



Vital Congregations

Task Force of the Northern Illinois Conference

CONGREGATIONAL VITALITY through **Spiritual Vitality & Financial Sustainability**

**Developed by the Northern Illinois Conference
Congregational Vitality Task Force
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Congregational Vitality Foundations

After extensive conference-wide listening sessions, pastors, laity, and leaders of our conference identified one of our goals should be to increase the number of highly vital congregations in our conference.

Congregations of any size can be highly vital in their context. Any size congregation can be highly vital if people are willing to follow God as disciples of Christ and are willing to do the things a disciple of Christ does.

In 2010 and 2011 the United Methodist Denomination conducted a study of over 33,000 churches to determine the most important practices present in highly vital congregations.

The study found:

1. Disciples worship God
2. Disciples make new disciples
3. Disciples grow in faith
4. Disciples give generously
5. Disciples engage in mission.

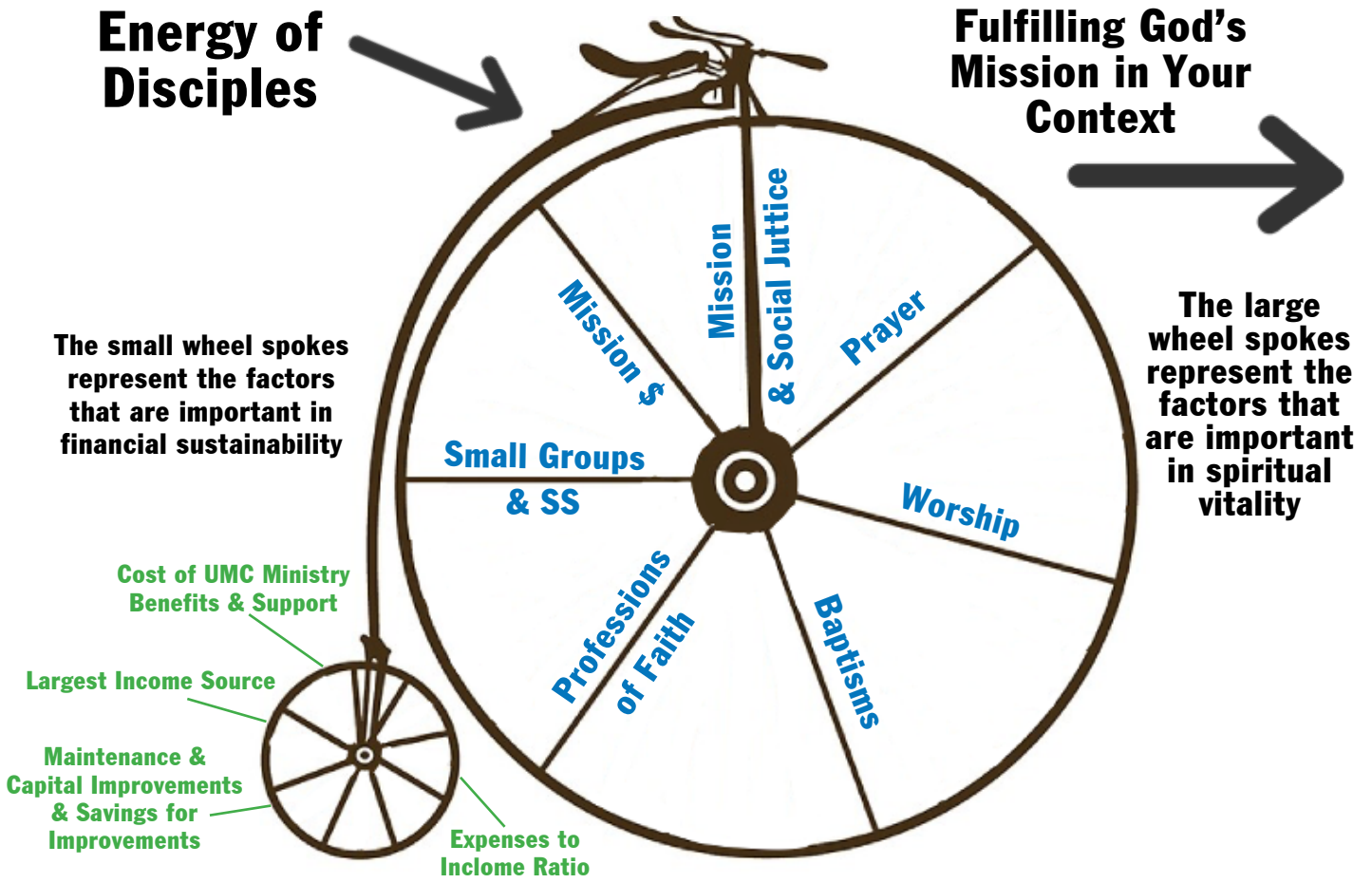
Since then, we have also found that in highly vital congregations disciples discern God's plan in communal prayer. These six things will be the basis for your church becoming spiritually vital.

Through following this process, your church will be able to chart its course in becoming more vital. Spiritual vitality is the greatest and primary factor as determined in the study in determining how vital a congregation will be in fulfilling the mission God has given the church. While secondary, financial sustainability is an additional factor that affects the church's ability to be vital. Spiritual vitality and financial sustainability are linked together and affect one another and therefore are the two factors where we can bring about change to make a church highly vital. Spiritual vitality is what drives financial sustainability and therefore spiritual vitality is primary. As a church becomes more spiritually vital the finances of a congregation also improve. But if a church is having trouble affording staff and facilities then so much of the congregation's energy is taken up with financial worries so the congregation does not have the energy to invest in spiritual vitality and following God's mission for them. To become more spiritually vital a church will have to address financial concerns if there are any because of how they are connected. The following picture of an old-fashioned bicycle helps to explain this relationship.



