



# G U I D E L I N E S

A photograph of a person with long brown hair, seen from the back, sitting at a conference table. They are using a laptop. The background is a blurred crowd of people seated at tables in a large room, suggesting a conference or meeting. A microphone is visible in the upper right corner.

# Lay Leader/ Lay Member

Connect Your Congregation  
and Your Annual Conference



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# **Lay Leader/ Lay Member**

**Connect Your Congregation and Your Annual Conference**

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Discipleship Ministries

**LAY LEADER/LAY MEMBER**

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# Blessed to Be a Blessing

If you are reading this Guideline, you have said yes to servant leadership in your church. You are blessed to be a blessing. What does that mean?

By virtue of our baptism by water and the Spirit, God calls all Christians to faithful discipleship, to grow to maturity in faith (see Ephesians 4). The United Methodist Church expresses that call in our shared mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, or the *Discipline*, ¶120). Each local congregation and community of faith lives out that call in response to its own context—the wonderful and unique combination of God-given human and material resources with the needs of the community, within and beyond the congregation.

The work of servant leaders—your work—is to open a way for God to work through you and the resources available to you in a particular ministry area, for you are about God’s work. As stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), servant leaders are entrusted with the precious and vital task of managing and using God’s gifts in the ongoing work of transformation.

In The United Methodist Church, we envision transformation occurring through a cycle of discipleship (see the *Discipline*, ¶122). With God’s help and guidance, we

- reach out and receive people into the body of Christ,
- help people relate to Christ through their unique gifts and circumstances,
- nurture and strengthen people in their relationships with God and with others,
- send transformed people out into the world to lead transformed and transforming lives,
- continue to reach out, relate, nurture, and send disciples...

Every ministry area and group, from finance to missions, engages in all aspects of this cycle. This Guideline will help you see how that is true for the ministry area or group you now lead. When you begin to consider all of the work you do as ministry to fulfill God’s mission through your congregation, each task, report, and conversation becomes a step toward transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Invite Christ into the process to guide your ministry. You are doing powerful and wonderful work. Allow missteps to become learning opportunities; rejoice in success. Fill your work with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

God blesses you with gifts, skills, and experience. You are a blessing when you allow God to work through you to make disciples and transform the world. Thank you.

(Find additional help in the “Resources” section at the end of this Guideline, in *The Book of Discipline*, and through <http://www.umc.org>.)

# Called to Love and Serve

[A]ll Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free. (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶128)

Thank you for accepting the call to be the lay leader of your congregation or lay member of annual conference from your congregation! God has called you, through your church's charge conference, to serve the church in an important way. The roles of lay leader and lay member of annual conference are separate, but should be complementary.

## The Responsibilities of Lay Leader/Lay Member

Responsibilities of both the lay leader and the lay member of annual conference include

- interpreting the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general church,
- communicating the vision and needs of the local church to the annual conference and general church.

These two roles are complementary, yet there are responsibilities unique to each role. The *lay leader* has a primary focus of linking the local church and community. The *lay member of annual conference* has a primary focus of linking the local church to the connectional United Methodist Church and God's worldwide church.

*The Book of Discipline* defines the roles of lay leader and lay member and—in broad terms—the work of your congregation, the annual conference, and The United Methodist Church. Two sections will be particularly helpful for your leadership. The paragraphs numbered in the 200s relate to the local church; ¶251.1 refers to the lay leader and ¶251.2 refers to the lay member of annual conference. Paragraphs 602.4–7 also contain references to the lay member of annual conference.

The *Discipline* states that the lay leader is to be elected from the professing membership of a local church (¶ 251.1) The lay member must be a professing member in good standing of The United Methodist Church for at least two years preceding his or her election and an active participant in The United Methodist Church for at least four years before his or her election (¶¶ 251.2, 602.4), though that requirement may be waived for newly organized churches. The lay member(s) of annual conference shall be elected annually or quadrennially as the annual conference directs.

The *Discipline* recommends that the lay leader be one of the lay members of annual conference. This is because the lay leader is to serve as an interpreter to the congregation

of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general church (§ 251.1c). If the lay leader is not a lay member of annual conference, the two people (or groups) should confer and work together as they serve. It may be difficult for the lay leader to be the sole lay member from a congregation due to the increased responsibilities of serving in both roles. A large-membership church or a church served by multiple clergy may have several people sharing these responsibilities.

*The Book of Discipline* sets forth the constitution, theology, history, Wesleyan heritage, polity, plans, process, and laws by which United Methodists govern themselves. In addition to the legislation that governs our life together, the *Discipline* includes important information regarding the mission and ministry of the church, including the General Rules of the Wesleyan societies (see § 104.2).

Most of the book is organized by paragraph rather than page, chapter, or section. The paragraphs are numbered consecutively within each chapter or section, but numbers may be skipped between sections to allow for future additions. The *Discipline* can be modified only by General Conference, which comprises equal numbers of clergy and lay delegates, elected from each annual conference, and which is in session once every four years. The General Conference “amends, perfects, clarifies, and adds its own contribution to the *Discipline*” (page v).

The *Discipline* has a table of contents and a topical index to help you find other items related to your role. Ask your pastor for a current copy or purchase a copy through Cokesbury (see the “Resources” section of this Guideline).

# The Role of the Lay Leader

The responsibilities listed in the *Discipline* for lay leaders apply to congregations of every size and to multiple-point charges. However, these responsibilities are lived out with a great deal of variation among local churches. In larger congregations, associate lay leaders may be elected to assist the lay leader.

