



lay leader/ lay member

*Connecting Your
Congregation and
Your Annual Conference*

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General Board of Discipleship

LAY LEADER/LAY MEMBER

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Some paragraph numbers for and language in the Book of Discipline may have changed in the 2008 revision, which was published after these Guidelines were printed. We regret any inconvenience.

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Welcome

You are so important to the life of the Christian church! You have consented to join with other people of faith who, through the millennia, have sustained the church by extending God's love to others. You have been called and have committed your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to a position of leadership. This Guideline will help you understand the basic elements of that ministry within your own church and within The United Methodist Church.

Called to Spiritual Leadership

Each person is called to ministry by virtue of his or her baptism, and that ministry takes place in all aspects of daily life, in and outside the church. As a pastoral leader or leader among the laity, your ministry is not just a “job,” but a spiritual endeavor. You *are* a spiritual leader now, and others will look to you for spiritual leadership. What does this mean?

First, *all* persons who follow Jesus are called to grow spiritually through the practice of various Christian habits (or “means of grace”) such as prayer, Bible study, private and corporate worship, acts of service, Christian conferencing, and so on. Jesus taught his disciples practices of spiritual growth and leadership that you, as a disciple, are to share with others as they look to you to be a model and guide.

Second, it means that you always keep your eye on the main reasons for any ministry—to help others grow to a mature faith in God that moves them to action on behalf of others, especially “the least” (see Matthew 25:31-46). This is an aspect of “disciple making,” which is the ultimate goal of all that we do in the church.

CULTIVATING VISION AND MISSION

As a spiritual leader, a primary function you carry is to help those you lead to see as clearly as possible what God is calling your church to be and to do. Ideally, your church council first forms this vision and then forms plans and goals for how to fulfill that vision. As a leader, you will help your team remain focused and accountable to honor the vision and goals to which the church is committed. You will help your team create and evaluate suggestions, plans, and activities against the measure: *Does this move us closer to our church's vision to bring others to God in this place and time?*

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING

While there are appropriate and useful business-like practices that apply to church life, Christian practices distinguish the church as the church. In the United Methodist tradition, how we meet and work together is important. “Christian Conferencing” involves listening not only to each other, but also listening intently for the will of God in any given task or conversation. This makes prayer essential in the midst of “business as usual.” As Christians, we are called to “speak the truth in love.” This is a special way to speak in which we treat one another as if each of us were Christ among us. As a spiritual leader in your ministry area, you have the privilege and opportunity to teach and model these practices. By remembering that each of us is beloved of God and discerning the presence of God in all that the church does, every task becomes worshipful work.

THE MISSION OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The United Methodist Church is a connectional church, which means in part that every local church is interrelated through the structure and organization of districts, conferences, jurisdictions, and central conferences in the larger “family” of the denomination. *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* describes, among other things, the ministry of all United Methodist Christians, the essence of servant ministry and leadership, how to organize and accomplish that ministry, and how our connectional structure works (see especially ¶¶125–138).

Our Church is more than a structure; it is a living organism. The *Discipline* describes our mission to proclaim the gospel and to welcome people into the body of Christ, to lead people to a commitment to God through Jesus Christ, to nurture them in Christian living by various means of grace, and to send persons into the world as agents of Jesus Christ (¶122). Thus, through you—and many other Christians—this very relational mission continues.

(For help in addition to this Guideline and the *Book of Discipline*, see “Resources” at the end of your Guideline, www.umc.org, and the other websites listed on the inside back cover.)

Called to Love and Serve

“...all Christians are called to minister wherever Christ would have them serve and witness in deeds and words that heal and free” (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, ¶127).

Thank you for accepting the call to be the lay leader of your congregation or lay member of annual conference! God has called you, through your church’s charge conference, to serve the church in an important way. *The roles of lay leader and lay member of annual conference are separate, but the Book of Discipline recommends that the lay leader also serve as lay member to annual conference.* If the same individual does not hold both positions, the two people should confer and work together as they serve. A large membership church may have several people sharing these responsibilities.

The Responsibilities of Lay Leader/Lay Member

Responsibilities of both the lay leader and the lay member to annual conference are:

- interpreting the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general Church
- communicating the vision and needs of the local church to the annual conference and general Church.

These two roles are complementary, yet there are responsibilities unique to each role. The greatest distinction is the connections they forge with and on behalf of the congregation. The lay leader has a primary focus in linking the local church and community. The lay member of annual conference has a primary focus in linking the local church to the connectional United Methodist Church and God’s worldwide church. (Note the chart below indicating the committee relationships of the lay member and lay leader.)

Role	Charge Conference	Church Council	Finance Committee	Lay Leadership Committee	S/PPR Committee
Lay Leader	X	X	X	X	X
Lay Member	X	X	X		X

The Book of Discipline defines your role as lay leader/lay member and defines in broad terms the work of your congregation, the annual conference, and The United Methodist Church. Two sections will be particularly helpful for your leadership. The paragraphs in the 200s relate to the local church; ¶251 specifically refers to the lay leader. The paragraphs in the 600s relate to the annual conference; ¶602.4 begins specific references to the lay member of annual conference. The *Discipline* has a table of contents and a topical index to help you find other items. Ask your pastor for a current copy or purchase a copy through Cokesbury (see Resources at the back of this Guideline).