The rider of the early bikes would pedal the larger wheel. The force the rider was applying with their leg muscles was multiplied by the larger diameter of the front wheel thus enabling the rider to travel greater distances with one revolution. The small wheel was there to support the bike and help with balance so the bike could travel forward without falling backwards. The work of the smaller wheel was secondary to that of the front larger wheel. If the rider were to pedal the smaller wheel it would take much more energy because the smaller wheel would have to make many more revolutions than the larger wheel. Thus the greatest distance is attained when the rider applies all their energy to the front wheel.

Congregational Vitality Bike for Visual Representation



The large wheel represents the spiritual vitality of a congregation. When disciples focus all their energy on spiritual vitality factors, their energy is multiplied and moves the church forward as they fulfill God’s mission. As the disciples concentrate their energy on the church’s spiritual vitality, the finances come along because they are integrally linked to spiritual vitality.

The factors with the greatest impact on spiritual vitality on the big wheel are communal prayer, worship, baptisms, professions of faith, small groups and Sunday school, mission dollars, and mission and social justice. The factors with the greatest impact on financial sustainability on the small wheel are salaries, benefits and conference support, utilities, maintenance, capital improvements, savings for improvements, expenses to income ratio, and largest income source.

If the disciples must focus more of their energy on the finances to support staff and facilities, then that energy has little effect on the church moving forward and fulfilling God’s mission. Because most congregation members have a limited amount of time, resources, and energy to give to the church, the more energy expended on financial difficulties, the less energy there is for the most important factors that drive spiritual vitality. With more energy being focused on finances and less on spiritual vitality the congregation will be less effective in fulfilling God’s mission. Even though spiritual vitality is the most important factor, we can see how financial difficulties can drain the church’s energy and prevent it from effectively fulfilling God’s mission.

The bike diagram helps us to understand how spiritual vitality and financial sustainability are related and linked to one another. Thus for a congregation to be highly vital, we need to consider both spiritual vitality and financial sustainability.

Sub-Factors that Are Important for Congregational Vitality

Seven factors can be measured in a church that indicate a church's spiritual vitality and its disciples. These seven factors help us understand a different and important facet of spiritual vitality. As people grow in their faith and Jesus becomes more and more the Lord of their life, then the following changes happen: 1) prayer becomes a more important part of their life and becomes the way they hear God's voice; 2) being a part of weekly worship becomes more important to them; 3) they desire and work to see more people become connected to Jesus Christ, so the lives of others are transformed; 4) they find it essential to be part of a group that meets regularly to grow in their faith with others, and 5) they seek to give more generously of their finances and time to alleviate suffering and transform people's lives and the world. The following seven sub-factors are indicators of the spiritual maturity of the people in the congregation and hence the whole church.

1. **Communal Prayer:** For a church to hear the voice of God, we measure the average number of people involved in communal prayer each week (Jeremiah 29:11-14).
2. **Worship:** For the church to give thanks to God, praise God, and nourish our souls we measure the average number of people in weekly worship (Hebrews 10:24-25).
3. **Baptisms:** We measure the number of baptisms each year to determine how many young families with children are being reached for Jesus Christ and how many new adults who have never been baptized are coming to faith.
4. **Professions of Faith:** We measure the number of professions of faith each year to determine how many new people are finding a relationship with Jesus Christ.
5. **Small Groups and Sunday School:** We measure the average number of people involved in growing their faith with others in small groups or Sunday school each week.
6. **Mission Dollars:** We measure the number of dollars given above and beyond apportionments to others outside the church to alleviate suffering and transform lives and the world.
7. **Mission and Social Justice:** We measure weekly the average number of people who are giving their time serving others in mission or for actions of social justice to transform lives and the world.

There are four sub-factors that we are measuring in the church that indicate financial sustainability. These four sub-factors each help us understand the church's financial sustainability. When a church has financial difficulties, the energy focused on finances will drain the available energy people have to invest in the more important spiritual aspects of the church's life.

1. **Cost of UMC Ministry:** We measure the yearly percentage paid for benefits for pastoral staff and conference support. The categories we use for the factor are the percentage of health insurance paid, percentage of pension paid, percentage of property insurance paid, and percentage of apportionments paid for the year
2. **Expenses to Income Ratio:** We compare the expenses of a church to the income a church receives to determine if a church can support the cost of staff, facilities, and ministries of the church.

3. **Largest Source of Income:** We compare the largest source of income, whether from a single donor or a single source such as rental income, to the total amount of income received to determine how the loss of that single source might affect the financial stability of the church.
4. **Maintenance, Capital Improvements, and Savings for Improvements:** This factor takes into consideration how well a church congregation is maintaining the church facilities. One way to track this is to compare the number of funds used for maintenance and capital improvements or savings for future capital improvements each year as compared to the replacement value of the facilities.

Spiritual Vitality Sub-factors, Targets, and Measurement

The spiritual vitality of a congregation is measured by looking at seven different sub-factors

1. Communal prayer
2. Worship attendance trends
3. Baptisms
4. Professions of faith
5. Weekly small group and Sunday school attendance
6. Mission giving excluding apportionments
7. People sent out weekly serving in mission and social justice.

The spiritual vitality factor equals the sum of all seven sub-factors; the ideal target is 100 as excellent.

Sub-Factor for Worship Attendance Trend: As people grow spiritually, it becomes more important to be present in worship each week. Just as worship attendance reflects the spiritual maturity of individuals, so does worship attendance of the whole congregation reflect the spiritual maturity of that congregation (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Target: The ideal target is for a church to be experiencing a 5% growth in worship attendance.