## Responsibilities of the Lay Leader

The lay leader's responsibilities touch the entire breadth of the congregation's life (§ 251.1). The lay leader

- functions as the primary representative of the laity in that local church;
- fosters awareness of the role of the laity within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world; and finds ways within the community of faith to recognize those ministries;
- meets regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the church and the needs for ministry;
- serves as a member of the charge conference, church council, the committee on finance, the committee on nominations and leadership development, and the committee on staff/pastor-parish relations;
- continues to be involved in study and training opportunities to develop a growing understanding of the church's reason for existence and the types of ministry that will most effectively fulfill the church's mission;
- assists in advising the church council of community need and opportunities for more effective ministry in the community;
- informs the laity of training opportunities provided by the annual conference;
- attends training opportunities in order to strengthen his or her work;
- is urged to become a certified lay servant.

## Represent the Laity

The lay leader serves as primary advocate for and representative of the laity in the congregation. The lay leader should, therefore, be a person of faith and integrity. As an extension of the congregation in the community, the lay leader also needs to be aware of the reputation the church has in the community and work to enhance or improve it. The lay leader is also an advocate for the needs of the community. He or she works to inspire the congregation to care for those beyond the walls of the church.

## Model Discipleship

Key to faithful discipleship is how we carry out our mission as leaders in the church. Your leadership role requires that you be a model of discipleship—a grace-filled follower of Jesus Christ who puts faith into action, joyfully joining in God’s mission in the world. Through your participation in the mission of The United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, you will not only engage in your area of ministry but also work to empower others to be in ministry. The vitality of your congregation and the church as a whole depends on the faith, abilities, and actions of all who work together for the glory of God.

One of the most significant ways we develop new leaders is through the core process for carrying out our mission as stated in ¶122 of *The Book of Discipline*:

We make disciples as we:

- proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather into the body of Christ;
- lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing;
- send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.

To better remember and understand the core process as written in ¶122, think in terms of H.O.P.E.—**H**ospitality, **O**ffer Christ, **P**urpose, and **E**ngagement. Through these discipleship paths of H.O.P.E., new disciples are made and sent out to reach even more people to bring into the body of Christ.

We go into the world in outreach and mission, offering hope through proclamation of the gospel, seeking, welcoming, and gathering as we offer **hospitality** to those not yet in the body. We **offer Christ** by providing an opportunity for people to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the Spirit and profession of faith. We nurture people in Christian living to help them find a true sense of **purpose** in life and what it means to live out their belief through acts of piety and acts of mercy, Christian conferencing, regular participation in the sacrament of Holy Communion, and other means of grace. Through **engagement**, we send out these grace-filled followers of Jesus Christ who are putting their faith into action, helping to transform the surrounding community, and offering hospitality in the name of Jesus Christ. Thus **H.O.P.E.** cycles back around.

Ask yourselves and the leadership of your congregation how your church might become a place of hope. Whether your church is small, medium, or large, it is essential to have an intentional discipleship system like H.O.P.E. in place. No matter what system you decide to use, the components of the core process should be established in every local church to accomplish the church's mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. After all, it's all about hope.

Your visibility as the lay leader in the congregation places you in a position to model good habits of personal devotion and discipleship. As you engage in spiritual practices and serve in outreach and mission, you serve as an example and mentor to others.

### **Foster the Role of the Laity**

The work of laity must be continually renewed and expanded if your congregation is to be a vital organism. Our Methodist heritage includes active lay leadership and involvement in spreading scriptural and social holiness throughout the land. It is your responsibility to encourage laity to use their Spiritual gifts, skills, talents, treasure, and time to love and serve God and neighbor.

You can also help to foster the role of the laity through ministry in the home, workplace, community, and the world. Paragraph 220 of the *Discipline* describes "The Call to Ministry of All the Baptized." This paragraph explains that each member is a servant of Christ in mission in the local and worldwide community. You can help laity become aware of their responsibilities as members by calling their attention to this important paragraph. Help church members discover their spiritual gifts and use their gifts, skills, and talents to strengthen the church and to witness to people in all areas of their lives.

### **Recognize and Celebrate the Ministry of the Laity**

Bringing awareness of the role of the laity to the congregation and community can be accomplished by finding opportunities to recognize and celebrate laity ministries. Here are some suggestions:

- Observe Laity Sunday (usually the third Sunday of October) annually.
- Invite community groups, such as firefighters, teachers, or city workers to worship and recognize their work as ministry.
- Recognize laity who have become local church lay servants or who have been certified as lay servants, lay speakers, or lay ministers. Advocate with pastors and worship leaders for these persons to share their stories or to preach.
- Publicize training events for laity and encourage participation.
- Prepare visual displays that celebrate the ministries of the laity both within and beyond the church facility.
- Regularly promote special opportunities for service and mission projects.
- Recognize the steady ministry of groups and individuals who live out their faith in service through regular volunteer work in schools and the community.
- Provide opportunities for people of all ages to share stories of the ways they have lived as faithful Christians during the past week, including in the workplace. They

might share those experiences in worship, small groups, newsletters, the church website, social media, or bulletins.

### **Meet with the Pastor**

*The Book of Discipline* states that the mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Each congregation must discern the way to accomplish that mission in its unique setting. And each pastor and lay leader must decide how they will share the work, partnering together, to guide the congregation in accomplishing its mission. You will want to meet regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the congregation and the needs for ministry both within and beyond the congregation. Cultivating a healthy relationship with the pastor is a vital part of your ministry. You are the bridge between the pastor(s) and congregation. It's essential to keep that relationship healthy and strong.

One way to demonstrate this working relationship is for the lay leader to serve as co-leader with the appointed clergy in meetings, worship, and ministry in the community. Work with your pastor to identify the ways you can witness together to the strength and significance of your working relationship.