The *Discipline* encourages churches to have one person assume the role of lay leader and lay member of annual conference. If you are elected to both roles, remember that there is overlap in these complementary roles. The unique responsibilities of each position have been noted above.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church sets forth the constitution, theology, history, Wesleyan heritage, polity, plans, process, and laws by which United Methodists govern themselves. In addition to the legislation that governs our life together, it has important information regarding the mission and ministry of the church, including the General Rules of the Wesleyan societies.

Most of the book is organized by paragraph rather than page, chapter, or section. The paragraphs are numbered consecutively within each chapter or section, but numbers may be skipped between sections to allow for future additions. The *Discipline* can be modified only by a General Conference, comprised of delegates elected from each annual conference, held every four years. The General Conference “amends, perfects, clarifies, and adds its own contribution to the *Discipline*” (page v).

The Role of the Lay Leader

The *Discipline* lists these responsibilities for a lay leader in congregations of every size and in multiple point charges. These responsibilities are lived out with a great deal of variation in congregations. Associate lay leaders may be elected to assist the lay leader by representing the lay leader in committee meetings.

Responsibilities of the Lay Leader

The lay leader has a role and responsibility that touches the entire breadth of the congregation's life. The lay leader will:

- advocate
- model responsible and faithful discipleship
- build awareness within the congregation
- recognize and celebrate the ministry of the laity
- meet with the pastor
- serve on various committees
- continue to study
- assist the church council
- inform the laity of educational opportunities.

ADVOCACY

The lay leader serves as primary advocate for and representative of the laity in the congregation and must be a professing member of the congregation. A prior part of this advocacy work includes the recognition that the lay leader should be a person of faith and integrity. As an "extension" of the congregation in the community, the lay leader also will need to be aware of the reputation the church has in the community and work either to enhance it or improve it. The lay leader is also an advocate for the needs of the community; to inspire the congregation to care for those beyond the walls and windows of the church.

MODELING DISCIPLESHIP

The visibility of your position as the lay leader in the congregation places you in the position to model good habits of personal devotion and discipleship. As you engage in spiritual practices, you can be an example and mentor to others.

BUILDING AWARENESS

You build awareness of the role of laity within the congregation by the example shown by your leadership. For example, the lay leader can be physically present as co-leader with the appointed leader in meetings, wor-

ship, and the community. The lay leader encourages others to use their gifts to participate in leading the mission and ministry of the congregation.

In addition, you will help to foster awareness of the ministry of the laity through their ministry in the home, workplace, community, and the world. For example, invite people of all ages to respond to how they have lived as faithful Christians during the past week, including in the workplace. They might share those answers in worship, small groups, newsletters, or bulletins. Recognize the steady ministry of groups and individuals who live out their faith in service by regularly volunteering in schools and the community. Encourage church members to use their skills—such as carpentry, plumbing, teaching, tax preparation, nursing, and so on—to help each other or persons in the community and throughout the world. Encourage church members to discover and use their spiritual gifts to strengthen the church. Learn about spiritual gifts that are listed in the Bible in Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-10, 28-30; and Ephesians 4:11-13.

RECOGNIZE AND CELEBRATE THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

One of your tasks will be to find ways within the community of faith to recognize and celebrate all the ministries of the laity. Here are some suggestions.

- Observe Laity Sunday, annually, usually the third Sunday of October.
- Invite community groups such as fire fighter, teachers, or city workers to worship and recognize their work as ministry.
- Be sensitive to interfaith issues in your hospitality.
- Recognize laity who have become lay speakers and announce training events for all laity.
- Prepare visual displays that celebrate the ministries of the laity within the walls of the church and in the world outside the building.
- Regularly promote special opportunities for service and mission projects.

MEET WITH THE PASTOR

You will want to meet regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the congregation and the needs for ministry both within and beyond the congregation. Cultivating a healthy relationship with the pastor is a vital part of your ministry, and being the healthy bridge between the pastor(s) and congregation is essential.

SERVE ON VARIOUS COMMITTEES

You will be busy! The lay leader is automatically a member of charge conference, church council, finance committee, nominations and leadership

development committee, and staff/pastor-parish relations committee. The lay leader represents and advocates for the laity in specific ways in each of these places. You can find out more about them by reading the Guidelines for each of these committees and their responsibilities.

The **charge conference** is the connecting link between the local church and the general Church and has general oversight of the church council. The charge conference is held annually at a time set by the district superintendent. The lay leader represents the laity by attending the charge conference and by submitting a report on the state of lay ministry in the congregation. The *Discipline* has provision for special sessions of the charge conference.

The **church council** is the group responsible for planning and coordinating the administrative and programmatic life of the congregation. The church council includes members of the church staff and laity who chair committees and task forces. Your role as lay leader at the church council is to bring a broad perspective of laity of all ages as you listen to the plans for implementing the mission and vision of the congregation. Ask questions and represent various constituencies. Be prepared to interpret the plans and decisions of the church council to the laity of the congregation.

