**Five Rivers District Ministry Action Plan**

The Five Rivers District Ministry Action Plan is built around the four focus areas of the Great Plains Conference: Know God, Proclaim Christ, Serve Others (especially the poor), and Seek Justice. It aims to achieve “Zero Decline” in worship attendance, professions of faith, small groups, and payment of mission shares by increasing congregational vitality throughout the district.

Teamwork is key to the plan. When great churches, disciples, and leaders work together as “many members of one body,” the world is transformed (I Corinthians 12.14). Four fundamental team strategies drive the plan:

* Churches and Networks will connect and collaborate to accomplish the mission.
* Conference personnel will be deployed to support the efforts of pastors, congregations, and networks.
* Churches and Networks will make use of connectional resources from the Conference website, Church of the Resurrection, Lewis Center for Church Leadership, and the general church to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness.
* Church and community partnerships will be formed and strengthened to harness the passions and energies throughout the mission field.

We are better together! And it is only together that we will flourish.

This plan is offered as a resource. Let it seed your creativity. Take what is here and make it your own. Improve on it with your experience and knowledge of your mission field. You are the experts! I can’t wait to see how God blesses our faithfulness with fruitfulness.

A quick shout out to the District Strategy Team and the pastors of the Five Rivers District for all the conversations that have resulted in this M.A.P. I’m glad we’re on the same team.

***“A team is a small number of people with complimentary skills committed to common purpose, performance goals, and mutual accountability.”***

***“A person can make a difference. A team can make a miracle.”***

--David Watson, District Superintendent

January 2019

**Five Rivers District**

**Ministry Action Plan**

**Focus: Know God**

**Outcome (Big Goal) # 1: Spiritually Maturing Laity and Congregations.** (This is number one because, according to the 2010 Towers-Watson research on vital congregations, of the four drivers of congregational vitality—Effective clergy, Spiritually Mature Laity, Passionate Worship, Strong Children’s/Youth Ministry—it is SPIRITUALLY MATURE LAITY who impact the most people in the mission field.)

**IDEAS, STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS:**

1. The DS will conduct network leader workshops on the spiritual disciplines and Covenant Discipleship Groups. Pastors and lay network leaders will then provide these workshops to their congregations/networks as a means of raising up disciples through the formation/strengthening of small discipleship groups in all congregations/networks on the district. Helpful resources:

* *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster
* *Covenant Discipleship* by David Lowes Watson
* *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius B. Dotson
* *Disciple Bible Study*
* *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* by Putnam and Harrington
* *Catch Fire in Fifty Days* by Busick and Latana
* *Lead Like Wesley: Help for Today’s Ministry Servants* by Mark Gorveatte
* *Unstuck Church* by Tony Morgan
* *The Emotionally Healthy Church* by Peter Scazzero
* *You Only Have to Die* by James Harnish
* *God’s Country* (a novel) by Percival Everett (about small churches)
* *The Class Meeting*, Kevin M. Watson
* *Accountable Discipleship*, Steven Manskar (This is a more recent version of the methods developed in David Lowes Watson’s book)
* *A Blueprint for Discipleship*, Kevin M. Watson (This book considers Wesley’s three rules for our day in light of the challenges of contemporary culture.)
* *Eight Life-Enriching Practices for United Methodists*, Henry H. Knight III (A good introduction that takes account of the means of grace in today’s culture.)
* *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Steve Harper (Focusses on Wesley’s own practices of daily devotion.)

2. Time at every quarterly district pastor gathering and in all yearly pastor supervisory consultations will be devoted to the practice of the means of grace on a personal and congregational/network level.

3. Network Leaders (pastor and lay) will spend intentional time getting to know their laity to learn what practices around the means of grace already exist in congregations. This will be a way to celebrate and encourage such gifts and practices in the laity.

4. Everyone with the appropriate technology will be encouraged to use the new conference Smartphone Ap for spiritual health.

