certainly reaching back to Asia Minor in the first century, and also to frontier America when population was very thin. House churches are typically small, limited to the number that can fit in a home or a small meeting space. These churches may begin with as few as 6 or 7 folks, and grow to 12, or given the right space and leadership, they may grow to 50 or 60 folks. In some parts of the world, they multiply rapidly. Multiple house churches may gather monthly in a large worship venue. They are often lay-led, with clergy sometimes riding a circuit to bring the Sacraments.

- **Benefits** – these projects can be extremely low budget, and they do not depend upon a large clergy supply (think early American Methodism). New leaders can be trained and deployed, so that where there is one house church, there may soon be six or more. Some conferences may yoke the house churches with a station church, and appoint a pastor to the station church who can also offer leadership to the house church leaders.
- **Challenges** – it is easy for a house church to forget its connection. In Methodism, we do not do “disconnected

church.” Some who feel led to a simple house church experience may resist United Methodist connection and accountability. Also, some house churches will quickly settle in and become closed groups with tight fellowship and few new participants. Those who lead such churches must help the participants keep an eye on multiplication, evangelism and missional service in the community.

- ***Tempting Shortcuts*** – The easy shortcut is to send persons to lead who are simply unprepared in terms of spiritual maturity, theology or group-leading skills. Just because the group is small does not mean that this is easy ministry. When leaders or potential leaders are unwilling to remain connected to the mission of the larger United Methodist church, or to share in the discipline of accountability to the pastor assigned to supervise them, we must remove them and deploy those who are willing to play for the team.



IX. INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES (\$) ---

While there is no singular micro-strategy for creating Intentional Communities they are, most basically, groups of people living together (in one residence or in several residences in close proximity) in a specific missional area who are bound by a covenant with common goals and vision. Often referred to as New Monastic or Neo-monastic communities these Intentional Communities gather together with the purpose of growing spiritually, following Christ and aligning around a particular focus on social justice and acts of love, mercy and hospitality toward others. The strategy is often traced back to the early church movement described in Acts 2. There have been Intentional Communities throughout most of Christian history, tracing their roots back to Franciscan, Benedictine and early Celtic orders. More contemporary examples of this strategy, still in existence, were founded in

the early 1950s. Typically, Intentional Communities remain small in size (3-12 people) and have no plan to “formalize” as chartered churches with land and a church structure. These missional movements align and mesh with a particular community to develop intense relationships that seek to transform that community in kingdom-building ways.

- **Benefits** – Practically no cost to congregations and conferences to implement this strategy. Mutual support and accountability. Intentional spiritual formation. Healthy inter-dependence among participants. Opportunity to connect with other congregations and Intentional Communities.
- **Challenges** – Creating and abiding by a shared covenant. Learning to share resources (space, finances, possessions). Respecting privacy. Building peace with other residents (conflict management).
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – Failure to develop a covenant and the basic rules of life for the group. Taking on more mission/ministry than the community can handle at the start. Inviting persons to become residents before they are ready.



X. THE SURPRISE BIRTH (\$)

Sometimes, churches are born unexpectedly – just as children may come along in a season when we did not expect them. Causes of surprise births would include church splits, a group that decides to affiliate with The United Methodist Church, a group of laity who envision a new church and proceed without asking permission, or a campus ministry that develops to the point that they desire to become a congregation in the fullest sense of the Book of Discipline. Whenever these new churches or new ideas pop up on the radar, it is easy for church officials to view them with skepticism, especially when

“we did not think of it.” However, some of our best United Methodist congregations have emerged in this way, as a work of the Holy Spirit and faithful laity. With wise pastoral care and negotiation, these projects often can be brought into the United Methodist fold as official new church projects.

- **Benefits** – Church planting does not get easier than this. When your region has a goal of five new churches and you only have money for three, what a blessing to discover another congregation coming to life without any conference investment!
- **Challenges** – The district may have had no input in deciding where they would meet. Such churches may choose to worship in close proximity to other area churches. In most cases, their style is such that they draw very different people from those at other nearby churches. Also, if the church has existed independently for a while, it needs to weigh carefully the commitments of moving into the United Methodist fold.
- **Tempting Shortcuts** – Be careful that financial incentives for groups to join The United Methodist Church are minimal, or at least that they are balanced by other connectional obligations. In this economy, people and groups are going to be drawn to money and subsidy wherever they smell it – this could distract the church from the most important questions of what it really means to become United Methodist.



XI. INTEGRATED MULTI-ETHNIC PROJECTS (\$\$-\$\$\$)

This strategy results in an intentionally multi-ethnic church plant that worships as one integrated body to create a unique cultural expression and reflect all groups involved. This is what heaven looks like, so why not intentionally plant churches that are integrated? This strategy reflects the work of the Holy Spirit to bring together as one in Christ a multitude of cultural, racial and ethnic groups. We recognize that The United Methodist Church is just learning how to implement this strategy effectively.

- **Benefits** – Great cities were established because of the gathering of diverse people groups; a diverse church grows through the diverse talents and gifts found therein. The U.S. is becoming more and more diverse and church plants will begin to reflect this shift. This is a great opportunity to reach younger people, who often have more diverse natural networks of friends and colleagues than older generations. Often, they will bring their friends and families and may reflect a more economically diverse people. Ideally, this strategy brings authenticity, in that the church reflects our increasingly diverse communities and the unity that Christ prayed we would have (see John 17).
- **Challenges** – This is not an easy strategy to implement. Everything depends on the planter’s ability to relate to, recruit leaders from, and be empathetic toward diverse ethnic-racial groups in building a multi-ethnic team. Creating a “third culture” (a space where all people are respected and participate in leadership roles) is a constant challenge. Learning to find leaders in new places requires the planter and key leaders to make an effort to connect with an ever-expanding network of diverse people. There may be slower growth in numbers of participants than in predominantly homogeneous congregations.

- ***Tempting Shortcuts*** – The ultimate goal in this strategy is transformation of the mission field, not simply gathering diverse multi-ethnic/racial people. Diversity of the plant is a by-product of the lead team and the mission field, its diversity, and the desire to be in mission with all people in the community. Hiring ethnic/racial staff (either lay or clergy) only because of their particular ethnic/racial background is not a good idea. Great chemistry, competence, character and commitment to shared values should be considered above all else.

For additional information or support exploring or implementing these strategies, please contact any of the New Church Strategists on the Path1 staff.