



Urban Strategy
2015
Chicago Churches
Relational Meeting Report

Prepared by
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Northern Illinois Conference United Methodist Church

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Report Introduction

This report provides an overview of the work of the Urban Ministry Area of the Northern Illinois Conference (NIC) of The United Methodist Church, specifically as it relates to relational meetings held with a selected group of urban ministry practitioners in the Chicago Southern and Northwestern Districts. The focus of the NIC Urban Strategy (US) continues to be aimed at building the capacity of local congregations to positively impact the lives of the people in their communities in the areas of:

Community Safety

Education & Literacy

Restorative Justice

Food Security

Since its “launch” in May 2013, the Urban Strategy (US) has evolved through the ideas, promotion, and participation from a number of sources including:

Urban Strategy Planning Team

NIC Presiding Bishop, Sally Dyck

Rev. Robert E. Biekman (Urban Ministry Coordinator)

Rev. Dr. Chris Pierson (Director, NIC Connectional Ministries)

Rev. Martin Lee (Director, Congregational Development)

Rev. Dr. Tracy Smith Malone (Chicago Southern, District Superintendent)

Rev. Dr. Zaki L. Zaki (Chicago Northwestern, District Superintendent)

Urban Strategy Steering Team

Angel Grant

Rev. Wendy Witt

Rev. Ken Ehrman

Rev. Dean Francis

Laura Dean Friedrich

Rev. Dr. Barbara Morgan

Arnold Rivera (Conference Lay Leader)

Eugene Williams

Keleigh Green Patton

Rev. Rich Darr

Rev. Joseph Johnson

John Maxson

Rev. Dr. Jon McCoy

Rev. Michael Mann (NIC, Mission & Advocacy)

Lois Moreland (United Voices for Children)

Rev. Dr. Myron McCoy

Rev. Dr. Barbara Morgan

Rev. Diane Bagues (NIC, Urban Ministry, Specialist)

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The work of the US uses qualitative and quantitative information received from local congregations. Over the last 16 months, 2 comprehensive assessments have been conducted. These assessments have determined local congregations' capacity to provide ministry programs and advocacy relative to the four areas of the US. The city of Chicago, with 70 United Methodist faith communities and 10,000 members, is the largest city in Northern Illinois and has been at the heart of implementation of the Urban Strategy.

BACKGROUND

PHASE I – SELF ASSESSMENT AND REPORT

Phase I of understanding how churches are progressing across the four areas of the Urban Strategy was the distribution of a Congregational Self-Assessment during the first quarter of 2014. The assessment was disseminated to the churches on the Chicago Southern and Chicago Northwestern District, which covers Chicago and the Greater Chicago-land area. The primary foundational question of the assessment was, 'What is your congregation doing now and what does it plan to do in the future in terms of engaging the community across the four areas of the Urban Strategy?' In the second quarter of 2014, Forty-six percent of the churches (57) returned a completed assessment. During the third and fourth quarters of 2014 the information was compiled, analyzed, and a report generated. The report highlighted that churches are making progress across the Strategy areas at the following rate through the listed activities:

- **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** - Preaching, training, study groups, providing resources, prison visitation, and legislative acts such as decriminalizing school misconduct
- **COMMUNITY SAFETY** - Engaging stakeholders, newsletters, block clubs, neighborhood organizations, youth programming, festivals
- **FOOD SECURITY** - Feeding ministry, shelters, food banks, food pantry, food drive fundraisers, job training, farmers market, affordable restaurants
- **EDUCATION & LITERACY** - Being present, celebrating, bulletin inserts, donate supplies, safe havens, classes, alternatives to detention & suspension, and letter writing

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PHASE II – RELATIONAL MEETINGS AND REPORT

In Phase II, relational meetings were held with key churches that were identified based on what they reported in the assessment of how they were making progress across Strategy area steps based. The selected churches were diverse racially, ethnically, nationally (country of origin), economically and geographically. The US Planning team reviewed, updated and approved the list for visitation.