### **Establish a Leadership Covenant**

A good way to work together is to establish a covenant between you, as the lay leader, and the pastor regarding how you will work together to carry out your tasks and responsibilities.

#### **Leadership Covenant Sample**

Leadership Covenant between \_\_\_\_\_ (pastor) and \_\_\_\_\_ (lay leader)

- Local mission and ministry area (local church, district, annual conference).  
Remind each other of the history of the area; when and how established, distinctions, purpose. Write a 2–3 sentence synopsis of your discussion.
- Roles (who does what).
- Expectations (learning actions, timelines, shared vision, goals).
- Accountability (participation in covenant group; spiritual self-care, days apart from the work of ministry).
- Evaluation (outcomes based on goals).
- Covenant Review Plan (date for review, process, included).
- Plan for improvement.
- Celebrate accomplishments.

### **Serve on Various Committees**

You will be busy! The lay leader is automatically a member of charge conference, church council, finance committee, nominations and leadership development committee,

and staff/pastor-parish relations committee. The lay leader represents and advocates for the laity in specific ways in each of these places. You can find out more about them by reading the *Guidelines* for each of these committees and their responsibilities, but here are some brief descriptions.

The **charge conference** is the connecting link between the local church and the general church, and it is the ultimate authority for directing the mission and ministry of the local congregation. The charge conference is in session annually at a time set by the district superintendent. The lay leader represents the laity by

- attending the charge conference.
- submitting a report on the state of lay ministry in the congregation.
- interpreting the importance of apportioned funds, explaining the causes supported by each of them and their place in the total program of the church. The lay leader, as one of the best connections between the general church and the local charge conference, should be well versed in how apportioned funds are used. It is important to pass on this knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm to help the local charge conference understand better its connection to the general church.

The **church council** is the primary administrative agency for the charge conference, responsible for planning and coordinating the administrative and programmatic life of the congregation. The church council includes pastor(s) and laity who chair committees and task forces. Your role as lay leader at the church council is to

- bring a broad perspective of laity of all ages as you listen to the plans for implementing the mission and vision of the congregation.
- apprise the council of needs and opportunities for more effective ministry in the community.
- help to interpret the plans and decisions of the church council to the laity of the congregation.

Your role in helping the council extends beyond the internal workings of the church, into the community. You assist the council to better attend to the unique ministry and mission needs in your community as you

- look for and take advantage of opportunities to interpret the mission and ministry of the congregation to the community. Where can the ministries of your congregation assist the community? What do you have to offer?
- share ways in which the congregation could provide mission and ministry opportunities to meet the needs of people in the community. Could you partner with a local elementary school, homeless shelter, sports organization? In what ways could you participate in disaster relief or neighborhood watch?

The **finance committee** prepares an annual budget for the congregation to submit to the church council for review and adoption. The committee is responsible, together with the stewardship committee (if you have one), for developing and implementing a plan for raising funds for the budget adopted by the church council. The committee administers the funds according to the instructions of the church council and guides the work of the church

treasurer and financial secretary. Your role in this committee is similar to your role in the church council. You are to

- represent all the laity and the community as the budget is prepared and as funds are administered.
- interpret the finances of the church to the congregation.

The **nominations and leadership development committee** identifies, develops, deploys, evaluates, and monitors the Christian spiritual leadership of the congregation. This critically important committee should be the hub of leadership selection and training. The responsibilities include more than finding people to fill empty slots. *Identifying* is more than finding willing people; it includes discovering the gifts needed for various ministries and who possesses those gifts. *Developing* is about equipping, providing prayer support, and mentoring those who are in leadership positions. *Deploying* refers to discerning areas of mission and ministry where the gifts of the members will be used most effectively. *Evaluating* the success of each committee and the nominations and leadership development committee's efforts is essential to improving the work of the congregation. *Monitoring* is done by taking the pulse of the congregation—what needs to be added to the leadership? What should change or be eliminated? As a representative of the laity on this committee, your role is to

- encourage the Spiritual gifts assessment of potential leaders, which empowers the laity and the committee to discern where use of gifts and passions will enhance an individual's leadership and faith journey;
- encourage the committee to provide leadership training, mentors, and prayer partners for the committees and chairs of committees;
- assist in monitoring congregational needs for leadership and evaluating the success of each ministry or mission area.

The **staff/pastor-parish relations committee** reflects on the work of the pastor(s) and staff and assists them in assessing their gifts and setting priorities as they lead and serve the church. Members of this committee other than the lay leader and lay member of annual conference are divided into three classes, with a new class elected each year for a three-year term (lay leaders and lay members of annual conference are members of this committee as long as they serve in these offices). This committee meets at least quarterly or more often when requested. These meetings are closed sessions, and meeting discussions are to be kept confidential. See ¶258.2 in the *Discipline* for more information on this committee. Your role on this committee is to

- represent the interests of the laity. What are you hearing? What is beneficial or of concern?
- support the pastor and staff in their ministry efforts, establish prayer support teams or partners, and encourage sabbath time.

### **Engage in Continuous Study**

It will be important for you to continue to study and attend training to understand the church's reason for existence and the types of ministry that will fulfill the church's mission

faithfully and effectively. Your practices model the importance of continuing education for other church leaders. In addition, you have the opportunity through district and conference channels to inform the laity of educational opportunities provided by the annual conference and to participate in lay training. A lay leader is urged to become a certified lay servant in order to increase skills for leadership. (See pages 19–20 for more information on Lay Servant Ministries.)

## District and Conference Lay Leaders

The lay leader of a local church has counterparts in the district and annual conference who can help with the job. The district lay leader works in partnership with the district superintendent and is charged with training local church lay leaders; fostering awareness of the role of laity in congregations, workplaces, homes, and communities; and supporting and enabling lay participation in the planning and decision making of the district. The district lay leader relates to other organized groups of laity within the district, such as Lay Servant Ministries, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Youth.