The **finance committee** prepares an annual budget for the congregation to submit to the church council for review and adoption. The committee is responsible together with the stewardship committee (if you have one) for developing and implementing a plan for raising funds for the budget adopted by the church council. The committee administers the funds according to the instructions of the church council and guides the work of the church treasurer and financial secretary. Your role in this committee is similar to your role in the church council. You are to represent all the laity as the budget is prepared and as funds are administered and to interpret the finances of the church to the congregation.

The **nominations and leadership development committee** identifies, develops, deploys, evaluates, and monitors the Christian spiritual leadership of the congregation. As a representative of laity, your role is to bring suggestions to the committee of people who might lead particular ministries, encourage the committee to provide leadership training for the congregation, and assist in monitoring and evaluating congregational needs for leadership. Remember that leadership development and deployment is dynamic, always changing as ministry needs change and as church members join or leave the congregation. Before 2000, this group was called the nominating committee. The new name better describes what they do.

The **staff/pastor-parish relations committee** reflects on the work of the pastor(s) and staff and assists them in assessing their gifts and setting priorities as they lead and serve the church. Members of this committee **other than the lay leader and lay member to annual conference** are divided into three classes with a new class elected each year for a three-year term. This committee meets at least quarterly or more often when requested. These meetings are closed sessions and meeting discussions are to be kept **confidential**. See ¶258.2 in the *Book of Discipline* for more information on this committee.

STUDY

It will be important for you to continue to study and attend training to understand the church's reason for existence and the types of ministry that will fulfill the church's mission faithfully and effectively. Your attendance models the importance of continuing education for other church leaders. In addition, you have the opportunity through district and conference channels to inform the laity of educational opportunities provided by the annual conference and to participate in lay training. A lay leader is urged to become a certified lay speaker in order to increase skills for leadership.

ASSIST THE COUNCIL

Your role in helping the council with the internal workings of the church is already obvious. Your role extends beyond the immediate boundaries of the church building into the community. You can assist the council to look for and take advantage of opportunities to interpret the mission and ministry of the congregation to the community. In so doing, you can better attend to the unique ministry and mission needs in your community.

District and Conference Lay Leaders

The lay leader of a local church has counterparts in the district and annual conference who can help with the job. The district lay leader works in partnership with the district superintendent and is charged with training local church lay leaders; fostering awareness of the role of laity in congregations, workplaces, homes, and communities; and supporting and enabling lay participation in the planning and decision making of the district. The district lay leader relates to other organized groups of laity within the district, such as lay speaking ministries, United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Youth.

The annual conference lay leader works in partnership with the bishop and represents the interests of laity. The conference lay leader relates to organized groups of laity to assist with planning, implementation, and evaluation

of ministries of the laity. The conference lay leader is an advocate for lay ministries and also promotes the role of laity in the annual conference session.

FOR REFLECTION

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me (Matthew 25:35-36).

New Hope United Methodist Church had a plan to cultivate laypersons to assist the pastor with hospital visits. A group of interested laity received training in hospital visitation, but the program never got off the ground. Why? Some members of the congregation reportedly wanted to be visited only by the pastor, not by a layperson.

- How could a lay leader have been an advocate in the congregation for the group of trained and available lay visitors?
- How could the lay leader have been an advocate in the congregation for the pastor?
- How might this Scripture passage help the lay leader interpret ministry opportunities to the congregation? What other passages could be helpful?
- What methods could the pastor and lay leader employ to bring Scripture and the church's mission to the forefront regarding shared clergy/laity ministry?

The Role of the Lay Member of Annual Conference

The *Discipline* requires that the lay member of annual conference shall have been a professing member in good standing of The United Methodist Church for at least one year. The lay member to annual conference:

- participates in the annual conference sessions and votes on all matters except those pertaining to ministerial relations.
- reports to the congregation in the week following the annual conference session and to the church council at its next meeting after the close of the conference session. The *Discipline* states that the report to the church council must be within three months of the close of the session. Go to “Communication Tools for Lay Members to Annual Conference” and also “The Things I Learned at Annual Conference” at <http://www.gbod.org/laity>.

- interprets, with the pastor, the actions of the annual conference session to the congregation.
- serves as a member of the staff/pastor-parish relations committee, church council, and finance committee.

You and the other lay members to annual conference will be serving with an equal number of clergy members. This is an opportunity to listen and learn from each other. Annual conference gives you an opportunity to experience a greater variety of God’s human creation than you may experience in your local congregation. You have the opportunity to meet and work with people from different size churches; various cultures; urban, rural, and suburban congregations; and a wide variety of professions, life experience, and economic levels. Take advantage of this opportunity by getting acquainted with people sitting near you. Celebrate the diversity of The United Methodist Church.

Annual conference covers a time span of four or five days, and most annual conferences in the United States meet in May or June. The bishop occasionally calls extra sessions if there is emergent business. Your pastor or district superintendent can inform you about meeting dates, or you can check the annual conference website.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE: TWO MEANINGS!

Annual conference is a unique geographic area of The United Methodist Church. Each annual conference is assigned a bishop (sometimes called the episcopal leader) and elects a conference lay leader. Shared resources (including itinerant clergy) and policies connect all local churches within the annual conference.

Annual conference is the annual meeting of the lay and clergy members of the geographical area. This meeting sets directions and budget for the area, and the bishop appoints clergy members to their place of service for the next year.

