

# INUMC Urban Ministry- Comprehensive Plan

## Introduction

The 2016 Book of Discipline [¶2549, ¶212] has established a formal requirement that addresses the needs of communities and the responsibility for congregations who reside in transitional areas, considered urban centers. According to the 2016 Book of Discipline ¶212, since many of the communities in which the local church is located are experiencing transition, special attention must be given to forms of ministry required in such communities. The local church is required to respond to the changes that are occurring in its surrounding community and to organize its mission and ministry accordingly.

1. When the communities where the church is located experience transition especially identified as economic, cultural, and/or ethnic, the local church shall engage in deliberate analysis of the community change and alter its program to meet the needs and cultural patterns of the new residents. The local church shall make every effort to remain in the community and develop effective ministries to those who are newcomers, whether of a cultural, economic, or ethnic group different from the original or present members.
2. In communities in transition, the local church shall be regarded as a principal base of mission from which unjust structures of society shall be confronted, evangelization shall occur, and a principal witness to the changing community, including ministry with the poor, shall be realized.
3. It is recommended that decisions concerning ministry in transitional communities be made after thorough consultation has taken place between structures and agencies in the connection.
4. It is recommended that the commitment of resources in terms of money and personnel to ministries in transitional communities be of sufficient longevity to allow for experimentation, evaluation, and mid-course corrections to ensure an adequate effort in ministry in those situations. Evaluations shall involve those on the local level as well as those at the funding level.
5. The ministry of the local church in transitional areas may be enhanced by review and possible development of some form of cooperative ministry.

Additionally, the Book of Discipline ¶12549.7 states that when a church in an urban area is discontinued and the property abandoned and sold, the funds derived from the sale of that property be set aside for use in support of vital urban ministry according to the urban ministry strategic plan of the Annual Conference.

This Urban Ministry Comprehensive Plan will be a collaborative ministry focus of Church Development, Mission and Justice, along with the Extended Cabinet of the Indiana United Methodist Church. As the Indiana Conference lives out a Wildly Important Goal (WIG) of 100% of its congregations and clergy engaging in life-giving changes for Jesus Christ, this ministry focus aligns and becomes a priority for all within the annual conference.

### **What is Urban Ministry in the Indiana Conference?**

According to the most recent census data, 72.4% of Indiana residents live in urban centers. In order to live into our shared mission to make disciples for the transformation of the world in Indiana, we must strategically invest our energy and resources into urban ministries that align with the unique needs of these urban neighbors. We recognize God's call is to promote the welfare of the city and its people, and the United Methodist Church of Indiana must embrace the city as our "new frontier." Further, we celebrate the rich legacy of the United Methodist ministries that have been and continue to be in ministry with our urban communities, and we look to their witness to guide our conference in responding faithfully and creatively to the challenges and opportunities of this "new frontier."

The Indiana Annual Conference will understand "urban" as large, dense, and socially heterogeneous centers of population where we have an opportunity and responsibility to join God's work of *shalom* — the healing, wholeness, and peace-making that extends to both individuals and entire communities — within these urban centers. Therefore, Urban Ministry in the Indiana Annual Conference can and will take shape in a variety of ways because of the diverse communities found throughout our urban centers. As a baseline, we define urban centers as those areas with population greater than 50,000 people. However, we also recognize that population alone is not a sufficient metric. Urban centers, for our purposes, are also understood as those areas that possess these characteristics: high population density, cultural and socio-economic diversity, a variety of family structures and household configurations, and a concentration of infrastructure (such as government, hospitals, financial institutions, employers, and schools).

## **Strategic Process of Urban Ministry in the Indiana Conference**

Urban ministry in the Indiana Conference will be an intentional effort to invest in the communities for transformation, which could encompass these initiatives:

- establishment of new and renewed faith communities, especially in areas of high population density and/or population growth that are not currently served by a United Methodist presence which could include church plants, restarts, or intentional revitalization of existing congregations
- investment in community and leadership development, both within and beyond our local churches
- engagement with community organizing efforts, particularly in ways that allow the church to support and not supplant the established leadership (both official and unofficial) of the local community
- commitment to ministries of justice and compassion, working to further God's *shalom* in our cities

Realizing that "every congregation is located in a community in some type of transition, every local church is encouraged to study their congregation's potential (Book of Discipline ¶1213)" to identify opportunities to share in the commitment of transformation in communities beyond themselves to assist in the transformation of urban centers throughout Indiana. In all of these initiatives, we value ministry *with* and not for and proactivity as opposed to reactivity.

### **Establishment of New and Renewed Faith Communities**

These efforts should focus primarily on urban areas not currently served by a vital United Methodist presence. New faith communities could be established through fresh expressions, vital mergers, multi-site ministry, nested congregations, or new church starts. Special care should be given to ensuring the establishment of new faith communities in urban areas builds on the existing assets of and leadership in those areas, so that the faith community is reflective of the surrounding community.

The "mission congregation" designation should also be considered as a viable means of establishing faith communities in urban areas underserved by the United Methodist Church. Per Book of Discipline ¶1259, a mission congregation designation is appropriate when 1) membership opportunities and resources are limited and not likely to result in a chartered congregation for an extended period of time; 2) a strategic demographic, cultural, or language opportunity for serving a limited population is present; 3) it is expected that long-term sustaining funding from

sources outside the congregation will be necessary to enable the congregation to exist; or 4) it is probable that the annual conference will need to provide long-term administrative guidance.

