

# MOVING THE MISSION **FORWARD**

*“Falling in love with your community again!”*

## **WHO IS THIS DESIGNED FOR?**

This guide is designed for churches ready to move forward at carrying out the church’s mission, but that need direction on where to start. This is also for churches that want to more intentionally engage with their communities.

## **HOW IS THIS TO BE USED?**

This guide is meant to be used by the key leaders of a church. Ideally five to twelve persons will work through this guide together. Choose persons who are interested in your church reaching out and connecting with its community. Ideally, your pastor and key leaders will be a part of your team. It may include persons outside your church who are very connected in your community.

This team will want to regularly meet, perhaps weekly, as they work through this guide. At times they will seek the input of others in the congregation and community. If the team would find it helpful to have an outside guide to assist them, they can contact Church Development for a Field Guide.



**Flourish to Multiply**

Helping Church Multiplication Dreams Become Reality

## EMBARKING ON OUR JOURNEY

As we prepare to embark on this journey, we need to stop and ask ourselves two questions. First, do we really know and accept the mission? And second, are we willing to commit to do our part to help move the mission forward?

To answer these, we must be clear about what our mission is. The United Methodist church is a denomination that clearly articulates its mission. Its mission is the same for every United Methodist congregation worldwide. The church's mission is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." As United Methodists, this is the reason we exist, our purpose, our marching orders.

The good news is that this mission is achievable because we get to take this journey accompanied and led by Jesus. Sometimes the path will be smooth and other times we will encounter bumps along the way. In either case, moving the mission forward is a privilege. It will bring new life not only to those of us on the journey but also those we encounter.

This guide is designed to help your congregation on this journey. Have fun with it. If you need a person to help you, Church Development can provide you with a Field Guide. Above all listen to what God is saying and where God wants to lead!

So where to start? How about the Apostle Paul, the greatest missionary of all times. His vision and commitment to the cause of Christ never wavered. We find his approach clearly laid out in Romans, Chapter 1:8-9.

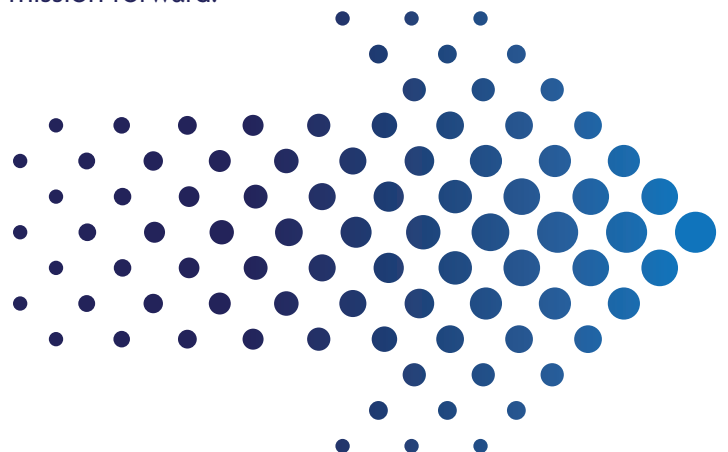
***"Let me say first that I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith in him is being talked about all over the world. God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son."***

In order to move the mission forward, consider these three steps that Paul points to in these verses. First, Paul focuses on being thankful. As members of Christ's church, we are fully aware of what we have to be thankful for. We are showered with countless blessings as a result of believing in and walking with Jesus, and ultimately, we celebrate our salvation that comes through Christ alone. Let's begin our journey with a focus on thankfulness as Paul does.

Secondly, Paul clearly lifts the importance of prayer. It is critically important that we keep prayer at the center of this journey. The prayer is not just for God to move in our congregation and community, but it is also a means to listen for the Holy Spirit's guidance and God's will and direction. This listening prayer, sometimes called "breakthrough prayer," is essential if we are to move the mission forward.

Third, Paul demonstrates by example the value of service. In every community he visits, Paul engages with the people. Paul knows full well that relationships must be formed in order for conversations to occur that move the mission forward. Engaging with the community is key in our efforts to accomplish the mission.

**So, are you ready?**



## PART 1. WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

“Who is my neighbor?” Jesus is asked this question in Luke 10:29. It echoes another question that Cain asks in Genesis 4:9, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Jesus’ answer is not only a resounding “Yes!” but he goes on in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, to clearly show that we are called to serve even the stranger who is not of our “tribe.”