Responsibilities of the Lay Member

The lay member to annual conference has many responsibilities, some before, others during, and others following the session. If you are employed, you will have to take time from work to attend some of these gatherings. When the dates are announced, take care to plan with your employer for the necessary days of vacation.

PREPARE FOR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Study the pre-conference journal and materials that are submitted for action by the annual conference. These materials may be mailed to you several weeks before annual conference or may be available on the annual conference website. To prepare, you should:

- attend any pre-conference district meetings and training sessions.
- understand your annual conference process for conducting business. For example, some conferences operate with Robert's Rules of Order (parliamentary procedure); other conferences operate with discernment processes and consensus. Your pastor or annual conference office can help you prepare before your first session. There is a summary of parliamentary procedure terminology as well as some general consensus and discernment information at <http://www.gbod.org/laity>. (Look for "Robert's Rules of Order...")
- develop a general knowledge of the *Book of Discipline* (see information at the beginning of this Guideline).
- meet with the pastor, lay leader, and congregation members to discuss issues that will be a part of the annual conference business.

PARTICIPATE DURING ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- Attend the annual conference laity session.
- Participate in all sessions dealing with annual conference business. During business sessions, you will be asked to vote on legislation, resolutions, reports, and budget. Annual conferences have different processes for holding discussions and bringing these issues to a vote, so you will want to talk with others to prepare for the process used at your conference session.
- Listen to proceedings in order to make informed decisions when voting. You do not have to vote the same as other members from your congregation, and you may abstain if you do not feel qualified to vote on a particular issue. You must hold in mind the tension between the ministry of the Church in the world and the interests of your own congregation. Sometimes you might choose to vote for the "greater good" on issues that may (or may not) have a direct impact on your congregation and issues that may even increase your local church budget. Examples might be an increase in budget for mission work, work to curb violence that is not part of your local community, a position on a social issue on which all members of your congregation do not agree. In these instances, you have a role to explain and educate your congregation about the issues.
- Participate in all worship experiences (opening worship, early morning or evening chapel, ordination, memorial service, and others). You will have opportunities to experience several worship styles, hear a variety of music groups and preachers, and join in new ways to worship God.

- Attend plenary and Bible study sessions. Annual conference sessions can be an excellent way to grow spiritually.
- Explore the resource display to gather information and ideas for ministry in your congregation. During fellowship events, at display tables, and in casual conversation you will learn about The United Methodist Church in new ways. Participate fully with anticipation of new ways God might come to you.

A spiritual discipline for conference is journaling! Write your reflections about proceedings, discussions, worship experiences, special ceremonies, music, and so on as preparation for later sharing with your congregation. Keep an accurate record of the votes taken that will have impact on the congregation's finances, operations, and ministry.

SERVE AFTER ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- Share information with your congregation about your experience. Remember that the report is to be given within three months after the annual conference meeting.
- Search websites and general church news sources and your annual conference newspaper for information to share with your congregation throughout the year.

General Conference

Every four years all of the annual conferences, along with the central and missionary conferences, meet together to review and enact new legislation or approve new initiatives of The United Methodist Church. This conference is held in the years divisible by four (2000, 2004, 2008, 2012). The year before each annual conference elects lay and clergy delegates to represent them at General Conference. Each annual conference has slightly different preparation and requirements of potential delegates in these elections. Check with your annual conference regarding the process to follow.

This is no easy task! It takes two weeks of your time that does not include the meetings held in your annual conference prior to General Conference. The General Conference reimburses for travel, lodging, and meals but this may not meet all of your expenses. There is a huge amount of reading required and discernment needed in order to be prepared to serve in this role. **However** it is a unique experience of Christian conferencing on a grand scale.

FOR REFLECTION

Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress (1 Timothy 4:15).

One new lay member to annual conference discovered that there was much more to conference than she had expected. The reports she had heard from other attendees gave her the impression that annual conference might be boring and more like a burden than a privilege. When she attended annual conference personally, she discovered inspiring pageantry, worship, and music. Annual conference had a spiritual aspect that had never been mentioned. Members engaged one another in Christian practices, not only in worship but also in the celebration of and decisions about their ministries.

- As you review and anticipate the different ways you will participate during annual conference, be thinking of how you can relate those different aspects of annual conference so that others can understand the whole experience.
- Think of various Christian practices (prayer, corporate worship, small group devotions, Communion, Christian conferencing, service and other acts of justice, compassion and works of mercy, and so on). How might you describe your own experiences through the lens of one or more Christian practices?

Improving Your Leadership

Preparation for leadership is not just accomplished by taking a course or reading a book. It is a lifelong process of study, prayer, and discernment. It includes developing your administrative skills, communication skills, people skills, and spiritual practices. Leadership development is a continuous improvement process.

Servant Leadership

A servant leader has certain characteristics. Jesus told the disciples, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25-28, NIV). When you recognize the worth of others, you realize that when you perform even the most menial of tasks, you exhibit the qualities of a servant leader.

All persons who are called to Christian spiritual leadership are called to servanthood. This is the kind of leadership modeled by our leader, Jesus. When you lead by serving, you empower others in the congregation. Your leadership is lived out in a variety of ways. Sometimes you are giving directions or leading a meeting. Many times you are listening to what others say in verbal and non-verbal ways. Other times you are encouraging others to take action. The best way to check your servant leadership is to ask, “Are those being served growing in their faith and in their own skills as a leader?”