Tracking: Add everyone in worship each week, including children, youth, adults, and worship leaders. This number should also include special worship services held during the year, such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, community Thanksgiving, etc. Add together all weeks, even if some weeks had no attendance, and then divide the total by 52; this will make it uniform for all churches. Note: Online worship attendance is not yet included until we figure out a good way to collect this data accurately.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 14.29 is given for worship attendance increasing by 5% or greater and decreases if worship attendance is less than 5%. This factor is weighted so that the average for the most recent year is given the greatest weight.

Sub-Factor for Communal Prayer: For a church to discern God's will, congregations must be in communal prayer (Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Target: The ideal target is for 15% of the average worship attendance to be in communal prayer each week.

Tracking: Communal prayer should involve an invitation for everyone to pray; prayer by one person is not counted. For example, if you have a leadership meeting on Monday night and you take 10 minutes to allow everyone to pray for the church's ministry, then count this as 10. If that same week, 25 people attended a morning prayer service and everyone is invited to pray, count them all, even if some of the same people were at the meeting and the prayer service. The total for the week would have been 35. Add together all the weekly numbers of people praying for the year and divide by 52, even if there were weeks with no communal prayer.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A factor of 14.29 is given when on average, 15% or greater of the worship attendance is praying together in the community. The sub-factor approaches zero as the percentage of people in communal prayer approaches zero.

Sub-Factor for Sunday School and Small Group Participation: As people grow spiritually, they will have a desire to grow in their faith through small groups or Sunday school and will make the sacrifice of time to be involved with others growing in faith together. Measuring small group and Sunday school participation indicates a congregation's spiritual maturity through their desire to grow in the faith.

Target: The ideal target is for a church to have the average number of people involved in Sunday school or small groups equal to 50% of the average weekly worship attendance.

Tracking: To calculate this weekly average number of people involved in growing their faith calculate by averaging the following:

Add together the attendance for each Sunday school class throughout the year for all 52 weeks, even if no groups met that week:

week 1 - 35 people, week 2 - 27 people, week 3 - 0 people, week 4 - 21 people, etc. through week 52
Total attendance for 52 weeks = 972

Add together the attendance for all small groups each week throughout the year; there will be many weeks when the number of people meeting in small groups is zero since our churches typically have short-term small group studies.

week 1 - 8 people, week 2 - 6 people, week 3 - 7 people, week 4 - 8 people, etc. through week 52
Total attendance for 52 weeks = 116

Total Sunday School Attendance for Year = 972

Total Small Group Attendance for Year = 116

Total Attendance for Year >>> = 1088

Average Attendance for Year = $1088 / 52 = 20.9$

(realize this number doesn't mean that people met every week, but it is a number that can be uniformly calculated for all churches and compared to worship attendance)

Sub-Factor Calculation: This sub-factor is based on the weekly average number of people in Sunday school or small groups for the year. A sub-factor of 14.29 is given for Sunday school and small group participation equal to 50% of worship attendance. The sub-factor will decrease if less than 50%.

Sub-Factor for Baptisms: In our Methodist tradition, most baptisms are of infant children, thus being an indicator of young families entering and becoming a part of the church. Baptisms give an indication of churches reaching young families. As people grow spiritually, their heart becomes like the heart of Christ and desire to seek and save the lost.

Target: The ideal target is for a church to perform several baptisms yearly, equaling 5% of the average worship attendance.

Tracking: Add all baptisms for the year, including infant baptisms, youth baptisms, and adult baptisms.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 14.29 is given for baptisms equaling 5% or greater of worship attendance. The sub-factor will decrease as the number of baptisms is less than 5%. This factor is calculated on the average number of baptisms over the last three years and is not weighted.

Sub-Factor for Professions of Faith: Professions of faith often occur when confirmands and adults make a profession of their faith before the congregation. Professions of faith give an indication of the church reaching families with youth that are of confirmation age and of reaching adults who have not come to faith before. As people grow spiritually, their heart becomes like the heart of Christ and desire to seek and save the lost.

Target: The ideal target for a church is to have the number of professions of faith each year equal to 5% of the average worship attendance.

Tracking: Add together all of the new professions of faith for the year, including confirmands and any adults who have made a profession of faith. This does not include affirmations of faith, for example, when someone has previously made a profession of faith at another church.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 14.29 is given for professions of faith equaling 5% or greater of worship attendance. The sub-factor will decrease as the number of professions of faith is less than 5%. This factor is calculated on the average number of professions of faith over the last three years and is not weighted.

Sub-Factor for Mission Giving excluding Apportionments: As people and congregations grow spiritually, they develop a heart like Jesus Christ and have compassion for those hurting in the world. People will want to give financially to alleviate suffering in the world. This factor measures the generosity of a congregation above and beyond their normal apportionment payments.

Target: The ideal target is for a church to be giving 10% of the church's income to missions outside of the church beyond paying the church's apportionments.

Tracking: Add all gifts your church gave to other entities above and beyond your yearly apportionments. This would include gifts given to other ministries, such as food pantries, missionaries, and gifts given to individuals to help with needs such as gas or utilities or rent, etc.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 14.29 is given for churches reaching this 10% level or greater and will decrease as mission giving is less than 10%.

Sub-Factor for People Sent Out in Mission & Justice: As people and congregations grow spiritually, they develop a heart like that of Jesus Christ and have compassion for those hurting in the world. People will want to invest their lives in serving others through mission and social justice to alleviate suffering in the world.

Target: The ideal target is for churches to send out people each week to serve in their community in mission and social justice equaling 10% of the weekly worship attendance.

Tracking: To calculate this, the weekly average number of people involved calculate by averaging the following:

Add the daily events for all people each week involved in serving in the mission throughout the year for all 52 weeks, even if there were weeks when nobody was serving in the mission. Examples might be working at the food pantry, tutoring, each day working on a mission trip (if five people work on a mission trip for four days, this would be counted as 20 people that week), visiting the sick or shut-ins, etc.

