

Proposed Strategic Priorities

Iowa Conference, United Methodist Church

May 2, 2013

The Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church exists to encourage communities of faithful people who live out the love of Jesus as instruments of God's grace, peace, and justice. We are lay people and pastors, churches of all sizes, ministries and programs, all connected by the Holy Spirit into one body – the Iowa Conference – in order to live out our mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

In all parts of the Iowa Conference, God is calling us to a season of resurrection. “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert” (Isaiah 43:19 NRSV). God is calling us to be reborn as a conference so that we will grow our number of communities of faith and Christian disciples, develop hundreds of new leaders for God's transforming work, and intentionally focus resources on our common mission. Every step of the way, God is leading us outside of our churches and into our wider communities to build relationships with new people, reaching out especially – as Jesus did – to persons living on the margins of society.

This future is exciting, but it also asks us to take bold steps of faith, together, as we love and serve our neighbors. As United Methodist disciples in Iowa we acknowledge that we are fully dependent on God's grace. Yet with conviction we embrace those spiritual practices of prayer, presence, gifts, service, and witness that keep us connected to God as we seek to transform the world. To live out our vision and mission, we believe as the Iowa Conference we must focus on these strategic priorities:

1. Creating World-Transforming Communities of Faith

A. *Establishing new communities of faith*

- 1) The Iowa Conference will help communities of faith study their local mission field, using demographic resources such as MissionInsite, in the process of discerning opportunities for ministry and outreach.
- 2) By January 1, 2014, every district will have assessed and identified areas for potential development and begun working in partnership with area congregations, setting goals for launching new ministries and communities of faith.
- 3) Each community of faith will tell their stories at charge conference of engagement with the surrounding community through mission, service, fellowship, worship, advocacy with particular attention to working for peace and justice, and other activities that make connections and build relationships.

B. *Increasing vitality in existing communities of faith*

- 1) Every community of faith will be invited into a process for intentional missional transformation and faith development. All will be expected to document and present their plans at charge conference to make disciples and transform the world in their ministry context.

- 2) The Iowa Conference will create and coordinate opportunities for hands-on mission and service with the poor, growing participation by 25% in the next three years.
- 3) The Ministry Cabinet will develop and implement urban and rural ministry strategies, working alongside poor and marginalized persons in these communities to explore the conditions that create their circumstances and to address the possibilities for transformation by advocating for peace and justice.
- 4) The Iowa Conference will raise a minimum of \$2 million by 2014 with the participation of every community of faith to save 200,000 lives through the Imagine No Malaria initiative.

2. Equipping Ourselves and Others as Transformational Leaders

We will collaborate in all areas of ministry throughout the Iowa Conference in a spirit of partnership, embodying God's intentions for us to be in mutual ministry as laity and clergy.

A. Equipping lay leadership to disciple others and transform the world

- 1) By 2016, 25% of United Methodist Iowans will have invested themselves in a significant lay training experience, such as Walk to Emmaus, School for Lay Ministry, Disciple Bible Study, and Lay Servant Ministry.
- 2) By July 1, 2015, every training program in the conference will be assessed and realigned for effectiveness in equipping laity to do the work of intentional faith development, asset-based community development, and intentional evangelistic witness, emphasizing opportunities for coordination and collaboration across agency structures.
- 3) Lay participation in small accountability groups and hands-on mission engagement will improve by 25% throughout the conference by 2015.
- 4) The number of laity who are identified, mentored, trained, and engaged in leadership throughout the conference in new church starts, communities of faith, mission schools, innovation teams, and short-term task groups will increase by 10% by 2015, with particular attention given to multi-cultural opportunities and youth and young adult outreach.

B. Equipping clergy leadership to disciple others and transform the world

- 1) The Order of Elders, the Order of Deacons, and the Fellowship of Associate Members and Local Pastors will assess current practices and implement new strategies to facilitate full participation in regular gatherings by Jan. 1, 2014 in order to strengthen the clergy covenant.
- 2) All clergy will spend at least 10% of their time in the wider community to which they are appointed.
- 3) By July 1, 2015, every training program in the conference will be assessed and realigned for effectiveness in equipping clergy to do the work of intentional faith development, asset-based community development, and intentional evangelistic witness, emphasizing opportunities for coordination and collaboration across agency structures.
- 4) Every pastor under appointment will identify and participate in a monthly covenant group of his/her choosing to disciple one another through prayer, study, and mutual encouragement by Jan. 1, 2014.

- 5) The number of clergy who are identified, mentored, trained, and engaged in leadership throughout the conference in new church starts, communities of faith, mission schools, innovation teams, and short-term task groups will increase by 10% by 2015, with particular attention given to multi-cultural opportunities and youth and young adult outreach.
- 6) The Board of Ordained Ministry and the Appointive Cabinet will develop and implement processes in order to strengthen the effectiveness and address ineffectiveness of clergy.