So, one of your church’s first steps in engaging with its community is to define who its community is. By community, we are referring not to those who make up your church, your congregation, but rather those outside your church’s congregation. This group can be defined in a couple of ways...

1. As a specific geographic area, for example:
  - the six block-area surrounding your church’s building
  - your church’s zip code area
  - your school district boundary
  - an apartment complex or retirement center
2. As a particular population niche group, like the following:
  - single adults
  - persons in recovery
  - families with special needs children
  - the LGBTQ community
  - the homeless
  - retirement communities
  - incarcerated and/or their families
  - persons with mental illness

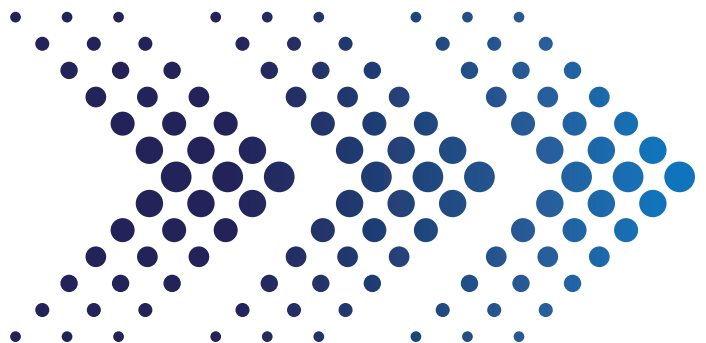
A church that focuses on a particular geography will likely be more of a neighborhood church; whereas the church that is focused on a particular population niche will be more of a regional church. Some churches may be called to be both—both a church focused on reaching a particular geography and a particular population niche. Most churches, however, will only have the capacity to focus on one.

How do you feel about this? There will likely be many in your church who will push back and say that we should be a church for everyone. Of course, everyone should be welcomed into your congregation no matter where they come from or what population niche they happen to be a part of. However, the more narrowly you define the community you’re called to reach, the more likely you will successfully reach them. Typically, when you try to reach everyone, your efforts will be so diffused that you reach very few.

**So who is your neighbor?**

**Who is it that God is counting on your church to intentionally engage with?**

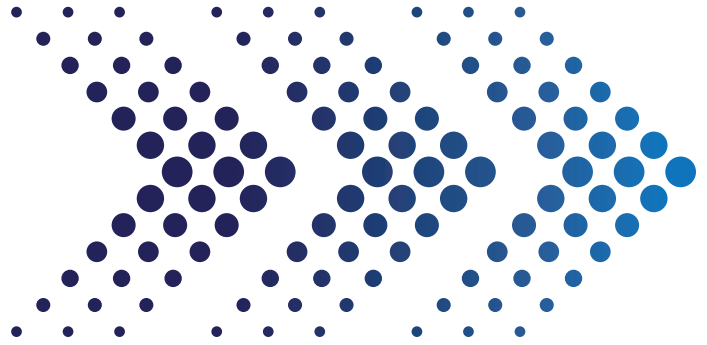
**How will you know?**



## Take your next steps...

**A. CREATE A TEAM** of five to twelve persons that will work through this guide together. Choose persons who are interested in your church reaching out and connecting with its community. Ideally, your pastor and key leaders will be a part of your team. It may include persons outside your church who are very connected in your community.

**B. BEGIN YOUR DISCERNMENT.** Here are some steps you can take. Give your team adequate time to work through these. They could be done as part of a retreat or they could be done over the course of a couple months. You may want to engage the broader congregation for its members' input. Bathe this whole process in prayer!