The annual conference lay leader works in partnership with the bishop and represents the interests of laity. The conference lay leader relates to organized groups of laity to assist with planning, implementation, and evaluation of ministries of the laity. The conference lay leader is an advocate for lay ministries and also promotes the role of laity in the annual conference session.

### For Reflection

“I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.” —Matthew 25:35-36

New Hope United Methodist Church had a plan to cultivate laypeople to assist the pastor with hospital visits. A group of interested laity received training in hospital visitation, but the program never got off the ground. Why? Some members of the congregation reportedly wanted to be visited only by the pastor, not by a layperson.

How could a lay leader have been an advocate in the congregation for the group of trained and available lay visitors?

How could the lay leader have been an advocate in the congregation for the pastor?

How might this Scripture passage help the lay leader interpret ministry opportunities to the congregation? What other passages could be helpful?

What methods could the pastor and lay leader employ to bring Scripture and the church's mission to the forefront regarding shared clergy/laity ministry?

# The Role of the Lay Member of Annual Conference

**T**he lay member of annual conference, along with the pastor, interprets the work done by the annual conference session to the congregation. They are the liaisons between the congregation and the general church and represent the congregation in the actions taken at the annual conference sessions. The lay member of annual conference

- participates in the annual conference sessions and votes on all matters except those pertaining to ministerial relations;
- reports to the congregation and to the church council as soon as possible, but not later than three months after the close of the conference;
- serves as a member of the charge conference, church council, the finance committee, and the staff/pastor-parish relations committee (see pages 10–12).

You and the other lay members to annual conference serve with an equal number of clergy members. Annual conference covers a time span of three to five days, and most annual conferences in the United States meet in May or June. The bishop may occasionally call extra sessions if there is emergency business. Your pastor or district superintendent can inform you about meeting dates, or you can check the annual conference website.

## **Annual Conference: Two Meanings!**

An annual conference is a unique geographic area of The United Methodist Church. Each annual conference is assigned a bishop (sometimes called the episcopal leader) and elects volunteer leadership for the conference, including a conference lay leader. Shared resources (including itinerant clergy) and policies connect all local churches within the annual conference.

The annual conference session is the annual meeting of the lay and clergy members of the geographical area. This meeting sets directions and budget for the area, and the bishop appoints clergy members to their place of service for the next year.

## **Responsibilities of the Lay Member**

The lay member of annual conference has many responsibilities, some before the annual conference session, others during, and still more following the session. If you are employed, you will have to take time from work to attend these gatherings. When the dates

are announced, take care to plan with your employer for the necessary days of vacation. It is important that you attend the entire annual conference session.

## Prepare for Annual Conference

Study the pre-conference journal and materials that are submitted for action by the annual conference. These materials may be mailed or e-mailed to you several weeks before annual conference, or they may be available on the annual conference website. To prepare, you should

- attend any pre-conference district meetings and training sessions.
- learn your annual conference process for conducting business (For example, some conferences operate with Robert's Rules of Order (parliamentary procedure); other conferences operate with discernment processes and consensus. Your pastor or annual conference office can help you prepare before your first session.
- develop a general knowledge of *The Book of Discipline* (see the sidebar on page 6 of this Guideline).
- meet with the pastor, lay leader, and congregation members to discuss issues that will be a part of the annual conference business.
- note issues and concerns that need to be taken to the annual conference session.

## Participate during Annual Conference

- Attend the annual conference laity session. This may be a training event, a form of information sharing, or a time to celebrate the ministry of the laity in your annual conference.
- Participate in all sessions dealing with annual conference business. During business sessions, you will be asked to vote on legislation, resolutions, reports, and budget.
- Listen to proceedings in order to make informed decisions when voting. You do not have to vote the same as other members from your congregation, and you may abstain if you do not feel qualified to vote on a particular issue.
- Participate in all worship experiences (opening worship, early morning or evening chapel, ordination, memorial service, and others). You will have opportunities to experience several worship styles, hear a variety of music groups and preachers, and join in new ways to worship God.
- Attend plenary and Bible study sessions. Annual conference sessions can be an excellent way to grow spiritually.
- Explore the resource displays to gather information and ideas for ministry in your congregation. During fellowship events, at display tables, and in casual conversation, you will learn about The United Methodist Church in new ways.

### **A spiritual discipline for annual conference is journaling!**

Write your reflections about proceedings, discussions, worship experiences, special ceremonies, music, and so on as preparation for later sharing with your congregation. Keep an accurate record of the votes taken that will have an impact on the congregation's finances, operations, and ministry.

## Serve after Annual Conference

Attendance at the annual conference session is the basis for the work you will do in your congregation throughout the year.

- Share information with your congregation about your experience. Remember that the report to the congregation and the church council is to be given as soon as possible, but not later than three months after the close of the annual conference session.
- Search websites and general church news sources and your annual conference newspaper for information to share with your congregation throughout the year.
- You may also choose to participate in annual conference or district committees or work areas.

## General Conference

Every four years all the annual conferences of the United States, along with the central and missionary conferences, meet together to review and enact new legislation or approve new initiatives of The United Methodist Church. These actions may have direct impact on the ministry of the local congregation through changes to the polity and policy of The United Methodist Church as documented in *The Book of Discipline* and *The Book of Resolutions*. As laity representative to the denomination beyond the local church, you need to be aware of changes that may have meaning for your local context and be prepared to interpret those changes. This conference is held in the years divisible by four (2016, 2020, 2024...). The year before, each annual conference elects lay and clergy delegates to represent them at General Conference. Check with your annual conference regarding the election processes.