FOR REFLECTION

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you (John 13:14-15, NIV).

Jesus modeled servant leadership when he washed the disciples' feet. And he told them to follow his example. Jesus, God in the flesh, was willing to serve others by performing a task usually done by a slave or other persons of low social status. We who profess to be followers of Jesus are called to attend to needs rather than to conform to social roles. Jesus taught and modeled that this way of leading glorifies God.

- Are you willing to serve as Christ did?
- What does it mean when leaders in the church today does the work of servants?
- What might you be called to do as lay leader or lay member that seems not to conform to your sense of identity or social situation? How will you address that situation?

Spiritual Gifts

God gives each believer certain abilities and gifts to prepare her or him for ministry. These gifts enable us to make unique contributions to the church, our society, and the world. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” Just as we were saved by grace, so God prepares us by grace and empowers us for meaningful service.

All spiritual gifts are valuable and equally important, according to 1 Corinthians 12. Spiritual gifts are truly from God and are to be used for God's glory. Remember that natural talents are not necessarily the same as spiritual gifts, but any talents and skills can also be used to glorify God. Various spiritual gifts are listed three places in the New Testament: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 27-28; and Ephesians 4:11-13.

As you begin and continue in leadership, you will want to:

- use a spiritual gifts assessment tool to discover your gifts
- discover the area of ministry you are passionate about
- seek out ways to use your spiritual gifts
- thank God as you receive and/or recognize your spiritual gifts.

As you (lay leader) work with the committee on nominations and leadership development, encourage them to organize spiritual gifts workshops for the congregation in order to help members discover their gifts and passion for ministry. Resources are suggested at the end of this Guideline.

FOR REFLECTION

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it (Ephesians 4:7, NIV).

As a congregational leader, your biggest challenge may be to encourage others to discover and use their spiritual gifts. God's presence is surely manifest when we see the gifts of the Spirit in others. To encourage others, you might begin by noticing and naming the gifts you think you see in others. Ask God's guidance in knowing when to speak of spiritual gifts.

- What gifts have you observed in others, including your pastor?
- What are the ways you can help others recognize their gifts?
- How will you affirm and celebrate these gifts?

Lay Speaking Ministries

Paul prepared many years for his ministry (Galatians 2:1), and we must continue to prepare for ours. In 1 Corinthians 9:25, Paul reminds us, "Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever" (NIV). Lay speaking ministry is a United Methodist system for lay leadership development. The basic and advanced courses are designed to help persons develop their skills in leadership, communication, and care-giving. Participating in this training as it is offered helps you build relationships with other lay leaders. In this way you increase opportunity for yourself and for your congregation to be in ministry with others, and your credibility as a leader is enhanced.

According to the *Discipline*, a lay speaker is a professing member of a local church or charge conference who is “ready and desirous to serve the Church and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church.” A lay speaker “has received specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and care-giving ministries” (§266). A lay speaker can and does provide leadership in a congregation. Sometimes this means serving as the chairman of a committee or a project; other times it means supporting others; sometimes the leadership is behind-the-scenes doing work necessary to complete a task or support a ministry.

Local church lay speakers serve only in their local churches. Certified lay speakers serve in their own churches, in other churches, and through district or conference projects and programs. Information on lay speaking courses may be obtained through your district director of lay speaking ministry, your district lay leader, district superintendent, conference director of lay speaking ministry, or through the annual conference office. Lay speaking print resources are available from Discipleship Resources. (See Resources.)

THE HISTORY OF LAY SPEAKING

Lay speaking ministry has existed in The United Methodist Church almost from the beginning. There are references to “exhorters” as early as 1746. In the *Book of Discipline* (1948) both exhorter and lay speaker are listed. The duties of exhorters were given as holding meetings for prayer and exhortation whenever opportunity was afforded. This was subject to the direction of the pastor. The duties of lay speaker were the same but included conducting services of worship. In 1956, the *Book of Discipline* only referred to lay speaker, and in the index under *exhorter* it said “(see lay speaker).”

The understanding of the role and function of lay speakers was expanded in 1992. Lay speakers were to witness to their faith in the areas of ministry by “spoken communication, church and community leadership, and care-giving ministries.” Now lay speakers no longer just fill pulpits as needed, but they are to be in ministry in every facet of the life of the Church.

WHY BECOME A LAY SPEAKER?

Lay leaders and lay members of annual conference are encouraged to participate in the Lay Speaking program as a way to increase and enhance their leadership in the Church. Choose from among the Advanced courses to gain a solid understanding for leading a particular ministry and for growing in faith. You can help other lay persons develop their spiritual leadership by:

- informing members of the congregation about lay speaking courses
- encouraging participation in lay speaking ministries
- keeping track of courses taken by congregational members
- helping participants in lay speaking ministry to find ways to use their skills.

Certified Lay Minister

On occasion, a bishop may assign a certified lay speaker to serve a church under the direction of a district superintendent or a supervising elder. Lay speakers are dedicated to leading, communicating, and caring. They are willing to submit to the *Discipline* and obtain required training. In 2004 General Conference approved a new lay ministry position—certified lay minister. This legislation was intended to equip and support certified lay speakers who had been assigned to serve as pastoral leader in a small congregation. For more information on certified lay ministry go to <http://www.gbod.org/laity>.