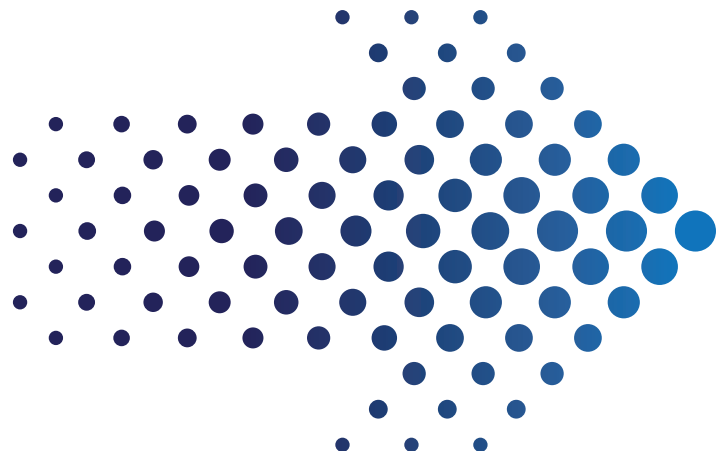
1. **PRAYER.** Enter into an intentional period of fasting and prayer as a congregation. You may want to recruit a prayer team to help lead this effort or your team can lead it. Consider using the Prayer and Fasting guide in the appendix (1).
2. **SCRIPTURE.** Prayerfully consider specific scriptures relating to engagement with others, like Matthew 25:31-46. What scriptures come to mind? Spend time reflecting on them both individually and as a team.
3. **SIGNS & WONDERS.** Reflect as a group on where you are seeing your church having connections with its community.
  - a. Consider who the church's newcomers are. Are they from a particular geographic area? Do they come from a particular population niche? Do they have particular community connections?
  - b. What organizations (secular and/or religious) has your church been drawn to? Who are they serving?
  - c. Where are you seeing God at work in your community? How might you join God with those people who are involved?
4. **DREAMS & VISIONS.**
  - a. What is your church's vision? Who is it impacting?
  - b. What other dreams and visions are you hearing from people in your congregation? Your community?
5. **IDENTITY & VALUES.**
  - a. Reflect on your church's identity. What is it known for in the community? What does it stand for? How is it unique from other churches in its community?
  - b. What are your church's core values—the values that determine how you make decisions, spend your time, money, energy, resources?

- c. Reflect on your church's history, how has it engaged with its community in the past? With whom has it intentionally served?
- d. Describe a time when your church effectively carried out the mission and engaged with its community. What factors seemed to facilitate this? How might these be applied in today's context?

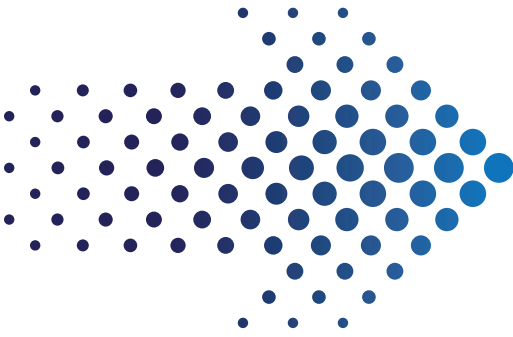
**C. SYNTHESIZE WHAT YOU'VE DISCERNED.** Spend time as a team reviewing and reflecting on what resulted from your discernment. What are the common threads or themes? Is there a particular group or groups that seem to stand out?

**D. CARICATURE.** Create a caricature of this group. Imagine that they are one particular person or family. Describe them. What is their name? (Yes, actually give them a name!) Where do they live? How many kids do they have? How old are the family members? What is their marital status? What kind of work do they do? What challenges are they dealing with? What are their gifts? What are their needs? What do they think of Jesus? The church? Your church? How might you connect with them?

Introduce your fictitious person/family to your congregational leaders. Ask them if they would add or change anything. Begin praying that God would help you to get to know these people in your community and pray for them.



## PART 2. EXPLORE THE LAND



In Numbers 13, the Lord tells Moses to send some men to explore the land of Canaan. This is an important next step for you and your team. It is time to explore your community looking at it with fresh eyes, as though you had never seen it before. Enter its spaces. Rub shoulders with those around. Leave your preconceived notions behind and listen deeply. What are the words and language of the people? What do they value? What are their norms? How do they view God? Do the answers vary from group to group or are they all pretty much the same?

### Take your next steps...

**A. EXPLORATION.** Use the following activities to better to explore your community (“the land”). Consider who else to invite from your congregation to join you in this exploration. Invite them to join one or more of these exploration teams.