In March 2015 a letter of invitation was sent to the selected churches. The relational meetings were held from March through May. The meetings were with pastors and leaders to better understand their community engagement ministries and to see if they have any Premiere Outreach Program (POP). Each meeting ranged in duration from 1.5 – 3 hours. Please note that each church was visited because of the progress they were making in one area, however it became evident that many are making progress across several areas. Additionally, as many of the pastors interviewed were not the ones who filled out the assessment, therefore on some categories the information listed on the chart may not fully represent all that they are doing.

MAKING PROGRESS ACROSS ALL AREAS OF URBAN STRATEGY			
Church	Contacts	District	ACTIVITY ACROSS ALL AREAS
United Church of Rogers Park	Rev. Catiana McKay, Sr. Pastor Rev. Wes Dorr, Associate Pastor	CNWD	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>RESTORATIVE JUSTICE</u></p> <p><u>“CIRCLES AND CIPHERS” YOUTH PEACE CIRCLES:</u> As a church program for youth, we provide space & pastoral and community support. <i>Circles & Ciphers</i> is a leadership development organization for disengaged young men that fuses restorative justice practices & principles with hip-hop arts and cultures to transform legacies. By sharing personal stories & openly exchanging ideas, participants build a shared sense of ownership & accountability. Circles are being used to strengthen relationships, to resolve conflicts, to celebrate, to mourn, and share wisdom. <i>Circles & Ciphers</i> offices are housed and meets at United Church. An extension site includes Sullivan High School. Opportunities for community engagement such as chaperoning field trips & peace circle engagement arise. Youth are fed in the evenings & have learning field trips and receive some stipends.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>COMMUNITY SAFETY</u></p> <p><u>NURTURED RELATIONSHIP WITH CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT CAPS:</u> Police and City relationships are encouraged and nurtured as well as regular BEAT MEETING attendance. We have been a part of the Gun Turn-In Program and continue to support violence prevention programs through the years.</p>

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MAKING PROGRESS ACROSS ALL AREAS OF URBAN STRATEGY			
Church	Contacts	District	ACTIVIVITY ACROSS ALL AREAS
			<p><u>COMMUNITY NEEDS:</u> We provide space for voting and space as needed for community gatherings at the Alderman's request.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>FOOD SECURITY</u></p> <p><u>COMMUNITY FEAST:</u> Every Sunday for over 30 years, volunteers have prepared and served a complete nutritious dinner for approximately 100 people in our neighborhood & beyond. This program is staffed entirely by volunteers and is only possible through the generous gifts of time, service and financial gifts from mission and ministry partners around Chicago land and beyond and through the support of the Greater Chicago Food Depository.</p> <p><u>"TOP BOX" SITE:</u> Top Box Foods is a non-profit organization with a simple purpose: to offer delicious, healthy, high-quality foods at affordable prices, particularly to folks living in areas with limited access to nutritious eating options. Payment includes "LINK."</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><u>EDUCATION AND LITERACY</u></p> <p><u>AFTERSCHOOL MINISTRY:</u> Since January of 2009 United Church of Rogers Park has provided a free after-school program with average attendance of 40 each day (enrolment near 100). The students range in age from K-6th grade and meet weekly Monday-Thursday from September-May. We depend heavily on Loyola University work study program as well as Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary students for tutors. Our afterschool program focuses on providing a safe space after school, homework help and extracurricular activities, such as gardening, martial arts, drama and music.</p> <p><u>SUMMER CAMP MINISTRY:</u> UCRP provides a free summer camp - 3 days a week for 5-6 weeks, for children, ages 6-12. The children participate in art, music, games and Bible study thanks to our mission trip immersion program, community partners and dedicated church volunteers. Funding for program varies yearly and depends on gifts from individuals and churches. Average daily attendance is from 50 to 80 children with an enrollment of around 90.</p> <p><u>STONE SOUP THEATER PROJECT:</u> Founded by local actors and directors, the mission of The Stone Soup Theatre Project is to offer theater to the communities of North East Chicago. Members of the company focus on bringing theater workshops into local schools, providing summer classes, and</p>