FOR REFLECTION

Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing. . . . And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them
(1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14).

Review the wide variety of lay speaking courses and consider how they might help develop leadership in your congregation. The title *lay speaker* has often been associated with preaching, yet many people do not feel called or gifted to “fill a pulpit.”

- What are some ways you can challenge yourself and others to grow in their faith and service?
- How do you (or can you) “build up each other” including the “idlers,” the “faint hearted,” and the “weak”? What reasons might there be for other church members to be among the “idlers, faint hearted, and weak” and how can you, as lay leader or lay member, employ the resources of the church to be in ministry with others?
- In what ways can you serve as a lay person other than by preaching?

Spiritual Disciplines

“O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises... Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days.” John Wesley

John Wesley wrote these words to an itinerant preacher to encourage him in his devotional life and to stress the importance of a life focused on devotion to God. In this way, a relationship is cultivated with God. In sermons and in letters, John Wesley encouraged everyone to practice what he called the means of grace, those practices that open the way for God’s grace in our lives. He believed these practices should be a part of daily life. He did not see the disciplines as Church laws but as the way of discipleship. John Wesley believed that the spiritual disciplines were more than just Bible study and prayer.

Today, Christian leaders must cultivate their relationship with God in order to lead others in spiritual growth. Spiritual leadership comes only from the overflow of our relationship with God. Without daily renewal and guidance, leaders can go astray from God’s purposes and often suffer burnout.

WESLEYAN MEANS OF GRACE

Wesley talked about the practices that keep us close and in right relationship with God. He called these practices the means of grace. They are spiritual practices that keep us centered in Christ and help us to maintain “holiness of heart and life.”

- **Prayer:** according to Wesley, is “the grand means of drawing near to God.”
- **Bible Reading:** worshipful reading that is different than reading to prepare a lesson or sermon.
- **Fasting:** practicing various forms of self-denial in order to give priority to spiritual matters.
- **Holy Communion or Eucharist:** Wesley urged Communion as often as possible.
- **Christian conferencing:** conversation in which we remember God is present for discernment and guidance.
- **Worship:** praising and thanking God for who God is and what God has done.
- **Family devotions:** personal devotions outside of the public worship settings.
- **Works of piety:** attention to acts of compassion and devotion.
- **Works of mercy:** attention to acts of justice and service.

ACCOUNTABILITY—COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP

One way to maintain this practice of spiritual disciplines or means of grace is to join or form a covenant discipleship group. Covenant discipleship is not a new concept. It began with the Methodist class meeting—the small group meetings from early Methodism. John Wesley described the Methodist societies and classes in this way; “a company of men (and women) ‘having the form, and seeking the power of godliness.’” In weekly meetings the members of the group help each other become more faithful in their discipleship. They “watch over one another in love.”

The General Rule of Discipleship found in the *Book of Discipline* ¶ 1118.2a, states; “To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” (See Resources for other helps for leader development, spiritual formation, and spiritual growth.)

FOR REFLECTION

“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).

Our words and our actions are the direct result of what we put into our minds. It is like the “Garbage in—Garbage out” principle in opposite! Put in faithful, excellent, just, and honorable things—such as Scripture and prayer and Christian community—and out comes what is pure, commendable, and worthy of praise: ministry in daily life, meaningful worship, and a deeper relationship with God.

- What can you do to avoid putting “garbage” into your mind? What form of “garbage” is a temptation to you?
- What results in your life have come from practicing spiritual disciplines? How have you seen those disciplines change and grow from your earliest efforts? What practices and processes have brought you to where you are now?
- As a leader, how will you encourage others to pursue the practice of spiritual disciplines in their lives?

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING / LEADING MEETINGS

As a leader in your congregation, you will have the opportunity to lead meetings. It is important that we remember whom it is we are serving and whose work is to be done. Using a Christian conferencing format, consensus and discernment is a way to keep Christ at the forefront of your meetings.

If you think about tithing your meeting time then **at least** six minutes of every hour should be set aside to honor Christ through prayer, singing, and Biblical reflection. Think about ways that the atmosphere of your meetings could be changed by taking just a short time to include some of the means of grace. For example, light a candle to remind everyone of the presence of the light of Christ with you. Reserve an empty chair to represent Jesus' presence among you or use a symbol of the Holy Spirit, or a pitcher, bowl, and towel (signs of servanthood) before you as a reminder of your roles in Christ's church. Sharing prayer concerns at the beginning of the meeting can help members focus on the business at hand rather than on their problems at home, work, or school. Take time during your meetings to lift decisions in prayer before voting or getting consensus.

Discernment. Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your decisions. Discernment is listening for God's call or will—seeing the heart of the matter through spiritual eyes. Discernment is not new to the church. In 1 Samuel 16 the prophet Samuel discerns God's will regarding who will be anointed king. Acts 1:12-26; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 12:10; and 1 John 4:1 also speak of discerning God's will.