1. **DEMOGRAPHIC STUDY.** Recruit a team of three to six people to study your community’s demographic information using MissionInsite, a free resource available through the Indiana Conference. Refer to appendix (2) for guidance. Describe your community’s population or a segment of it in a half-page.
2. **WINDSHIELD TOUR.** Recruit a team of three to thirty people to study your community by car or van. Choose various parts of your community and assign car/van-loads of people from your church to tour the specific areas using the Windshield Tour Guide found in the appendix (3). As a group, debrief what you observe and summarize it in a half-page.
3. **PRAYER WALK.** Recruit a team of three to thirty people to prayer walk your community by foot or car/van. Assign them in small teams to prayer walk (or drive) specific parts of your community using the Prayer Walking Guide found in the appendix (4). As a group, debrief what you sensed and summarize it in a half-page.
4. **LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS.** Recruit a team of four to twelve people to conduct interviews of selected community leaders. Team members should be put into pairs and each pair is assigned to conduct one or more interviews with specific leaders using the Leadership Interview Guide found in the appendix (5). Community leaders could include leaders of school systems, township trustees, city/town officials (e.g., mayor, town clerk), police and/or volunteer fire department, organization leaders (e.g., YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, Chamber of Commerce), area planning offices, etc. As a group, debrief what you heard and summarize it in a half-page.

**B. SYNTHESIS.** Share what you learned (the half-page reports) with the whole team and reflect. What common threads or themes did you discover? What are the assets of the community? Its needs? Its uniqueness? Its dreams? Are there persons of peace (Luke 10:5-6), people who welcome having conversations with you, who are connected in the community and can open doors for further engagement? How might your church’s gifts and ministries complement and mesh with where the community is at?

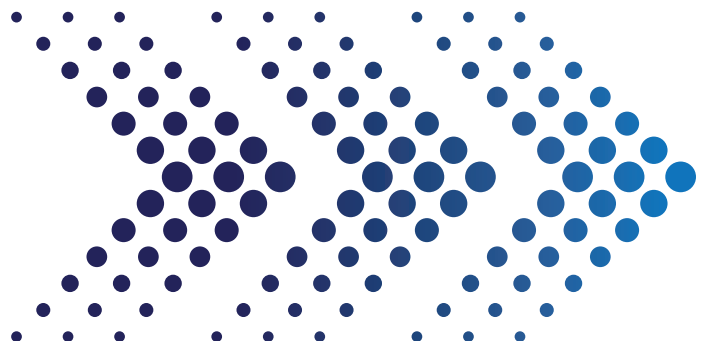


**C. JUSTICE.** As you synthesize, what you have learned about the community in terms of its need for justice and advocacy? For example,

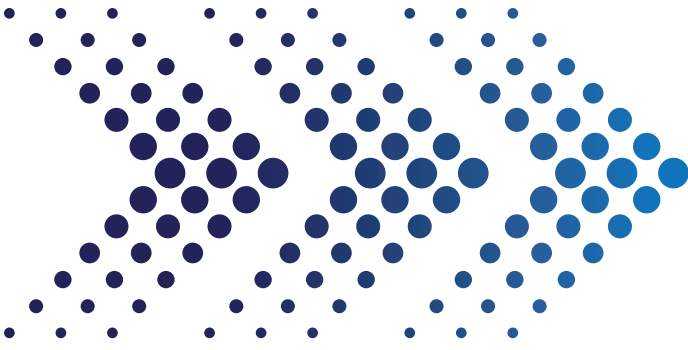
- The school to prison pipeline
- The social dynamics that contribute to homelessness
- The digital/technological denigration and commoditization of persons
- The dynamics that contribute to opioid addiction
- The impact of redlining, gentrification, and historic home-lending practices on home owning
- The treatment of the mentally ill and stigmatized

1. **PRAYER.** Spend time in prayer over the emerging issues. What does God seem to be laying on the hearts of you and your church?
2. **SCRIPTURE.** Prayerfully consider specific scriptures that speak to God's call for us to be advocates for justice and equity, especially for the poor and oppressed, like Psalm 82:3 and Micah 6:8. What other scriptures come to mind?
3. **ACTION.** What action does God seem to be calling your congregation to take in response?

**D. CONNECTIONS.** Develop and maintain a list of the leaders and organizations you have connected with. Consider how your church might maintain healthy, ongoing relationships with them. Don't underestimate the value of these. They may need you and your church and you and your church may need them as well in order to help God's love to fill your community.