This is a count of people per day each week serving others.

week 1 - 5 people, week 2 - 6 people, week 3 - 0 people, week 4 - 3 people, etc. through week 52

Total daily people in mission for 52 weeks = 106

Add together the daily events for all people each week involved in social justice for all 52 weeks, even if there were weeks when nobody was serving in social justice. Examples are participating in a march, meeting with the alderman to make changes in the community, meetings to promote anti-racism or end violence, etc. This is a count of people per day each week promoting social justice (if a person went to a meeting on Monday to organize and then met with an alderman on Wednesday and then participated in a march on Saturday, that would be counted as three even though it was the same person doing all three).

week 1 - 8 people, week 2 - 6 people, week 3 - 7 people, week 4 - 8 people, etc. through week 52

Total daily people in social justice for 52 weeks = 116

Total Daily People in Mission for Year = 106

Total Daily People in Social Justice for Year = 116

Total Daily Participation in Mission and Social Justice for Year = 222

Average Daily Participation in Mission and Social Justice for Year = $222 / 52 = 4.3$

(realize this number doesn't mean that people served a mission or social justice every week, but it is a number that can be uniformly calculated for all churches and compared to worship attendance)

Sub-Factor Calculation: This sub-factor is based on the weekly average number of people active in mission or social justice for the year as compared to average weekly worship attendance. A factor of 14.29 is given when churches send out on average 10% or greater of their worship attendance each week. As the average number of people compared to worship attendance decreases below 10%, the sub-factor decreases to less than 14.29.

A sample page to track this data each week is included on page 17 at the end of the packet and is also available on the Northern Illinois Conference website in Windows and IOS format. A spreadsheet to combine all the weekly data into one spreadsheet for the year is available on the conference website.

Financial Sustainability Sub-factors, Targets, and Measurement

The financial sustainability of a congregation is measured by looking at four different sub-factors;

1. Funds spent on maintenance and capital improvements
2. Cost of providing UMC ministry that includes basic costs for pension, health insurance, property insurance, and apportionments
3. The ratio of expenses to income
4. The largest income source for the church as compared to total income.

The financial sustainability factor equals the sum of all four sub-factors (possibly 25 for each sub-factor); the ideal target is 100 as excellent.

Sub-Factor for Maintenance, Capital Improvements, and Savings for Improvements:

The funds used for maintenance and capital improvements and savings for future capital improvements were chosen as a sub-factor since when a congregation is experiencing financial stresses, this is one of the first areas in the church budget that is cut or where funds are not spent. Consequently, churches behind in upkeep find it more difficult to make repairs in the future as the problems compound and become more expensive to fix.

Target: The ideal target for the amount of money expended for maintenance, capital improvements, or savings for future capital improvements is 1.5 percent of the replacement value of the church facilities.

Tracking: Add together all funds spent on maintenance and capital improvements made for the year along with savings for future capital improvements.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 25 is received for money spent on maintenance and capital improvements and savings for future capital improvements equal to or greater than 1.5% of the replacement value of the facilities. As the amount of funds spent on maintenance and capital improvements and savings for future capital improvements approaches zero percent of the replacement value, then the sub-factor approaches zero.

Sub-Factor for Cost of UMC Ministry: This sub-factor includes the basic cost of ministry for many churches, including property insurance, health insurance, pension, and apportionments. This was selected as a sub-factor to indicate financial sustainability because as the church experiences financial stresses, this is probably the second area of the budget, which is decreased.

Target: Ideally, the church should pay 100% of its obligations in these four areas, which cover the basic cost of being in the United Methodist ministry.

Tracking: At the end of the year, calculate the percentage of property insurance, pension, health insurance, and apportionments paid that year. If none was owed for any category, then count that category as 100% paid.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 25 is given when 100% of each of the four categories has been paid.

Sub-Factor for Expenses to Income Ratio: The amount of total income received is an important factor in determining financial sustainability. This factor does not include any grants from the annual conference or denomination.

Target: Ideally, income from these resources should be equal to or greater than the expenses of doing ministry.

Tracking: Add together all of your income received for the year from giving, interest received, revenue from the use of your building, and income received from fundraisers. Do not include any grant funds received from the annual conference or denomination.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 25 is given when the church's expenses are less than the income received.

Sub-Factor for Largest Income Source: We include a sub-factor for the largest source of income because if that source suddenly discontinues support for whatever reason, it can affect the financial sustainability of the congregation.

Target: The ideal target is the largest source of income to be as low a percentage of the total income as possible. Ideally, the number of income sources should number large enough that no one source is greater than 10% of the total income.

Tracking: At the end of the year, add all of the income received from the largest source, whether a donor or rental income from one source. For example, if one donor gave \$12,000 during the year, a preschool rented building space for \$15,000, a non-profit rented space for \$6,000, and the conference provided a grant of \$10,000, then the largest single source of income from one entity would be \$15,000 that was received from the preschool.

Sub-Factor Calculation: This sub-factor gives a value of zero if the largest source of income is equal to 10% of the total income. As the largest source of income decreases below 10% of the total income, then the sub-factor increases toward 25.

Sub-Factor for Maintenance and Capital Improvements: The amount of debt a congregation carries can affect its ability to use income in other areas of ministry. Excessive resources needed to service debt can strain congregations and hinder ministry.