Consensus. Christian or holy conferencing is the manner in which we govern our lives together—it calls us to build each other up, not tear them down. In consensus we work together for the best possible decision for the group. The foundation for consensus rests in trust, respect, unity of purpose, non-violence, self-empowerment, cooperation, conflict resolution, commitment to the group, active participation, access to power, and patience. With the consensus model:

- Every interest is heard and understood.
- Everyone accepts the outcome—they may not agree with the decision but they agree to stand aside and not block the process.
- All seek alternatives that address everyone's concerns and interests.
- There is an obligation not to stymie, but to help the group meet your interests and needs.
- There is an obligation to continue to try to meet the interests and needs of those who agree to stand aside.
- There is group ownership of the decision.
- If a vote is necessary to record numbers it can certainly be taken after consensus has been reached.

Mutual Invitation. Consider using a mutual invitation model during your meetings. This method involves an initial speaker presenting the agenda item or concern—speaking to it and then inviting someone else to speak.

That person can either speak to the item or pass, but invites another person to speak. All persons have a chance to pass or speak in this model so that all have a chance to participate in the discussion.

Inclusivity. When staffing committees, be inclusive in the representation. Include youth, young adults, older adults, men and women, and people of diverse ethnicities and abilities.

FOR REFLECTION

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another. . . .” (Hebrews 10:24-25, NIV).

- As a leader, what changes can you make in the way meetings are held in your church?
- What difference do you think it might make if all meetings were times of Christian conferencing?

Working Together in Ministry

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

You have been chosen! Because of your relationship with Jesus, you belong to a “royal priesthood,” sometimes referred to as the “priesthood of all believers.” These phrases; “chosen people,” “royal priesthood,” and “holy nation” are all ways to refer to Christians as a people belonging to God.” Though “priesthood” uses the image of ordination, the other images clearly indicate that this “holy nation” unites us in Christ and connects us to God so that clergy and laity alike join together to bring others into a relationship with God. ***We are ALL called to serve God in the priestly work of ministry.***

Paragraph 130 of the *Book of Discipline* talks about The Unity of Ministry: “There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidences of God’s grace in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16). The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another. All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in **mutual interdependence** and to be guided by the Spirit into the truth that frees and the love that reconciles” (emphasis added).

The *Book of Discipline* states that the mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Each congregation must discern the way to accomplish that mission in its unique setting. And each pastor and lay leader must decide how they will share the work as, together, they guide the congregation in accomplishing its mission.

New Ways to Work

This way of being in ministry together is not new. It was practiced by the first-century church with overwhelming success in making disciples for Jesus Christ! It is a clarion call for clergy and laity to work together in ways that have been forgotten or disregarded in the past few centuries.

LEADERSHIP COVENANT

One way to work together is to establish a covenant between you (pastor and lay leader) regarding how you will work together to carry out your tasks and responsibilities.

LEADERSHIP COVENANT SAMPLE

Between _____ (pastor)
and
_____ (lay leader)

- Description of Local Mission and Ministry Area (Local Church, District, Annual Conference). Remind one another of the history of the area; when and how established, distinctions, purpose. Write a 2-3 sentence synopsis of your discussion.
- Roles (who does what)
- Expectations (Learning actions, time lines, shared vision, goals)
- Accountability (Participation in covenant group; spiritual self care such as days apart)
- Evaluation (outcomes based on goals)
- Covenant Review Plan, including the date for review, how it will be done, and what will be assessed
- Plan for improvement
- Celebration of accomplishments