### For Reflection

“Practice these things, and live by them so that your progress will be visible to all.”  
—1 Timothy 4:15

One new lay member of annual conference discovered that there was much more to conference than she had expected. The reports she had heard from other attendees gave her the impression that annual conference might be boring and more like a burden than a privilege. When she attended, however, she discovered inspiring pagantry, worship, and music. Annual conference had a spiritual aspect that had never been mentioned. Members engaged one another in Christian practices, not only in worship but also in the celebration of and decisions about their ministries.

As you review and anticipate the different ways you will participate during annual conference, think about how you can relate those different aspects of annual conference so others can understand the whole experience.

Think of various Christian practices (prayer, corporate worship, small-group devotions, Communion, Christian conferencing, service and other acts of justice, compassion and works of mercy, and so on). How might you describe your own experiences through the lens of one of these practices?

# Improving Your Leadership

**P**reparation for leadership requires more than taking a course or reading a book. It is a lifelong process of study, prayer, and discernment. It includes developing your spiritual practices, communication skills, people skills, and administrative skills.

## Servant Leadership

A servant leader has certain characteristics. Jesus told the disciples,

“You know that those who rule the Gentiles show off their authority over them and their high-ranking officials order them around. But that’s not the way it will be with you. Whoever wants to be great among you will be your servant. Whoever wants to be first among you will be your slave—just as the Human One didn’t come to be served but rather to serve and to give his life to liberate many people.” (Matthew 20:25-28)

When you recognize the worth of others, you realize that when you perform even the most menial task, you exhibit the qualities of a servant leader.

All people who are called to Christian spiritual leadership are called to servanthood. This is the kind of leadership modeled by our leader, Jesus. When you lead by serving, you empower others in the congregation. Your leadership is lived out in a variety of ways. Sometimes you give directions or lead a meeting. Many times, you pay attention to what others say in verbal and nonverbal ways. Other times, you encourage others to take action. Always, you are willing to do whatever must be done—no task is too menial for a servant leader! That doesn’t mean that you have to do everything by yourself, but you should be willing to do any task, no matter how seemingly insignificant it may be.

## Spiritual Disciplines

“O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. . . . Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days.” —John Wesley, in a letter to Mr. John Trembath, 1760

John Wesley wrote these words to an itinerant preacher to encourage him in his devotional life and to stress the importance of a life focused on devotion to God. In this way, a relationship is cultivated with God. In sermons and in letters, John Wesley encouraged everyone to practice what he called “the means of grace”: those practices that open the

way for God's grace in our lives, that keep us in close and right relationship with God. He believed these practices should be a part of daily life. He did not see the disciplines as church laws, but as the way of discipleship.

Today, Christian leaders must cultivate their relationship with God in order to lead others in spiritual growth. Spiritual leadership comes only from the overflow of our relationship with God. Without daily renewal and guidance, leaders can go astray from God's purposes and suffer burnout. Every leader in the church should be spiritually equipped to lead.

The means of grace are ways God works invisibly in disciples, hastening, strengthening and confirming faith so that God's grace pervades in and through disciples. As we look at the means of grace, they can be divided into works of piety and the works of mercy, both individual and communal practices.

### **Works of Piety**

- **Individual Practices.** Reading, meditating, and studying the Scriptures, prayer, fasting, regularly attending worship, healthy living, and sharing our faith with others
- **Communal Practices.** Regularly sharing in the sacraments, Christian conferencing (accountability to one another), and Bible study

### **Works of Mercy**

- **Individual Practices.** Doing good works, visiting the sick, visiting those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously to the needs of others
- **Communal Practices.** Seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination (for instance, Wesley challenged Methodists to help end slavery), and addressing the needs of the poor

Making disciples, growing vital congregations, and transforming the world is part of a spiritual adventure that is empowered and guided by the Holy Spirit as churches engage in the means of grace. Spiritual goals are accomplished by connecting the means of grace with proven vital church practices such as planning, strategic direction, prioritization, clear focus, and alignment. (Adapted from "The Wesleyan Means of Grace," <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>.)

### **Accountability—Covenant Discipleship**

One way to maintain this practice of spiritual disciplines or means of grace is to join or form a Covenant Discipleship group. Covenant Discipleship is not a new concept. It began with the early Christians and was reignited with the Methodist class meetings—the small-group meetings developed from early Methodism's societies. John Wesley described the Methodist societies in this way: "a company of men [and women] having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness" (see the *Discipline*, ¶104). In weekly meetings, the members of the group help one another become more faithful in their discipleship. (See the "Resources" section for other helps for leader development, spiritual formation, and spiritual growth.)

## Spiritual Gifts

God gives each believer certain abilities and gifts to prepare her or him for ministry. These gifts enable us to make unique contributions to the church, our society, and the world. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul says, “There are different spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; and there are different ministries and the same Lord; and there are different activities but the same God who produces all of them in everyone.” Just as we were saved by grace, so God prepares us by grace and empowers us for meaningful service.

All spiritual gifts are valuable and equally important, according to 1 Corinthians 12. These are truly gifts from God, to be used for God’s glory. Various spiritual gifts are listed in the New Testament (see Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-28; and Ephesians 4:11-13).

As you begin and continue in leadership, you will want to

- use a spiritual gifts assessment tool to discover your gifts,
- discover the area of ministry you are passionate about,
- seek out ways to use your spiritual gifts, within and beyond the church,
- thank God as you receive and recognize your spiritual gifts.

Lay leaders work with the committee on nominations and leadership development to organize spiritual gifts workshops for the congregation and help members discover their gifts and passion for ministry. Resources are suggested at the end of this Guideline.