Target: Ideally, the amount of money a church spends on maintenance, capital improvements, and savings for future capital improvements should be equal to or greater than 1.5% of the replacement value of the church facilities. This 1.5% represents the amount of money a church needs to be spending per year over the long haul to represent the church's ability to maintain the facilities well maintained. For example, suppose a building's replacement value is \$300,000 for a parsonage. In that case, the church should be spending \$4,500 per year to keep up with repairs, upgrades to facilities, replacement of appliances, and replacement of large ticket items such as the roof and heating and air conditioning units. In this case, \$1,000 might be spent on repainting trim for maintenance, \$1,500 might be spent on capital improvements to upgrade flooring by replacing the carpet, and \$2,000 might be set aside in savings for future capital improvements to save for a large ticket item such as a new roof. Janitorial salaries and regular supplies are not included in the maintenance costs; only the cost of repairs is included.

Tracking: Each year, add together all of the 1) funds spent on repairs for maintenance, 2) funds spent on upgrades to the facility for capital improvements, and 3) funds set aside for future capital improvement projects.

Sub-Factor Calculation: A sub-factor of 25 is received when the funds spent on maintenance, capital improvements, and savings for future capital improvements for a given year are equal to or greater than 1.5% of the replacement cost of the church facilities.

Next Steps Toward Vitality

Your church should retain the services of a coach to journey with you as you discuss these results and determine what you want to do in the future. Your leadership team should examine these results with your coach, discuss their expectations for your current reality, and discuss your church's preferred future with your coach. This will help you to chart your course.

There are various courses of action a church can take:

1. A church can decide it wants to do the difficult work of transformation for the sake of the kingdom of God.
2. A church can decide it wants to reorganize such as through a merger (merger is just one option of many) so that it can reorganize for the sake of the kingdom of God.
3. A church can decide that it doesn't have the energy or resources to change and decide to become a legacy church and choose to close and have their assets used to plant a new ministry for the kingdom of God.
4. A church can decide to do nothing and let things continue as they are.

Jesus asked the invalid by the pool of Bethesda, who had been that way for 38 years, "*Do you want to get well?*" (*John 5:1-6*). Jesus may very well be asking us, "Do we want to be transformed for the sake of the Kingdom of God?" The choice is ours as churches as to what we do next.

Transformation for the Kingdom of God

If your church decides it wants to do the hard work of transforming your church for the sake of God's kingdom then you will want to plan how you will make changes. Based on the current reality of your church and the preferred reality for your church, your leadership should select one to three factors in spiritual vitality and one or two factors in financial sustainability, which your church would like to work on over the next year. Making lasting change in a church takes seven years or so; this will be an ongoing process since change doesn't happen overnight.

Bringing about change in a congregation is very difficult. It often requires either of the two or both of the following situations to be present:

1. A great desire to fulfill God's mission for the church and/or
2. A sense of urgency that if nothing is done, the future of the church is in doubt.

These two things can initiate the desire for a church to change and make them open to that change. Once change begins to happen though, there is often pushback because of how that change will affect people's lives. Ideally, the desire to fulfill God's mission will become the driving force that causes the congregation to continue with the change to get to where God is calling them. A leader's most difficult process to lead a congregation through is implementing change.

The following are great resources on leading change:

- *Leading Change* by John P. Kotter
- *Renovate or Die* by Bob Farr

Prayer is the Foundation for Vitality

Prayer is the first and most important thing we can do when wanting to be a vital congregation for the kingdom of God. In prayer, we hear God's voice and God's calling for our congregations as to how we are to fulfill our mission. It is hard to imagine that God can vitally use us if we don't first seek God's direction and blessing. Jeremiah 29:11-12 (NIV): *For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.*

Here are some excellent resources that share how God works in a praying church.

- *The Circle Maker* by Mark Batterson
- *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* by Jim Cymbala

These two books give practical advice and steps to lead the community of faith in communal prayer.

- *Flood Gates* by Sue Nelson Kibbey (Chapter 2)
- *Fresh Encounters* by Daniel Henderson

These two books are great resources for times of individual prayer.

- *How to Pray* by E. Stanley Jones
- *Draw the Circle* by Mark Batterson (excellent 40-day prayer devotional)

See the page 18, at the end of the packet, for some examples of Prayer Services

Clear Sense of Mission to Drive Transformation

If a church does not have a sense of mission that guides the congregation then it will be important for the leader to help the people understand the mission that God has given them in the place where God has planted the church.

The following is a plan for helping the church discover what it means to be the church and what God's calling is for them to fulfill. Please see page 21 at the end of this packet for Scripture and book references that can help guide discussion. The plan is designed to be done over several 1-2 hour sessions with the leadership.

Importance of having a clear vision of our church's mission

It is important to have a clear sense of our mission and God's calling for our church. The following questions might help to get their current understanding upon which to build a foundation.

- What would people say is the purpose of the church today?
- What are the consequences if our churches don't have a clear vision of God's mission?

The things that often guide churches if there is not a clear vision of the church's mission or purpose can be as follows: ¹

- Tradition – We've always done it this way. The goal is to avoid change.
- Personality – What does the leader want? The leader can be the pastor or a key layperson.
- Finances – How much does it cost? Nothing seems as important as finances.
- Programs – All the energy of the church is focused on maintaining and sustaining programs and never questioning whether the program is doing what is intended?
- Buildings – Paying for and maintaining the church building becomes the biggest item in the budget and the driving force for what the church does. Or on the other hand, the smallness or inadequacy of a building is allowed to set the limit for future growth.
- Events (Busyness) – The success of the church begins to be measured by the business of the people. The danger is that there can be a lot of activity, but an activity that is not accomplishing what God desires for the church.
- Seekers – The church must be sensitive to reaching seekers or those who are unbelievers, but must not let this be the sole driving force of the church. The danger is that it is possible to adapt too much of the culture and lose what makes the church holy.

Consolidating and Grouping Insights

Following the sharing of insights, group all of the insights into categories. Many of the insights will be related and be very similar. This will also help us to begin seeing a few important themes or ideas of what it means for the church to be fulfilling God's mission.