5. Network Leaders (pastor and lay) will spend intentional time getting to know their laity to help them discover their spiritual gifts, identify what ministries interest and excite them, and discern how God is leading them to passionately pursue their calling. This objective is driven by the belief that great joy comes to those who match their gifts, interests, and calling with ministries that respond to human need and grow God’s Kingdom. (Some resources for discovering spiritual gifts include UMC.org; L-3.)

6. Each congregation/network will hold focused and intentional conversations around how they are creating discipleship pathways for children and families to come into the church and faith life. Networks will work together to implement action steps to help create/strengthen such pathways.

7. District clergy and laity with expertise in small group discipleship ministries will be deployed to support these efforts.

8. Every pastor will be expected to lead (in partnership with lay leadership) at least one small accountable discipleship group each year. Small accountability groups are, after all, “The Method of Methodist Discipleship” (pp. 40-41 *Covenant Discipleship*, David Lowes Watson). Advent and Lent are prime times to introduce/experiment with this—with the objective of establishing ongoing accountability groups.

(The Strategy Team acknowledges that, while many of the above steps are “inward-focused”, the result of spiritual maturity is always outward—fruitfulness in the mission field. **“Holiness of heart leads to holiness of life…holy love that actively participates in God’s mission in the world.”** From *Transforming Community—The Wesleyan Way to Missional Congregations*, Henry Knight III & F. Douglas Powe, Jr.)

**Outcome (Big Goal) # 2: Clear Knowledge of Our Wesleyan Identity**

**IDEAS, STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS:**

1. DS and conference staff present district/network workshops on Wesleyan tradition using *The Wesleyan Way* curriculum and other resources.

2. Pastors and network laity leaders will teach the same workshops in local churches/networks

3. Develop network sermon series on Wesleyan teachings

4. Re-shape membership classes around Wesleyan themes

5. Use Wesley bobblehead in children’s sermon

6. Use “Chuck Knows Church” videos around Wesleyan themes

7. Add Wesley quotes to bulletin/reflection items.

8. Emphasize small group ministries based on Wesleyan models

9. Educate! Educate! Educate! in matters Wesley

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**Focus: Proclaim Christ**

**Outcome (Big Goal): Disciples Making New Disciples Through Witness & Service**

**IDEAS, STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS:**

1. Establish two “Fresh Expressions” (new ways of being church with those who do not come to church) in each district (Conference Congregational Excellence Team has committed to help fund this strategy).

2. Pastors and lay leadership will experiment with ways to learn and better know their community/network mission fields by mapping them and connecting directly with their neighbors. The *Mission Insite* database is an excellent resource for this. Another way is to create a detailed house-by-house map of a community, inviting church members to identify who lives where, and finding ways to build relationships with those unconnected with the congregation—thus building discipleship pathways into the church and faith life.

3. DS will present Faith Sharing Workshop to each network leadership team. Teams will then present to the networks.

4. Use the *Guest Quest* Sunday program or some similar “Bring a Friend” event idea. This will emphasize the importance of invitation as a means of evangelism.

5. Create mission trip opportunities for local churches, networks, and communities.

6. Create network confirmation classes and experiences which target community children, youth, and families.

7. Each congregation/network will hold focused and intentional conversations around how they are creating discipleship pathways for children/families to come into the church and faith life. Networks will work together to implement action steps to help create/strengthen such pathways.

8. Mission Insite will be presented at district clergy gatherings. (Dorcia Johnson and Marcee Binder can do this).

9. Be present in hospital cafeteria, donut shop, rec. centers, etc.

10. Offer Financial Peace University courses for the community. Use these classes as a means of connecting with the neighborhood around the church and building relationships.

11. Recognize groups that operate in the community and ensure that pastors and members of our churches are part of the groups and use that time to build relationships and share Christ.

12. Engage in intentional fellowship and relationship-building with other churches and non-church people.

13. Experiment with community-based gatherings for fellowship. These can become opportunities for Fresh Expressions and Sacred Encounter ministries.

14. Wednesday night meal. Free for all—like “Feeding Families” in the Bourbon County Parish Network in Fort Scott. Make these opportunities for intentional relationship-building with community neighbors.