## Lay Servant Ministries

The *Discipline* recommends that a lay leader be a certified lay servant. The apostle Paul prepared many years for his ministry (see Galatians 2:1), and we must continue to prepare for ours. In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul reminds us, “Everyone who competes practices self-discipline in everything. The runners do this to get a crown of leaves that shrivel up and die, but we do it to receive a crown that never dies.”

Lay servant ministry is a United Methodist system for lay leadership development. The basic and advanced courses are designed to help people develop their skills in leading, caring, and communicating. Participating in this training helps people build relationships with other lay leaders. In this way, leaders increase opportunities for themselves and for the congregation to be in ministry with others.

Your conference lay leader and district lay leader will have information on training opportunities in your annual conference. Lay servant resources are available, in print and as downloads, from <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>. For more information on Lay Servant Ministries, go to the Discipleship Ministries website at [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org).

## Certified Lay Minister

Certified lay ministers complete courses beyond Lay Servant Ministries and are interviewed and recommended for certification through the district committee on ordained

ministry. On occasion, a district superintendent or bishop may assign a certified lay minister to a specific ministry, such as visitation and care ministry, lay missionary, parish nurse, small-church pastoral leadership, Hispanic/Latino lay missionary, or as a staff member in a church. The certified lay minister serves under the supervision of a district superintendent or appointed clergy person. For more information on certified lay ministry, go to the Discipleship Ministries website at [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org).

## **Christian Conferencing/Leading Meetings**

As a leader in your congregation, you will likely have the opportunity to lead meetings. It is important to remember whom we are serving and whose work is to be done. Using a Christian-conferencing format with consensus and discernment is a way to keep Christ at the forefront of your meetings. Use the model or combination of approaches that suits your unique context and need.

### **The Means of Grace**

Think about how the atmosphere of your meetings could be changed by taking time to include some of the means of grace. For example, light a candle to remind everyone of the presence of the light of Christ. Reserve an empty chair to represent Jesus' presence among you; keep a symbol of the Holy Spirit, or a pitcher, bowl, and towel (signs of servanthood) before you as reminders of your roles in Christ's church. Share prayer concerns at the beginning of the meeting to help members focus on the business at hand rather than on their problems at home, work, or school. Take time during your meetings to lift decisions in prayer before voting or getting consensus.

### **Discernment**

Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your decisions. *Discernment* is listening for God's call or will—seeing the heart of the matter through spiritual eyes. Discernment is not new to the church. In 1 Samuel 16, the prophet Samuel discerned God's will regarding who would be anointed king. Acts 1:12-26; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 12:10; and 1 John 4:1 also refer to discernment as a powerful tool in decision making and in the life of faith.

### **Consensus**

Christian, or holy, conferencing is the manner in which we govern our lives together; it calls us to build one another up, not tear down. In consensus decision making, we work together for the best possible decision for the group. The foundation for consensus rests in trust, respect, unity of purpose, non-violence, self-empowerment, cooperation, conflict resolution, commitment to the group, active participation, access to power, and patience. In the consensus model,

- every interest is heard and understood.
- everyone accepts the outcome. An individual may not agree with the decision, but will agree to stand aside and not block the process.

- all seek alternatives that address everyone’s concerns and interests.
- everyone agrees not to hinder the process, but to help the group meet everyone’s interests and needs.
- everyone agrees that there is still an obligation to continue to try to meet the interests and needs of those who agree to stand aside.
- there is group ownership of the decision.
- if a vote is necessary to record numbers, it is taken after consensus has been reached.

### **Mutual Invitation**

Consider using a mutual invitation model during your meetings. This method involves an initial speaker presenting the agenda item or concern—speaking to it and then inviting someone else to speak. That person can either speak to the item or pass, but then invites another person to speak. Everyone has a chance to pass or speak in this model, so everyone has a chance to participate.

### **Inclusivity**

When staffing committees, be inclusive in the representation. Include youth, young adults, older adults, men and women, and people of diverse ethnicities and abilities. Try to schedule meetings when people from these groups would most likely be able to attend.

### **Communication Skills**

Listening is difficult. Active listening requires the full attention of everyone involved. Without listening, no communication takes place. The lay leader and the lay member of annual conference listen to many different voices. In your roles, you will hear from members of the congregation and from the pastor and staff. Some of these people may be angry or confused; some might have new ideas for ministry; and some want to tell you how they understand things. Your active listening skills will be a key to your effectiveness as a leader of the congregation. (See Eric Law’s “Respectful Communication Guidelines” at [www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines) for a helpful model.)

### **Leading Change**

As lay leader or as lay member of annual conference, you have the responsibility to work with other leaders to guide your congregation (or your annual conference) through change. Change itself is not bad or good. It is part of life and growth. One of your leadership tasks is to work in partnership with other leaders to guide your congregation and your annual conference toward vital and effective ministry.

### **Appreciative Inquiry and Asset-Based Development**

One resource that can help you in the process of leading change is *Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*. Most problem-solving exercises focus on identifying a problem, analyzing the causes

and possible solutions, and action planning that is better described as “treatment of the malady.” The AI process focuses on the positive things that have occurred or are occurring and builds on those. AI suggests that you look for what is working well. Base the momentum for change on high moments rather than on what is not working right now. AI uses a cycle of processes:

- Appreciate and Value the best of “What Is”
- Envision “What Might Be”
- Dialogue “What Should Be”
- Innovate “What Will Be”

Then the cycle begins again as you discuss what is going well, valuing the best of what is. (See the “Resources” section for more on Appreciative Inquiry.)