Developing your church's mission statement

The Spiritual Leadership Team team should take the insights that give an indication of the mission of God and begin thinking of a mission statement that can become a guide for our church's ministry. It will be beneficial if each leadership team member has time to think about possible mission statements.

Mission statements should be short enough and concise enough that people can remember them. If a mission statement is too long to memorize easily, then it will be of little impact if people can't remember what the mission statement is. The mission statement becomes the guiding light for the church in ministry and becomes the yardstick by which all existing ministries will be measured.

Example from the United Methodist Church denomination

The mission of the Church is: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

We will collect the mission statement possibilities through the brainstorming process. All of the possible mission statements will become the starting point of creating a new mission statement. Pieces of these brainstormed mission statements may be used and coupled with others, some will be taken off the list completely, and some may sound pretty good, but need further editing to shorten and make them memorable. Then create a shortlist from all of the brainstormed mission statements. Have the group take at least a week to pray about this shortlist and see if a consensus develops for a certain mission statement.

Example of a shortlist of possible mission statements for Wesley UMC:

- To reflect God and God's love in and out of the church
- To love God, love our neighbor, and make Jesus Christ known
- To love Christ, be Christ, and share Christ
- To know Jesus and make Jesus known
- To love Jesus and love others
- To love Jesus Christ and love like Jesus Christ
- To spread the word through His Son, Jesus Christ, Our Lord, and Savior, to all the world

Selecting a mission statement

At the next gathering, we will come together and look over the shortlist of possible mission statements. Ask if any other mission statements not on the list need to be considered. Leave open the possibility that a mission statement may have come to someone during this period of prayer that wasn't even considered before. Have the group work to find a consensus around one statement that rises above all the others.

For example, at Wesley UMC, they selected: Love Christ, Be Christ, and Share Christ as the one statement that rose above the rest. The final mission statement that the church adopted was an expression of what it meant for us to be the church in their context and fulfill God's mission. The following is Wesley UMC's mission statement and Willow and Kent UMC's mission statement. They vary from one another to reflect the unique call the churches heard from God for their mission in their specific context. Each mission statement also reflects something of the DNA of the churches themselves.

Mission Statement Selected by Visioning Team at Wesley UMC

Our mission is to Love Christ, Be Christ, and Share Christ

Wesley's was further revised to Love Christ, Be Like Christ, and Share Christ

Mission Statement Selected by Visioning Team at Willow Kent United Methodist Churches

Our mission is to: Praise God and share Christ's love with all.

Mission Statement of Bethel UMC

Our mission is to: Love Christ, Grow Faith, and Share Hope

Determining how to live out this mission statement in our context

To fulfill this mission statement we will meet together and look at things that we can do internally in the church and outwardly to reach out into the world that would help us to fulfill God's mission. It is important to not set too many goals in this area. One to three goals would be manageable. After those goals are accomplished then more goals can be set that align with the mission statement. Depending on the scope of goals set, we may want to set at least one goal that is internally focused and one that is outward focused. The internal and external goals set should help our church align with the final mission statement we have selected. Churches that are missional-minded and desire to fulfill God's mission have both an inward focus and move outward into the world. *They see the future as one of bringing the Gospel alive for a new generation in a new world – so the church will not just survive, but thrive. These congregations focus on God's mission, missio dei. These missional churches are reproducing communities of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world which have connected their pervasive hunger for spirituality with the ancient contemporary invitation to know God and live to His glory.*²

² Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practice of Missional Churches, by Milfred Minatrea, page 8

Setting Internally Focused Goals to Align with Mission Statement

Internal goals should be set that would help the church align its community life with the mission statement. The internally focused goals might address issues of spiritual maturity and Christian education, community life together and how people relate to one another, prayer, communion, baptism, worship, fellowship, etc.

Setting Externally Focused Goals to Align with Mission Statement

The specific context of our mission field should be considered when setting goals for fulfilling God's mission. What other churches are doing in their context may not always work in our context because each context is different. An externally focused goal should deal with how our church will live out the mission statement in relation to those people in our immediate mission field who are not yet connected to God through the church.

Strategies to Implement Transformation

There are a variety of processes that can be used to guide the transformation. One process is OGSME that involves

1. Recognizing the main objective to be accomplished
2. Setting goals that relate to the main objective
3. Developing strategies to pursue each goal
4. Measuring progress toward the goals
5. Evaluating over time how the objective is being reached and making any changes necessary in goals or strategies to accomplish the main objective.

Objective, Goals, Strategies, Measures, & Evaluate (OGSME)

Objective: The objective should be the main thing you want to accomplish; an example could be: To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

Goals: Goals are measurable and numeric, which, when reached, will define having achieved your objective.

Strategies: Strategies are the steps you will take or the methods you will use to accomplish your numeric goals.

Measures: Measures are your statistics or data that relate directly to your goals that you regularly track and indicate how your strategies are working.

Evaluate: Evaluation involves discussing your measures compared to your goals and determining if the strategies you employed helped you reach your objective. Part of the evaluation is determining if any changes in goals or strategies are necessary to fulfill your objective.

The following is an example of how this process for transformation was used at the Bethel UMC in Shannon, IL.