15. Make greater use of social media to reach new Christians—expand to a diversified culture.

16. Include community in church-sponsored events: swimming parties, concerts, fishing tournaments, etc.

17. Support area farmers with intentional caring. Send personalized notes of support and encouragement as well as prayers for crops, workers, and the farm.

(As churches partner more and more with community groups, they will practice intentional evangelism while working side-by-side with other do-gooders and world-transformers. This will help create a district-wide culture of welcome and service evangelism. Each church member will receive training in how to do this. Remember: It all starts with relationship-building. An excellent resource for this is Bishop Bob Farr’s book, *Get their Name*)

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**Focus: Serve Others (Especially the Poor)**

**Outcome (Big Goal): Alleviate Food Insecurity at Colleges/Universities on the District resulting in fewer students unsure of the source of their next meal**

**IDEAS, STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS:**

1. Connect campus ministries—ours and others.

2. Determine how best to get the word out about already available services. (Much is already happening around this, but many don’t take advantage of what is offered.)

3. Utilize KU Alumni Associations as a connecting link and partner.

4. Use KU and Baker Greek systems to help collect resources and communicate.

5. Identify who we want to feed—where do they live?—and target those places as possible distribution points.

6. Identify already existing food ministries and continue to support and partner with these.

7. Target breaks in the school year—this is often when the need is greatest.

8. Experiment with congregational/network dumpster diving initiatives and expeditions.

9. Mobilize campus ministers and ministries to partner with pastors, local churches and networks in this effort.

10. Onboard other key stake-holders through the mission field to support this effort.

11. Learn about and experiment with community gardens (Osawatomie has an excellent community garden ministry that is community-based and involves schools, churches, and many other organizations.)

12. Provide backpack meals for students.

13. Partner with Feeding America, Kansas Food Bank, and Harvesters.

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**Focus: Seek Justice**

**Outcome (Big Goal): Churches and networks connecting with community partners to become more aware of social injustice and find common ways to confront and correct it.**

**IDEAS, STRATEGIES, ACTION STEPS:**

1. Support initiatives to address the high suicide rate among returning combat veterans.

2. Move beyond the question “What can we do for the hungry?” and instead ask “Why are people hungry?” This ensures not merely the development of symptomatic strategies (ministries of compassion), but the possibility of curative efforts (ministries of justice).

3. Ask forgiveness of God each day for those who die of starvation, and work to alleviate world hunger.

4. Networks can become advocacy groups for prisoners of religious and political conscience.

5. Work closely with the District and Conference United Methodist Women to learn from their reading programs the many ways UMW is involved in social justice ministries.

6. Communicate regularly with elected local representatives on issues of economic justice.

7. When you are aware of injustices practiced in your church, your community, your nation, and your world, speak out.

8. Identify social justice “rallying points” in your community (school bullying, hunger, drug addiction, lack of services for children and youth)—those things that many people are already passionate about—and partner with them to discover and implement solutions.

9. Pay attention to the ways “the kingdom of God is at hand,” (Matthew 4.17b) in your community mission field. This can be seen in the many acts of compassion, mercy, and justice which people practice every day. And when you see them, pat those people on the back. Say, “That is how you behave in the kingdom of God! By doing what you have done, you have brought us closer to the God’s reign on earth! Good work! Keep it up!” This way, churches will be announcing the presence of the kingdom of God here and how—and bearing witness to God’s work in the world.

10. Through partnerships with local schools, confront the bullying culture and work to transform it into one of tolerance, understanding, respect, and support. Churches will work with school leaders to learn about the problem. Pastors/churches will partner with schools/families to strategize ways to address the culture of bullying. Churches will work together to address any bullying aspects of congregational life. Use Covenant Discipleship Sprouts and Teen Groups to build a culture of support and accountability. Learn from community-based stake-holders what is working to address the problem—and partner with these efforts—offering a Christian witness in support of secular approaches. Establish “We Dine Together” chapters in every community school. (https://www.beyonddifferences.org/we-dine-together/)

11. Pray every day for the coming of the reign of God.