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			<p>creating productions that make people laugh, cry, and think. By enlisting the help of community organizations and local businesses' The Stone Soup Theatre Project provides production and educational workshops at little to no cost to patrons. Stone-Soup Theater Project, partners with United Church of Rogers Park to provide drama workshops for our after school program. Contact: Hannah Gallagher at educationstonesouptheatre@gmail.com</p> <p><u>LET'S GO CHICAGO:</u> Non-profit that has bloomed out of UCRP children's garden, developed out of a synergy between a youth garden program and the founding an intentional community (Koinonia House). The gardening program teaches neighborhood children how to grow food in the front yard of the Koinonia House (next to the church and church collaboration), while developing sustainability solutions for the property as a whole. Let's Go Chicago serves as one of 16 Summer of Solutions programs hosted by Grand Aspirations, a national youth-led organization that empowers, connects, and supports youth leaders as they create innovative, self-sustaining, and inter-dependent initiatives that integrate climate and energy solutions, economic security, and social justice.</p> <p><u>UNITED METHODIST WOMEN'S CREATIVE CIRCLE:</u> Creative activities and intergenerational classes (sewing, jewelry making & other arts) building relationships and social awareness. Women's Creative Circle meets three days a week in the church craft studio. Some of the women's creations are available for sale, with a portion of the proceeds benefiting the church and/or United Methodist Women.</p> <p><u>MARY CRANE HEAD START PROGRAM:</u> Serves children ages 2-6 (capacity of 71 children)...For over 100 years, Mary Crane Center has been dedicated to the comprehensive early development of children and to supporting their families through a variety of services.</p> <p><u>REFUGE-ONE:</u> Currently providing space for ESL (English as a Second Language), and other refugee/interfaith women's programs.</p> <p><u>DOOR CHICAGO:</u> DOOR (Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflection) hosts mission ... short term <i>mission trips</i> in Atlanta, <i>Chicago</i>, Denver, Hollywood LA, Miami and San Antonio. Hosting short term <i>mission trips</i>, short term mission teams, and individual mission opportunities. We serve as a second Chicago site for mission hands-on learning opportunities.</p>

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			<p><u>MISSION TRIP CENTER:</u> UCRP has a growing reputation for solid mission outreach engagement and training. Groups from across the country have connected with us for repeated and deepening ministry outreach. We have recognized the need for and the stability component of creating a space for seasonal dorms and expanded community ministry. Our mission groups provide the labor and supporting funds for children's camp.</p> <p><u>TRILOGY ART'S PROGRAM</u> UCRP provides space for weekly arts classes. Trilogy Behavior Healthcare</p>
St. Mark	P. Devon Brown, Sr. Pastor	CSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kairos • Creation of a justice ministry • Block Clubs and Neighborhood Associations • Prayer Walks • Partnership with local schools, "One Church One School" • Boy Scouts & Girl Scouts • Martial Arts for Young people • After school programs

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MAKING PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE				
Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
Humboldt Park	Rev. Paula Cripps-Vallejo, Sr. Pastor Delia Ramirez, Staff	CNWD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide Affordable Housing (11 apartment units) ▪ Homeless Shelter ▪ Working with individuals who are losing their homes to the 606 Bloomingdale Trail ▪ Actively organizing and fighting for justice to raise the minimum wage (Fight for \$15 – national program)) (The day I visited they had a training and a couple of coach buses to take people downtown for the rally) ▪ Helping with immigration, documentation (government issued identification), and dealing with gentrification <p>Women 2 Women program (a program for Latino women that provide support and life skills and health strategies. There are peer groups and cell groups. Additionally the program pays for the women to have counseling sessions 1x a month with a clinical psychologist. 1x a month support group for domestic violence. They see about 80-100 women, however this year so far the numbers have increased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food pantry (FS) • Life skills training (E & L) • Mentoring (E & L)
Grace Calvary	Rev. Rodney Walker, Sr. Pastor	CSD	<p>Saturday Sanction- Program in partnership with the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department. It meets every Saturday for a 12 week cycle. The Goal is to keep the young men (ages 13-18) out of the Juvenile Detention Center and get them engaged</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Feeding – (FS) • Senior Programming – 1st -3rd Saturdays from 9-noon • Health Programming • Host site for many community activities and services