Objective: Love Christ, Grow Faith, and Share Hope

Goals:

- Corporate Prayer - 520 hours per year
- Worship Attendance - 182
- Professions of Faith - 15
- Reconnections to the Church - 25
- Small-Group Participation - 3,120 people per year
- People Sent Out in Mission - 500 people per year
- Dollars Sent Out in Mission - \$51,000 per year

Strategies:

- Corporate Prayer: 1) In April, gave every member the book “Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire” by Jim Cymbala, 2) Challenged congregation to 40-day prayer adventure in May and June, 3) Established a 30-minute prayer service three times per week (6:30 pm Monday, 6:00 am Wednesday, & 6:30 pm Thursday) and put prayer service on Facebook live.
- Worship Attendance: 1) establish a new service called “Church at the Lake,” which was held Memorial Day through Labor Day at 8:30 am Sunday at the Lake Carroll Development, six miles outside of town. One thousand homes are in this development with 1/3 living there full time, 2) Meeting needs of people in the community by distributing funds through Acts 2 Fund, 3) One Sunday school class taking over the food pantry, 4) Hosting Summer Fun Nights each month during the summer (movie night in the park, fire truck rides and movie night at the fire station, vacation bible school, pool party at Lake Carroll, Trunk or Treat in October, and hayrack ride with dinner).
- Professions of Faith and Reconnections to Church: 1) Church at the lake summer service, 2) Meeting needs of people in the community by distributing funds through Acts 2 Fund, 3) One Sunday school class taking over the food pantry, 4) Hosting Summer Fun Nights each month during the summer (movie night in the park, fire truck rides and movie night at the fire station, vacation bible school, pool party at Lake Carroll, Trunk or Treat in October, and hayrack ride with dinner), 5) offering adult baptism by immersion.
- Small-Group Participation: 1) Use the church-wide program “The Story,” giving every person from preschool thru adults a copy of Story that will take us through the bible in 9 months (September thru May)
- People Sent Out in Mission: 1) One Sunday school class taking over the food pantry, 2) Adult mission trip in March to UMCOR, 3) Youth Mission Trip to Arizona,
- Dollars sent out for mission: 1) Give away Easter Offering (split three ways - international or national, state, and local), 2) Give away Christmas Offering (split three ways - international or national, state, and local) 3) Give to those in need in the community through Acts 2 Fund, 4) pay apportionments 100%.

Measures after nine months

- Corporate Prayer - 544 hours
- Worship Attendance - 161
- Professions of Faith - 12
- Reconnections to the Church by Reaffirmation of Faith - 38
- Small-Group Participation - 1,706 people
- People Sent Out in Mission - 415 people
- Dollars Sent Out in Mission - \$28,003

To track the data for Spiritual Vitality, a form at the end of this document, on page 17, can be used each week. This data can then be input into a spreadsheet (Windows or IOS platform) that is available on the Northern Illinois Conference website to combine the weekly data into one spreadsheet for the year.

Evaluations

The Spiritual Leadership Team evaluated briefly how the church was doing in August; a more in-depth evaluation was done in January after twelve months to make plans for the next year. At that time, the church will adjust and implement new strategies for the next year. New goals were also set in January and February for the next year.

Final Thoughts

The purpose of congregations becoming more vital is to fulfill the mission God has given each congregation in its local context. As the Spiritual Vitality and Financial Sustainability of a congregation get stronger, the church can better fulfill its mission for the sake of the kingdom of God. The measuring of statistics is only a way of tracking progress toward the main objective, which is of the greatest importance. This transformation of spiritual vitality and financial sustainability takes several years and is designed to be ongoing, and it can be implemented in churches of all sizes. It is of great importance for the congregation to remember the reason for using this process is all about fulfilling the mission of God.

Sample Page to Track Weekly Vital Stats

Vital Stats for Week Ending Sunday, _____

People Praying Communally This Week

Prayer in Meetings _____

Prayer in Small Groups _____

Prayer Services _____

Total Communal Prayer _____

Faith Development

Number of Small Groups _____

of Sunday School Classes _____

Total # Faith Groups _____

Small Group Attendance _____

Sunday School Attend. _____

Total Faith Attendance _____

Discipleship

Professions of Faith _____

Baptisms _____

Worship Attendance This Week

Service #1 _____

Service #2 _____

#1 & #2 Combined _____

Special Worship _____

Worship Attendance Total _____

Facebook Views _____

Youtube Views _____

Total Online Views _____

Mission & Social Justice

People Sent Out in
Mission this Week _____

People Sent Out in Social
Justice this Week _____

**Total People in Mission &
Social Justice this Week** _____

Dollars Sent Out in
Mission this Week _____

Examples of Various Prayer Services

ACTS Prayer Service

Read Scripture selected for prayer service

Sing 2 verses of Song of Adoration

Adoration - use the scripture to stir your heart to praise God for who God is
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Sing 2 verses of Song of Confession

Confession - use the scripture to lead you in the confession of your sins and receive God's forgiveness
(Pray silently)

Sing 2 verses of Song of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving - use the scripture to lead you in giving thanks for what God has done
(Gather together in small groups of 2 or 3 and pray out loud taking turns)

Sing 2 verses of Song of Supplication

Supplications - use the scripture to inspire you in the requests you bring before God as you cry out to him
(Pray out loud with everyone praying at once)

Lectio Divina Prayer Service

Open with prayer

Ask God to speak through his scriptures to each one and for the Holy Spirit to help us to hear God's voice.

Read Scripture First Time

Have someone read the scripture through as everyone else listens for a word or phrase that stands out to them.

Read the Scripture Second Time

Have someone read the scripture through as everyone else listens for a word or phrase that stands out to them. After reading the second time through, have people share the word or phrase that stood out to them and why. This is the word or phrase that God is speaking to them.

Prayer of Praise

Praise God in prayer for speaking to you
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Prayer of Responding

Ask God in prayer to help you understand why God spoke that word or phrase to you and how God might want you to respond to what is being said to you.
(Pray silently)

Prayer of Supplication

Have people share prayer requests and then pray together.
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Lord's Prayer - Prayer Service

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Recite "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

Allow this phrase to guide you in praising God
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Recite "thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven..."

Allow this phrase to guide you as you lift prayers of supplication.
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Recite "Give us this day our daily bread..."

Allow this phrase to guide you in prayers for your needs.
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Recite "and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us..."