3. Directing Our Resources to Our Common Goals

A. Developing and implementing an effective communications ministry

- 1) The Communications Advisory Team will develop and implement a strategic plan by June, 2014, with attention to identifying both internal and external needs, most appropriate means for sharing information, and engagement with the media.
- 2) Coaching and training will be offered on an ongoing basis to facilitate effective and innovative communications practices by communities of faith.
- 3) The Iowa Conference will increase by 50% in the next year stories of transformed communities and lives in conference publications (district newsletters, *United Methodist Reporter*, conference website, etc.) so that we might be inspired by the ministries of others in the connection.
- 4) Conference-wide communications will reach more people by 2015 so that at least 25% of laity regularly receives information about opportunities to engage in the work of the community, church, and conference.
- 5) A new event-calendaring program will be implemented this year to support effective scheduling and to reduce the cross calendaring of other conference activities.
- 6) Specific definitions of information requested through forms and statistical reports will be provided this year so that communities of faith can communicate the best available information about their work and ministry in alignment with others.

B. Aligning organizational structures and staffing resources for the sake of the mission and vision

- 1) Conference staffing at all levels will be reassessed and redesigned with the support of the human resources department and input from communities of faith to address current needs based on our strategic priorities by June 1, 2014.
- 2) Conference agencies, such as parish development, the board of discipleship, the board of laity, and district connectional ministries councils, will give priority to the outreach efforts of communities of faith.
- 3) In order to better support the work of communities of faith, ministries that receive conference funding for work with the poor will receive consultative assistance in developing action/reflection models to broaden the experience of volunteers in their ministry. This work will aim to deepen discipleship, promote social holiness, and build support for work of peace and justice in our communities and world.

- 4) Conference funding priority will be given to ministries who provide regular evaluative assessments of their ministry and act upon the evaluation. All such ministries will participate in a covenant relationship with the Iowa Conference no later than 2014.

C. *Increasing the financial health of the Iowa Conference*

- 1) Our zero-based budgeting process will reflect the strategic priorities so that we can move from turf mentality and self-protection to ever more trust and cooperation in our work as a conference.
- 2) The Council on Finance and Administration will develop a five-year financial plan by June, 2014 aligned with our strategic priorities by June 1, 2016 in order to bolster the sustainability of the Iowa Conference and allow for the continuation of successful mission and ministry. Attention will be given to increasing the operating reserve level to \$6,500,000 and developing additional revenue streams beyond apportionments for the sake of the mission.
- 3) Conference leadership will provide timely, accurate, and readily attainable financial reports for review by leaders at every level.
- 4) The Council on Finance and Administration will work with the superintendents to identify congregations that have had chronic difficulty with full apportionment payment, develop a plan, and respond to assist these congregations by June 1, 2014. These congregations will have increased their apportionment giving by 25% by June 30, 2016. District stewardship teams will be reactivated and trained to offer stewardship education and financial advice to congregations and communities of faith in their districts.

ALIGNING SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The following questions are to help us better discern God's purposes as we engage in ministry as the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church. All leaders, congregations, staff, ministries, and organizations of the Iowa Conference will be asked these questions on a regular basis for support, accountability, and alignment around our strategic priorities.

Creating World-Transforming Communities of Faith

1. How do our efforts support communities of faith in their disciple-making work?
2. How do our efforts support communities of faith in their work of transforming the world?
3. How do our efforts build new relationships in new places?
4. How do our efforts lead disciples into the world for transformation, both of themselves and others?
5. Where is the Holy Spirit leading us? What risks are involved in answering that call?

Equipping Ourselves and Others as Transformational Leaders

1. How do our efforts deepen the discipleship of its participants? How is worship, study, prayer, and service a part of our work?
2. How do our efforts help disciples embrace and live out their calling?
3. How do our efforts help disciples to hold one another accountable?
4. What risks are we taking in our effort to further the mission of the Church?

5. What did we do that failed? What can we learn from that failure? What is God calling us to do next?

Directing Our Resources to Our Common Goals

1. What is the financial sustainability of our ministry?
2. How have we been good stewards of our resources and gifts for ministry?
3. How are we communicating our ministry and inviting others to join in?
4. How have our efforts reached out to multiple generations?
5. How do our efforts help us to build trust and relationships across the connection?

CONCLUSION

We believe we impact lives through the love of Jesus that is reflected in what we do. We do not have all the answers. We are on a journey of faith led by the Holy Spirit. We have entered into a new season of opportunity. As we travel together, we believe we are called to be unapologetically Christian and unashamedly United Methodist. We believe we are much stronger together than we are alone. We believe it is time for us all to unite to make a difference. When we follow and live out Christ's example of generous love and compassion, the world will be transformed.