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Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
			<p>in school and learning. If they do not show up the probation officer is contacted. This program provides the young men mentorship and exposure to art and culture via field trips, conflict resolutions tactics, effective communication, sports, Black History, community issues, anger management skills, and Spanish as a second language. This program takes a minimum of 7 persons to effectively run the program weekly. They have been doing this program since 2013.</p>	

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MAKING PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF COMMUNITY SAFETY				
Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
Redeemer of Calvary	Rev. Shirley Pulgar-Hughes, Pastor	CNWD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Church designated as "Safe Space" – (CS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with JFON <p>Make it. Take It. Eat it. (RJ and E & L) – This program is designed to engage the whole family 1 day a week for a few hours. The parents bring the children for activities where they make things and take it home (art and food). They teach the children arts & crafts and how to do basic cooking. The food they prepare they eat. They see 40+ people each meeting from the church, community, and schools. The pastor then takes the parents for on-on-ones to determine what assistance they need especially in the area of documentation and immigration. They help the parents with necessary paperwork and then partner with JFON where a lawyer looks over the paperwork for no cost. (Many community services promise to help people but charge exorbitant prices with no end product). This addresses the needs of a mostly Latino/a community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Card Ministry – Gather the Eastern European and Latina senior women to expose them to the art of card making that can then be given to those in the community who are sick, shut-in or need encouragement. This give these women a sense of purpose and community.

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MAKING PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF COMMUNITY SAFETY				
Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Movie Night – 1x a month movies are shown for families. This experience teach children to be in community with children who have different abilities (e.g. Blind and deaf children). For the parents that need on-on-ones and assistance meet with Pastor Shirley at this time. (RJ and E & L) ▪ Chicago Door – (E & L) ▪ Work with Homeless ▪ Food Distribution in partnership with the Chicago Temple, Irving Park Pantry (FS)
African Community	Fredrick Larley	CNWD		
Chicago Lawn	Robert McClerin, Pastor Rosa Garcia, Lay Person	CSD	Provide after school and summer programming for youth to keep them engaged and off the street. Although they do this independently, they are seeking partnership with Safe Haven and the Greater Chicago Food Depository.	
Gorham	Pamela Pyrtle, Pastor	CSD	Provide weekly Sunday Breakfast for the community. The food is donated and prepared by church members. This breakfast is open to the community. They see 50+ people weekly.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Garden planning stages (FS)

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MAKING PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF FOOD SECURITY

Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
Claire Christian	Dale Kelly, Pastor	CSD	Soup Kitchen on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 12-2pm. (It used to be Monday-Friday). They see 100 people each day. They get all the food via church members and community people who donate. They are not yet with the Greater Chicago Food Depository (GCFD). This ministry is coordinated by 3 church members and implemented with additional volunteers. They are in their 4 th year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys & Girl Scouts • Kids Community Choir • Boys & Girls Basketball League • Rites of Passage for boys (E&L/CS) • Teen Center – beginning stages of funding to build (E&L/CS) • Weekly program with youth who have been incarcerated – starting this program (RJ) • Senior Housing (Claire House) • Computer center for children/youth (E&L) • Back to School Rally/book bag give-a-way/ food/fun (E&L/CS) • Movie Night for Kids • Basic Basketball clinic for youth • Chess Tournament
River Forest	Ronald Greene, Pastor	CNWD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ As part of the Operation Proviso they distribute food every Saturday from 8am-10am. See 100+ families per week. This food distribution is in partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository. ▪ Partner with the local PADS (Public Action to Deliver Shelter) to provide dinner one Sunday a month for a local homeless shelter. The church prepares and delivers the meals. The food is donated by parishioners. This is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have an onsite Montessori School (E & L) ▪ Tutoring in the Austin area of Chicago (E & L) ▪ Speaker Series - Dealing with issues of the incarcerated and the impact on society. This is in conjunction with NW Suburban Cluster of UMC. (RJ) ▪ Worked with Sisters In the Hood (RJ) ▪ Worked with St. Leonard's House (RJ) ▪ Hosted a group from Statesville prison who presented a program "Letter from Statesville" (RJ)