Allow this phrase to guide you in prayers of confession and reconciliation.
(Pray silently)

Recite "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..."

Allow this phrase to guide your prayers for transformation in your life.
(Pray silently)

Recite "for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever..."

Allow this phrase to guide you in the prayers of thanksgiving.
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Close with the Lord's Prayer in unison

Musical Prayer Service

This prayer service is guided by the songs that are selected

Sing a Song of Adoration

Adoration - use the words of the song to stir your heart to praise God for who God is
(Pray out loud taking turns)

Sing a Song of Confession

Confession - use the words of the song to lead you in the confession of your sins and receive God's forgiveness
(Pray silently)

Sing a Song of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving - use the words of the song to lead you in giving thanks for what God has done
(Gather together in small groups of 2 or 3 and pray out loud taking turns)

Sing a Song of Supplication

Supplications - use the words of the song to inspire you in the requests you bring before God as you cry out to him
(Pray out loud with everyone praying at once) 19

Nature Prayer Service

This is an outdoor prayer service in a location to connect with God through nature.

Read Scripture

Adoration - use what you are seeing in nature and the scripture to stir your heart to praise God for who God is and what God has created.

(Pray out loud taking turns)

Confession - use what you are seeing in nature and the scripture to lead you in the confession of sins for ways we have not taken care of God's world and receiving God's forgiveness

(Pray out loud taking turns or Pray silently)

Thanksgiving - use what you are seeing in nature and the scripture to lead you in giving thanks for what God has created

(Pray out loud taking turns)

Supplications - use what you are seeing in nature and the scripture to inspire you in the requests you bring before God as you cry out to him

(Pray out loud taking turns)

Walking Prayer Service

Walking Prayer Service in Two Different Environments

Inside the Church

Have people walk throughout the church and pray individually for ministry and activities that happen in each of the various places in the building and for the people who serve or work in those places.

Outside the Church

Have people walk individually or in small groups throughout the neighborhood and pray for people and ministry opportunities in the community.

Scripture and Other References

These references are helpful for starting conversation to help the church discover what it means to be the church and what God's calling is for them to fulfill. They are meant to be used with the steps of the creating the clear sense of mission to drive transformation starting on page 11.

Sometimes We Just Lose Track of Our Specific Mission and Get Off Track

Ice Scraper video clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2Z2ilBkvvM>

The importance of being guided by God's mission

Establish the importance that God is the author of the church's mission and not people.

*Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. Proverbs 19:21 (NIV)
"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)*

God calls us to participate in His mission and prayer connects us to that mission

Because it is God's mission, prayer is vitally important and is essential for us to connect with God and begin to understand God's calling to participate in what God is already doing. Asking God to make clear to us what it means to be the church in our context is the starting point.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. John 15:16 (NIV)

To participate in God's mission, we must be willing to allow God to shape and change our churches. As a leadership team, we must be open to doing things differently than we have before. We must be willing to put everything on the table and have no sacred cows. *"Then the word of the Lord came to me, "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand." Jeremiah 18:5-6 (NIV)*

"Churches must continuously retool themselves for effectiveness in communicating the message of hope in the rapids of changing cultures. Change is difficult, and deep culture change is especially hard. Most churches are structured for continuity of what they have been in an age of Christendom, rather than being changed, ready to accomplish the mission in today's culture."³

The Urgency of participating in God's mission

It is critical to remember that there is an urgency to understand what God's mission is for the church and for fulfilling that mission.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10

Blessing of Salvation - *For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

Blessing of Lordship - *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Galatians 5:22*

The foundation for participation in God's mission

God has called us to be a part of what God wants to accomplish on this earth. Our calling is rooted in whom God created us to be and whom God predestined us to be like.

We are created in God's image

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Genesis 1:26-27 (NIV)

³ Shaped by God's Heart: The Passion and Practices of Missional Churches, by Milfred Minatrea, page 9

We are Predestined to be like Christ

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (NIV)

Christ was sent to fulfill God's mission

Christ was sent into the world to accomplish God's mission. Understanding Christ's mission will further help the church, as the body of Christ, understand its mission.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. John 6:38 (NIV)

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. John 17:1-5 (NIV)

Christ has chosen us to participate in fulfilling God's mission

We are chosen and sent by Christ to participate in what God is wanting to do.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.

Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. John 15:16 (NIV)

As you [the Father] sent me [Jesus Christ] into the world, I have sent them [the church] into the world. John 17:18 (NIV)

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." John 20:21 (NIV)

Determining the mission of God

In addition to the previous scriptures, use the following scriptures to determine what the mission of God is for our church. From these scriptures, we can begin making a list of the descriptors for God's mission for the church. We will compile a list of our insights on a board or easel so all can see.

God's mission is that God would be glorified

But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. Isaiah 43:1, 7 (NIV)

In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16 (NIV)

Commandments we have been given that help define the mission God calls us to

Jesus replied: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)

Therefore go 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 I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20 (NIV)

God empowers and equips us to fulfill His Mission

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8 (NIV)

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27-28 (NIV)

The early church fulfilled God's Mission

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47 (NIV)

Other scriptures to be considered if desired⁴

Matthew 9:35, 11:28-30, 16:15-19, 18:19-20, 24:14, 25:34-40

Mark 10:43-45

Luke 4:43-45

John 4:23, 10:14-18, 13:34-35

Acts 4:32-35, 5:42, 6:1-7

Romans 12:1-8, 15:1-7

2 Corinthians 5:17-6:1

Galatians 5:13-15, 6:1-2

Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:19-22, 3:14-21, 4:11-16, 5:23-24

Colossians 1:24-28, 3:15-16

1 Thessalonians 1:3, 5:11

Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:7, 13:17

1 Peter 2:9-10

1 John 1:5-7, 4:7-21