## PART 3. MOVE INTO THE NEIGHBORHOOD



The Gospel of John, Chapter 1:14, says, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood” (The Message). How should your church move into its neighborhood? What kind of relationship should it have? Sometimes churches have had paternalistic relationships, or us-them relationships, or transactional relationships (e.g., you’re hungry and we give you food). Will you minister to your community? Or, minister with? What is the difference? How your church

begins its engagement will establish the type of relationship it will have going forward. Once established, it will be very difficult to change.

Part of figuring this out includes answering the questions, Why are we wanting to engage with our community in the first place? What is our motive? What is driving us?

- To grow our church?
- Meet people’s needs?
- Save their souls?
- The Bible says to?
- To share God’s unconditional love?
- To help them experience an abundant life?
- To be their neighbor?
- Because the pastor wants us to?
- It’s the denomination’s expectation?

The people in your community will be quick to discover your underlying motives. It is important for all those involved to understand the “why?”

### Take your next steps...

Take the particular group you feel led to reach (the caricature from Part 1) and the context, including the assets and needs of the community (from Part 2), and look for points of potential ministry engagement.

- A. BRAINSTORM.** As a team, spend time brainstorming what potential engagement with the community might look like. Explain why each is important.
- B. PRAY.** Enter into a time of collective prayer, praying that God would guide your team and congregation as it begins to articulate a direction and focus. Invite the congregation into a time of listening prayer as well. Pray for clarity and discernment.
- C. CONGREGATIONAL INPUT.** Invite your church to prayerfully consider your list. Have them reflect on these questions:
  1. Which ideas seem to be a good fit for our church and is consistent with who we are and our church’s vision?



2. Which ideas seem to create the most energy and interest within the congregation?
3. Give congregation members the opportunity to “vote” on these ideas (e.g., have them place stickers on their top 2-3 ideas)? Which ones emerge with the most votes?

**D. DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN.** As a team, develop an action plan that clearly articulates the direction of your congregation’s outreach focus. Share this plan with the church council for its support and approval. (See section H. below.) Include the following:

1. A description of the hope-for outcomes
2. Why it is important that the church pursue this
3. Who this outreach is targeting and why
4. The 2-3 key objectives the church needs to focus on in order to make this a reality

**E. CHAMPIONS.** The team and/or church leaders need to identify a pair of people who would champion one of these engagement opportunities and empower them to recruit a team (or work with an existing committee/team) to pursue their particular engagement opportunity. If there’s interest and capacity, identify one or two other pairs of people who would champion one or two other engagement opportunities.

**F. ASSETS.** Surround them with on-going prayer and help point them to the appropriate assets in the church and community—including potential partner organizations, persons of peace, and potential grants. Encourage them to consider using Asset-based Community Development (ABCD) if it would be helpful. Encourage them to consider hiring a coach to work with them and to contact Church Development for other potential resources.

**G. COMMISSION.** In a congregational setting, like a worship service, recognize the team/s that will be leading community engagement. Commission them, pray corporately for them (e.g., lay hands on them), and send them with God’s blessings.

**H. APPROVAL.** Take official action in the church’s leadership council to endorse the team/s efforts and to officially designate the effort/s as key objectives of the church’s ministry. Consider what additional steps need to be taken to adequately support the effort/s in order to achieve the objectives.

**I. COMMUNICATE.** Create a way to regularly communicate with the congregation how the community engagement, done on behalf of the church, is going. How can the congregation be more involved? What stories of transformation are emerging? How will you celebrate the results? How will you give God the praise?



## OUR OUTWARD JOURNEY

Although the journey through this guide has come to an end, the journey outward continues. As previously mentioned, the mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Engaging with our community is a critically important facet of this mission. How can we transform the world if we simply remain in our buildings?

Jesus' ministry was one of engagement, it was incarnational, it was based on life-giving relationships. Jesus calls us to go, go out into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). May your journey of community engagement take your church beyond its walls, sharing the light and love of Jesus Christ with an incredible world that is waiting for it. And go with the power of the Holy Spirit!

**Church Development would like to hear about your church's journey through this resource. Please contact us at [CD@inumc.org](mailto:CD@inumc.org) to share your experience.**

**You can also request a Field Guide using this same email address.**



**Church Development**  
of the United Methodist Churches of Indiana