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Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
			<p>coordinated by 1 person and they have been doing this for 20+ years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participate in the Crop Hunger Walk 	
Maple Park	Rev. Robert Biekman, Sr. Pastor Vivian Lewis, Program Manager, Seeds Center of Maple Park Carla Williams, Director, Safe Haven Earl Streeter, President UMM	CSD	<p>The Park Café is an innovative program launched in March 2013, sponsored by the Seeds Center of Maple Park. It creatively addresses issue of Food Security by providing free, hot, and nutritious meals prepared by Cordon Bleu trained chefs, twice weekly during the lunch hours (12pm-2pm) in a hospitable and welcoming environment where the guests can "dine with dignity." The Program also does the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serves 500+ meals weekly to the community • Serve as a forum to exchange information and resources • Provide training for cooking students to learn all aspects of food delivery and creative meal planning • Provide opportunities for individuals to become a part of something larger than themselves by serving and volunteering • Fosters fellowship and connections <p>Community Garden - A collaborative effort by The Seeds Center, the Maple Park United Methodist Church and the members and friends of the Maple Park community to</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe Haven (Spring, Summer) – (CS/E&L) • Kids R.O.C.K. – Children's outreach ministry. Meets every 3RD & 4TH Saturday, Quarterly "Family Meal" (CS/E & L) • Healing Communities (RJ)

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Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
			create a healthy, safe, and inspirational community garden. Components of the garden will include: Prayer/Meditation space, Educational & Training space, Community Event space, Community resource space, School involvement (3 CPS schools within several blocks), Local business involvement, Paid FT Farm Manager & PT Admin positions, and CSA/Micro-enterprise establishment. The garden is in the planning phase.	

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MAKING PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF EDUCATION & LITERACY				
Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
Irving Park	Katherine T. Paisley, Pastor	CNWD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Safe Haven ▪ Education and the Arts. They engage the children in artistic, theatrical, musical productions that are then shown to the community. (Children Broadway shows). The proceeds go to fund the Food Pantry and the Arts Fund ▪ Backpack give-a-way to two local elementary schools (Disney II and Belden) and all the clients of their food pantry ▪ Recognizing many of the children they serve have Food Security issues they have partnered with their food pantry to send food home with the children (bread and other staples) ▪ Easter Baskets ▪ Children's Toy Store 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homeless Ministry (in partnership with the Episcopal Church) (RJ) ▪ Food Pantry (35 years old) in partnership. Every Wednesday and one Tuesday night a month. (FS) ▪ Food Rescue with Whole Foods (FS) ▪ Hold Community Forums on various topics such as: criminal injustice, economics, LGBTQ, racism, gun violence. Additionally will address these issues on the Sunday mornings before and after the forum. These become community conversations throughout the week, including with the local school children. ▪ 13 AA groups weekly ▪ 2 Boy Scout troupes ▪ Un-Schoolers Group – Group for those who Home School their children ▪ Mankind Project ▪ Yearly Block Party ▪ Yoga Classes
South Shore	Adonna Reed, Pastor	CSD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Year-round Safe Haven (i.e. After School, Spring Break, Summer Break). Received the “Best new Safe Haven program” award from the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) ▪ Chess Club ▪ Onsite GED classes in partnership with the City Colleges of Chicago 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Court Advocates (RJ) ▪ “Black & Blue” Police Relations Forums which included panel discussions with legal defense and law enforcement for those from 3rd grade through high school. Sessions on “Being black and safe with the police” (RJ)

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Church	Interviewed	District	ACTIVITY	OTHER STRATEGY AREAS ACTIVITIES
			Daycare – they provide almost free childcare services because parents can't pay and the governmental cuts in childcare funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chess Club (E & L) ▪ GED Classes in partnership with Kennedy King College (E & L) ▪ Daycare (free at the moment) (E &L) ▪ Food Pantry on Fridays from 5-7pm. Feed over 12,000 folks annually. (FS)