Another process that can help as we look at change is *Asset-Based Community Development*. This concept considers how we work with partners. There are resources all around us, if we are willing to consider connecting with the community. There may be partners in the community who would be willing to help fund or advertise ministries and missions within the community. How might our thinking change if we were willing to look beyond the walls and windows to the gifts and assets of the community? And how much more could we accomplish in mission or service with those in need?

### **Conflict and Mediation Skills**

*Conflict* is simply two different ideas in the same place at the same time. It is natural, the result of differences that produce tension, which is normal in communities and families. The important part of conflict management is bringing conflicts into the open where they can be clarified.

The JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation exists to prepare and assist United Methodists to engage in conflict constructively. The center summarizes the skills and attitudes needed for transforming conflict in its publication “Engage Conflict Well.” This summary and other material is available by free download from <http://www.justpeaceumc.org>. (Type “Engage Conflict Well” into the search bar, and it will bring up this resource.)

### **Evaluate Your Leadership**

As a lay leader or lay member, you have much to keep on track. A way to do this is to set goals for the things that you expect to accomplish within a given time frame. It is critical that the goals be specific and measureable. For more information on evaluation and measurement, please see “Vital Congregations: Setting Goals” at <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/vital-congregations-setting-goals>. On pages 23–24 are sample grids for a lay leader and for a lay member of annual conference:

**Sample: Goals and Measures Grid for *Lay Leader* at First UMC**

	<b>Represent the Laity</b>	<b>Model Discipleship</b>	<b>Meet with the Pastor</b>
<b>Definition</b>	Serve as primary advocate for and representative of the laity in the congregation.	Model good habits of personal devotion and discipleship. Engage in spiritual practices and serve in outreach and mission.	Pastor and lay leader decide how they will guide the congregation together in accomplishing its mission.
<b>Desired Result</b>	Laity know about and feel confident that their needs and concerns are accurately communicated to staff and congregational leaders.	The congregation recognizes the lay leader's spiritual practices of discipline, devotion, and leadership both within and outside the church.	The pastor and lay leader form a unified team who guide the church, with other leaders, in ministry within and beyond their church.
<b>Strategies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set up listening posts for laity to share concerns or ideas for mission and ministry.</li> <li>2. Develop a communication tool to share these ideas with other leaders.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop habits of personal devotion and corporate worship.</li> <li>2. Engage in mission opportunities.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Set a time for meetings with the pastor.</li> <li>2. Draft a Leadership Covenant.</li> <li>3. Develop a way to track discussions and results.</li> </ol>
<b>Measures</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a. 50% of those issues/ ideas were acted on by pastor/ staff/church council</li> <li>2a. 90% of leaders received the communication and acted on it.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a. Spend time daily in devotions.</li> <li>1b. Attend worship weekly unless prevented.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2a. Covenant drafted within 30 days of lay leader's term.</li> <li>2b. Covenant is reviewed or revised annually.</li> </ol>

### Sample: Goals and Measures Grid for *Lay Member at First UMC*

	<b>Prepare for Annual Conference</b>	<b>Serve during Conference</b>	<b>Report to the Congregation</b>
<b>Definitions</b>	Study the pre-conference journal and materials that are submitted for action by annual conference.	Participate in the annual conference sessions and vote on all matters except those pertaining to ministerial relations.	Share information with your congregation about your experience.
<b>Desired Results</b>	Meet with the pastor, lay leader, and congregation members to discuss issues that will be a part of conference business.	Attend the annual conference laity session through participation in all sessions dealing with annual conference business and worship. Vote when appropriate.	The congregation is informed about annual conference session, including decisions and policies that affect the church's ministry and administration, clergy expectations, resources for lay leadership, how "First UMC" members voted, worship ideas, and mission/ministry opportunities.
<b>Strategies</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attend pre-conference sessions and read Conference Journal.</li> <li>2. Relate proposed legislation to the <i>Discipline</i>.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Attend all sessions.</li> <li>2. Vote on legislation and recommendations.</li> <li>3. Journal business items, ideas, and other issues.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Work with pastor to complete the report.</li> <li>2. Plan how to report with the chair of the council.</li> <li>3. Note items during church council and other committee meetings that may need to be taken to the annual conference.</li> </ol>
<b>Measures</b>	1a. All pre-conference preparation is completed before the pre-conference sessions.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3a. Significant events and legislation noted in your journal on the same day.</li> <li>3b. Spoke to pastor and alternate to compare notes each day.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1a. As soon as possible after conference, date set with pastor.</li> <li>1b. At meeting with pastor, date for congregational report set.</li> </ol>

## **For Reflection**

“And let us consider each other carefully for the purpose of sparking love and good deeds. Don’t stop meeting together with other believers, which some people have gotten into the habit of doing. Instead, encourage each other, especially as you see the day drawing near.” —Hebrews 10:24-25

As a leader, what changes can you make in the way meetings are held in your church?

What difference do you think it might make if all meetings were considered opportunities for Christian conferencing?

What results in your life have come from practicing spiritual disciplines? How have you seen those disciplines change and grow from your earliest efforts?

As a leader, how will you encourage others to pursue the practice of spiritual disciplines in their lives?

## **A Final Word**

Fulfilling these roles within the congregation gives you a wonderful opportunity to make a kingdom impact! Become prepared spiritually to be the leader that God has called you to be. Open your eyes to the work of God in the world around you and discern how you can join God in that work.

May God bless you as you journey together with other leaders in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

# Resources

## Connectional Resources

Discipleship Ministries provides consultation, training, research, print and electronic resources to enhance the ministry of congregations and church leaders. For more information and free resources, see the website at [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org). An annual directory is available at annual conference or by calling (toll free) 1-877-899-2780, ext. 1793.