The intentional revitalization of existing faith communities may also be appropriate in urban areas to provide support and resources to existing United Methodist congregations who demonstrate commitment to a revitalization process. Consultative and coaching processes will be developed to support the unique ministry challenges of urban congregations. This may include a roster of outside consultants, a learning journey model with other congregations, and peer mentoring groups. These processes will also include resources to better understand and fully utilize data about the urban ministry settings, such as MissionInsite reports.

Understanding that church buildings in urban settings are often more albatrosses than opportunities, special attention should be given to how these buildings are utilized in ways that are sustainable for the current ministry and directly benefit the surrounding community while meeting its needs. This will encompass strategic efforts to expand the use of existing congregations' properties, as well as critical thinking about the sale of discontinued church properties so that community investment is prioritized over simple monetary return.

District and conference resources, such as staff guidance or grant monies through the Urban Transitional Community Grant fund should be prioritized for these urban areas to strengthen our United Methodist presence.

### **Investment in Community and Leadership Development**

*"Urban settings require not just pastoring churches but pastoring the entire neighborhood. That's a skill that needs to be taught." (Rev. Tracey Leslie)*

Urban Ministry leadership development encompasses the recruitment of local members, the training of local congregations, and the equipping of appointed clergy to urban ministry settings.

Thriving urban ministry should draw upon the existing assets of the neighborhoods in which they are located. Accordingly, congregations are encouraged to actively engage their neighbors and utilize the gifts, talents, and skills they offer for ministry in and through the congregation. In support of this effort, the Indiana Conference is committed to educating and developing congregational leaders in understanding

and implementing models of asset-based community development. This may include an enhanced understanding of what it means to be in “ministry with” our urban neighbors through efforts such as neighborhood walks and community days.

Intentional efforts to recruit those called to urban ministry will be a strategic initiative by the Indiana Conference through the Board of Ordained Ministry and the Board of Laity.

Recognizing the unique skills required for pastoring and ministering in urban ministry settings, consultative and coaching processes will be developed to support appointed clergy. Particular attention shall be given to equipping clergy newly-appointed to urban settings. This may include coaching, consultants, and peer mentoring groups.

### **Engagement with Community Organizing Efforts**

Urban ministry in the Indiana Conference must include engagement with community organizing efforts in our urban centers. We recognize this work is best done in partnership with the communities. Accordingly, United Methodist congregations and leaders should prioritize efforts to build strong relationships in their communities, so that critical community issues (anti-racism, housing, public policy, food deserts, mental health, etc.) and our United Methodist influence can be amplified by other community leaders, and we can amplify theirs.

The Indiana Conference should be actively engaged with statewide community and faith-based organizing efforts including the United Way and Faith in Indiana, as well as local and state governmental entities. In addition, ministry leaders in urban settings should identify and seek to engage with local organizing efforts including nonprofits, community organizing networks, neighborhood associations, and unofficial neighborhood associations and networks.

### **Commitment to Ministries of Justice and Compassion**

Ministries of justice and compassion are integral parts of urban ministry in the Indiana Conference as we take seriously the prophet Jeremiah’s charge to “seek the *shalom* of the city” (Jeremiah 29:7). We recognize that this healing and wholeness is only possible when we commit to ministries of justice and compassion in our cities. To that end, congregations in urban centers are urged to regularly audit and, if necessary, adjust their programs so that both compassion and justice ministries are integrated into the church’s vision.

Additionally, financial resources at the local church level as well as district and conference levels should be allocated to support ministries of justice and compassion in our urban centers. Deacons in our conference should be utilized as a resource in these efforts, as they are clergypersons ordained to Justice and Compassion.

### **Urban Transitional Community Grants**

One of the components of this Urban Ministry Comprehensive Plan is the Urban Transitional Community Grant (the Book of Discipline ¶12549.7). This effort is specifically focused on investing in ministry that meets the needs of the under-resourced and economically depressed parts of our cities.

Through the state of Indiana, there are over twenty-five areas that possess a prevalence and density of poverty, according to the recent census block data and MissionInsite reports. There are places for which there are pockets of poverty, but there are also places for which there is systematic poverty for which we as an Indiana Conference must begin to address, and utilize our resources to bring about change and transformation.

The Urban Transitional Community Grant shall be directed toward places where there is a poverty density, as well as the possibility for United Methodists of Indiana to be in the forefront of making a systematic impact that creates long-term change in these transitional communities.

The funding for Urban Transitional Community Grants comes from the proceeds from the sale of United Methodist properties located in urban centers (most commonly, closed churches). Per the Judicial Council Decision(s) #1282, #1067, these monies must be reinvested to establish new ministries or enhance existing ministries in urban transitional communities. In the Indiana Conference, we understand this directive to be particularly concerned with issues of equity, ensuring that financial resources of our urban communities remain invested in the urban communities.

Oversight of the Urban Transitional Community Grant lies with the Mission and Justice Team, with affirmation from the Extended Cabinet. The grant specifics, guidelines, and application can be found on the Indiana Conference website ([www.inumc.org](http://www.inumc.org)).