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REPORT FINDINGS

General Findings

- All churches visited expressed their desire to participate in future Learning Communities whether to learn, train, mentor, or volunteer.
- It was noteworthy that all churches reported having partners outside the church. Churches are working with Block clubs and neighborhood associations, ministerial alliances, the Chicago Police Department (CPD), and other public and non-profit agencies. Their pastors or leaders attend community meetings. They also are open to greater networking and establishing key relationships and partners.
- An interesting observation was many programs, some which have been in existence for many years (10+), are coordinated and implemented with seven (7) or less committed volunteers.
- Although the churches were selected based on the Strategy area they reported they were making the most progress, many are making progress across other areas as well.

Ministry Limiting Factors

Unanimously all have stated finances, building, and people (volunteers) are the limiting factors. Additionally they have stated the very same three items as resources that are needed.

Interestingly, the other resources they are requesting is for more information, exchange, partnerships, "best practices," ministry ideas, "how to's," training, and mental illness training.

For example, although Safe Haven via CPS has been talked about often, many did not realize that there are multiple ways to plug in and get involved (spring break, summer, year round). A request is to have someone check out their facility to see if it is "passable" before engaging the process.

Congregation Specific Ministry Limiting Factors

- Gentrification
- Immigration/Documentation
- Access to human services
- Need for clergy/staff help

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- Inequitable pay due to (demographic served and/or location of church)
- Burnout

Expectations and Hopes for NIC Urban Strategy

- “Where are the contact points of the community and the church’s strength?”
- Toolbox
- Grant information
- List of other churches with similar programs
- Black & Brown Dialogues & collaborations
- More follow-up
- At least 2x a year Youth Summit
- More actionable items (not just talk)
- Sustainable Action plans

Concerns with the assessment

- The people who filled it out may not be there any more

PHASE III – LEARNING COMMUNITIES, URBAN PASTOR ORIENTATON AND URBAN NETORK AND REPORT

The relational meetings identified a number of opportunities for the Urban Strategy. These include a need for mutual support, the need to develop sustainable actions plans, identifying more opportunities for strategic partnerships and developing an increased understanding of advocacy and organizing.

Limiting factors that urban congregations deal with in “doing ministry” include gentrification, immigration, competing priorities, facilities, appointment length, volunteers/staff and financial resources.

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Figure 1 to the left provides a visual image of the interaction between accountability and support. It is the goal of the US to be relational or to operate in the green section of Figure 1 where both a high degree of support and accountability is provided to urban congregations. The goal is to resource but also be result oriented.

Therefore over the next 12 months the goals of the Urban Strategy include:

- Delivering Urban Pastor Orientation
- Establishing Learning Communities
- Creating an Urban Network

In Phase III, congregations will be organized in Learning Communities based upon their giftedness and passion.

A **learning community** is a group of people who share common learning goals and attitudes and meet regularly to collaborate on their common field of interest. The objective of these learning communities is to build the participating churches capacity by sharing information, identifying resources, creating opportunities for partnerships, and facilitating mutual support. Four key factors of Learning Communities include:

1. Membership
2. Influence
3. fulfillment of individuals needs
4. Shared events and emotional connection

Participants of a learning community must feel some sense of loyalty and belonging to the group (*membership*) that drive their desire to keep working and helping others, also the things that the participants do must affect what happens in the community; that means, an active and not just a reactive performance (*influence*). Besides a learning community must give the chance to the participants to meet particular needs (*fulfillment*) by expressing personal opinions, asking for help or specific information and share stories of events with particular issue included (*emotional connections*) emotional experiences.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Learning_community