Director of Laity in Leadership—Discipleship Ministries, 877-899-2780 ext. 7179

The Academy for Spiritual Formation is an experience of disciplined Christian community for laity and clergy that emphasizes holistic spirituality. See <http://academy.upperroom.org>.

The Walk to Emmaus is a three-day experience exploring Christianity as a lifestyle. The Emmaus weekend is highly structured and is designed to strengthen and renew the Christian faith. See <http://emmaus.upperroom.org>.

## General Resources

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016).

*The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), ISBN: 9780687035724.

*The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), ISBN: 9780687330447 (pew edition blue).

## Leadership

Lay Servant Ministries courses can be used in many venues (small groups, Sunday school classes, etc.) to equip laity as they grow in their discipleship and ministry. Go to <http://bookstore.upperroom.org> to purchase course materials.

*The Lay Ministry Equipping Resources Catalog* can be ordered by calling 1-800-972-0433 or downloaded from <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>. Items below marked with **LL** are in the **Learning and Leading** series and can be found in the *Lay Ministry Equipping Resources Catalog*.

*Living Our Beliefs: The United Methodist Way* by Kenneth L. Carder (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2009), ISBN: 9780881775716.

- Mainline or Methodist? Rediscovering Our Evangelistic Mission* by Scott Kisker (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN: 9780881775419.
- Missional: Joining God in the Neighborhood* by Alan J. Roxburgh (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), ISBN: 9780801072314.
- Re-Jesus: A Wild Messiah for a Missional Church* by Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch (Peabody: Hendrikson Publishers, 2009), ISBN: 9781921202919.

## **Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Disciplines**

- Accountable Discipleship: Living in God's Household* by Steven W. Manskar (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), ISBN: 9780881773392; **LL**.
- Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition* by David Lowes Watson (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), ISBN: 9781579109547; **LL**.
- Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* by Steve Harper (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1995), ISBN: 9780835807401; **LL**.
- Eight Life-Enriching Practices of United Methodists* by Henry H. Knight III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), ISBN: 9780687087341.
- Opening Ourselves to Grace: Basic Christian Practices* (DVD), produced by Mark Purushotham (available from Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 978088175082.
- Restoring the Wesleyan Class Meeting* by Dr. James B. Scott and Dr. Molly Davis Scott (Dallas: Provident Publishing, 2008), ISBN: 9780977867325.
- This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* by Gayle Carlton Felton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), ISBN: 9780881774573.

## **Christian Conferencing**

- Concepts in Leadership I and II* by Brian Jackson and Sandy Zeigler, available as download from <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; **LL**.
- Leading in Prayer* by Mary O. Benedict (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007), ISBN: 9780881774924; **LL**.
- Respectful Communication Guidelines* by Eric Law, available at [www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines](http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines).

## **Change/Conflict**

- Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change* by David Cooperrider (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2008), ISBN: 9781576754931.
- Asset Based Community Development (PDF), available at: [http://www.neighborhoodtransformation.net/pdfs/What\\_%20is\\_Asset\\_Based\\_Community\\_Development.pdf](http://www.neighborhoodtransformation.net/pdfs/What_%20is_Asset_Based_Community_Development.pdf)
- Engage Conflict Well, available through [www.justpeaceumc.org](http://www.justpeaceumc.org).

*Inclusion: Making Room for Grace* by Eric H.F. Law (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), ISBN: 9780827216204.

JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation ([www.justpeaceumc.org](http://www.justpeaceumc.org)). JUSTPEACE is a United Methodist center that prepares and assists leaders and faith communities to engage conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, and restoration of community.

*Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation* by Eric H.F. Law (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002), ISBN: 9780827234529.

*Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), ISBN: 9780385528757.

*Vital Congregations: Setting Goals*, available at <http://www.umc.org/how-we-serve/vital-congregations-setting-goals>.

## **UMC Agencies & Helpful Links**

General Board of Church and Society, [www.umc-gbcs.org](http://www.umc-gbcs.org), 202-488-5600; Service Center, 1-800-967-0880

General Board of Discipleship (d/b/a Discipleship Ministries), [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org), 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>, 1-800-972-0433; The Upper Room, [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org), 1-800-972-0433; email: [info@umcdiscipleship.org](mailto:info@umcdiscipleship.org)

General Board of Global Ministries, [www.umcmmission.org](http://www.umcmmission.org), 1-800-862-4246 or 212-870-3600; email: [info@umcmmission.org](mailto:info@umcmmission.org)

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, [www.gbhem.org](http://www.gbhem.org), 615-340-7400

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, [www.gbophb.org](http://www.gbophb.org), 847-869-4550

General Commission on Archives and History, [www.gcrah.org](http://www.gcrah.org), 973-408-3189

General Commission on Religion & Race, [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org), 202-547-2271; email: [info@gcorr.org](mailto:info@gcorr.org)

General Commission on the Status & Role of Women, [www.gcsrw.org](http://www.gcsrw.org), 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, [www.gcumm.org](http://www.gcumm.org), 615-340-7145

General Council on Finance and Administration, [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org), 866-367-4232 or 615-329-3393

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting (General Commission on United Methodist Men), [www.gcumm.org](http://www.gcumm.org), 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, [www.umph.org](http://www.umph.org), 615-749-6000; Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; Cokesbury, [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com), 1-800-672-1789

United Methodist Communications, [www.umcom.org](http://www.umcom.org), 615-742-5400; EcuFilm, 1-888-346-3862; InfoServ, email: [infoserv@umcom.org](mailto:infoserv@umcom.org); *Interpreter Magazine*, [www.interpretermagazine.org](http://www.interpretermagazine.org), 615-742-5441

United Methodist Women, [www.unitedmethodistwomen.org](http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org); 212-870-3900

**For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.**