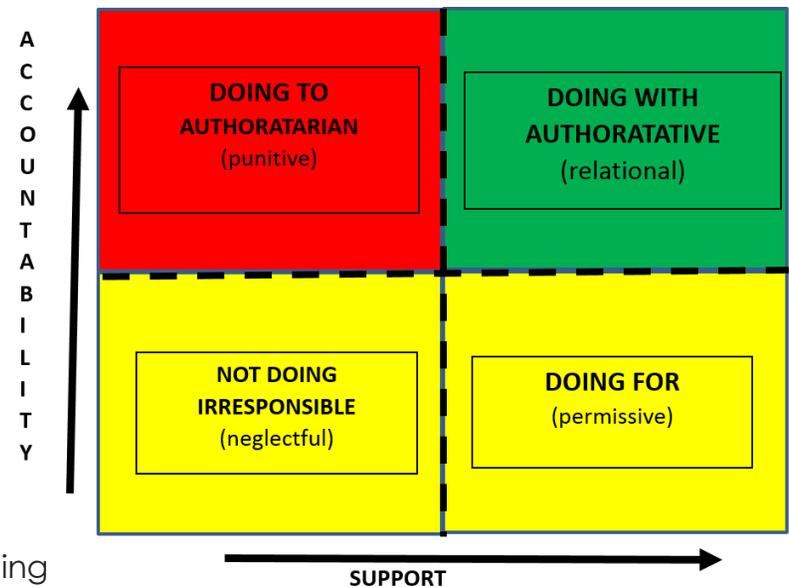


Figure 1

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Each Learning Community would be preceded by a plenary. In order to reach both lay and clergy Learning Communities would be planned on Saturdays. The following is an example of what a learning community around Food Security could look like:

- Bring in a representative from the Greater Chicago Food Depository
- Bring in someone who has experience at multi-levels of the Food industry
- Bring in someone who has experience with agriculture, community gardens, and green enterprise
- Bring together churches that are making great progress in this area so that they may share their story and program
- Invite churches who wish to grow in this area and are looking for ideas, best practices, resources, and contacts

The following is an example of a typical Learning Community agenda:

- I. Introductions
- II. Sharing (Relational Question)
- III. Presentation
 - A. Greater Chicago Food Depository
 - B. Food Industry
 - C. Agriculture/Community Gardens
- IV. Recap of ideas/best practices/networking
- V. Provide a list of resources (Compiled by Urban Ministry Specialist)
- VI. Evaluation/Feedback
- VII. Reporting and follow-up (post meeting Provided by Urban Ministry Specialist)

During Phase III of the Urban Strategy in addition to continuing the work currently being done, the focus will be on sustaining the current work of the US, organizing and supporting congregations for action/advocacy and creating an infrastructure to expand the work.

Urban Pastor Orientation

Another initiative that the US plans to implement is an "Urban Pastor's Orientation." In September a group (about 20) of urban pastors from across the conference with varying levels of years of experience and service in urban ministry context will be invited to a brainstorming session to develop a curriculum for an Urban Ministry Orientation Manual. A tool kit will also be developed. The initial orientation will be delivered in 2016.

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Northern Illinois Conference Urban Network

A passion for urban ministry is more important than geographical boundaries. Therefore, another aspect of the Urban Strategy over the next year will be to create a Northern Illinois Conference Urban Network. The primary purpose of the Urban Network includes:

- Providing a support network for urban ministry practitioners
- Facilitate organizing for advocacy regarding urban issues
- Recognize/celebrate urban ministry with an “NIC Urban Ministry Award”
- Connect urban ministry practitioners

The NIC Urban Network will encourage effective urban ministry with a congregational and community focus, which is holistic (spiritual/social/physical), asset-based, ecumenical, call-motivated and relational. With this in mind, the Urban Network will provide support/craft the Urban Strategy Learning communities.

Conclusion

The Northern Illinois Conference Urban Strategy has continued to evolve. It is significant that it has been issues (e.g., Community Police dialog, Faith in Action Assembly, promoting community safety) not necessarily ministry programs that have been most effective in drawing United Methodists across the city together. It is for this reason that issues based organizing is an essential for long term sustainability of the Urban Strategy. The results of the US Chicago Churches Relational Meeting Report has been invaluable in providing insight to the next steps in further organizing congregations and building capacity to meet the challenges unique to serving in an urban context.