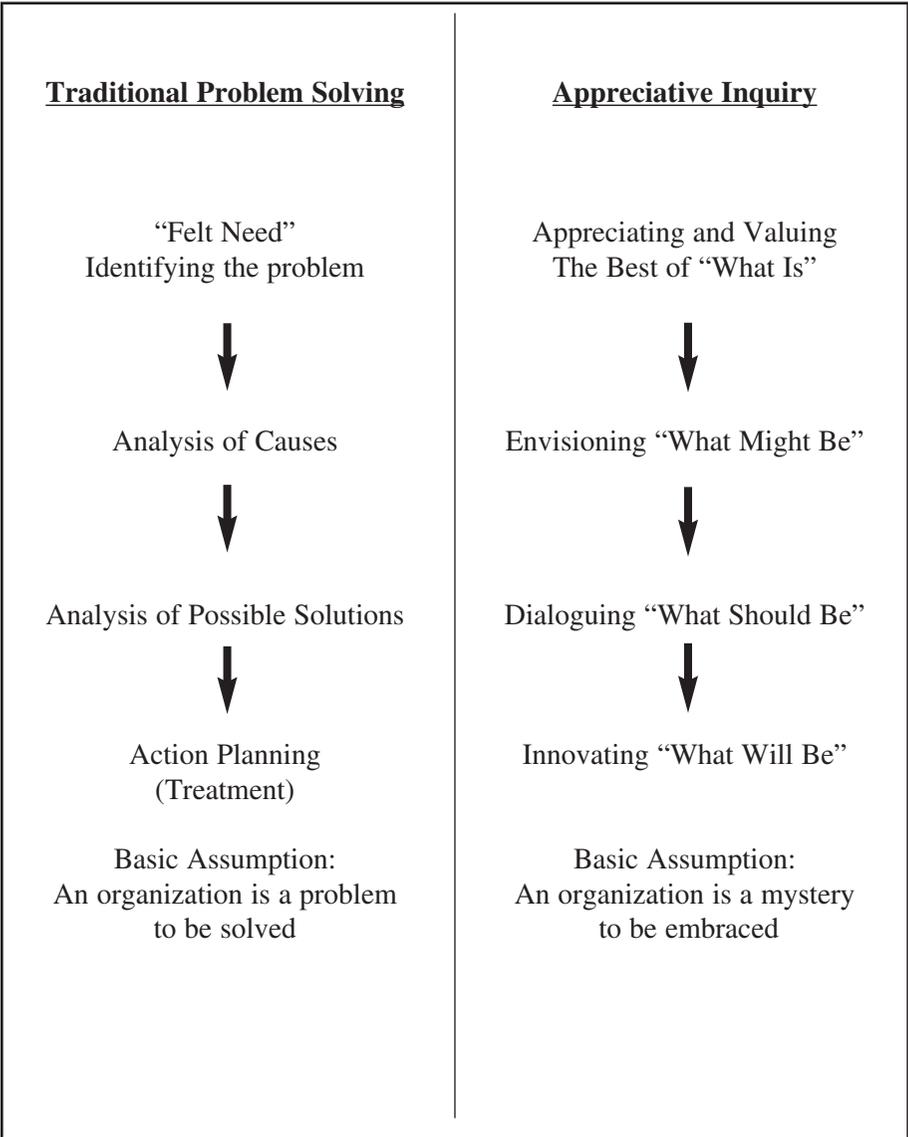
Leading Change

As lay leader/lay member of annual conference, you have responsibility to work with other leaders to guide your congregation through change. Change itself is not bad or good. It is part of life and growth. Congregations will welcome some changes, such as the need to add classes for new people and unexpected gifts to the budget. Some changes are not even noticed for a while, such as routine maintenance and a slow decline of Sunday school classes. Other changes are controversial and meet strong resistance—for example, a need to move the congregation or to add new worship forms or to become more welcoming. One of your leadership tasks is to work in partnership with other leaders to guide your congregation toward effective ministry with the current generation. The lay leader and pastor guide the congregation through appropriate change.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

One of the resources that can help you in this process is called Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This process focuses on the positive things that have occurred or are occurring and builds on those.

AI suggests that you look for what is working well in your congregation. What memories do you have of times when effective mission and ministry were happening? It bases the momentum for change on those high moments rather than what is not working right now. We have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future when we carry forward the good parts of the past. AI takes the focus off the problem and uses the positive energy from remembering the good to focus on what could be reality now and in the future. (See the Resources pages for material on Appreciative Inquiry.)



From *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Sue Annis Hammond, (Thin Book Publishing Co. 1998. ISBN 0-9665373-1-9)

Skills for Shared Ministry

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

One of the most difficult things to do is to listen. *Active listening requires the full attention of everyone involved.* Without listening, no communication takes place. The lay leader/lay member of annual conference listens to many different voices. In your role, you will hear from members of the congregation and from the pastor and staff. Some of these people may be angry or confused; some might have new ideas for ministry; and some want to tell you how they understand things. You may need to ask some quiet people for their opinions in interviews and surveys. Your active listening skills will be a key to your effectiveness as a leader of the congregation.

Body language is an important part of communicating. People often reveal more about their thoughts by their actions than by their voices. Be alert to what people are saying with their hands, eyes, heads, arms, and legs.

A CHECKLIST FOR GOOD COMMUNICATION

- Encourage the other person to stay in the present, the here-and-now. Stay away from the “we used to do it” scenario. The past is a foundation of strength and learning on which to build for the present and the future.
- Begin statements with “I believe” or “I feel,” and encourage others to do the same.
- Ask what the other person is feeling, if appropriate. Body language is a clue. Be aware of your own feelings as well. When there is strong feeling, take time to understand what the other person is experiencing. If necessary, take a “time out” to pray.
- Repeat what you hear to ensure accuracy. Ask questions for information.
- Build trust by finding what you can agree on, then move on to any differences.
- Accept or acknowledge; do not judge. This does not necessarily mean reaching an agreement. It does mean that you are attempting to hear and understand accurately, regardless of your own level of assent.
- Suggest opportunities for in-depth conversation (at home, on a walk, at lunch, and so forth).
- Provide a platform for sharing (for example, an “I wish” card in the Sunday bulletin).

CONFLICT AND MEDIATION SKILLS

Turn problems into possibilities. Conflict is simply two different ideas in the same place at the same time. Conflict is the result of differences that produce tension. Conflict is normal in communities and families. *The important part of conflict management is bringing those conflicts into the open where they can be clarified.*

The JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation exists to prepare and assist United Methodists to engage in conflict constructively in ways that strive for justice, reconciliation, resource preservation, and restoration of community in the Church and in the world. The Center challenges leaders to prepare themselves for conflict transformation and then to engage others in transforming conflict. The Center summarizes the skills and attitudes needed for transforming conflict in its ten-point “Engage Conflict Well.” This summary and other helpful material is listed here and is available for free by downloading from <http://www.justpeaceumc.org>.

Prepare for Conflict Transformation

1. **Create a well, not a wall.** Create in yourself an openness to conflict as part of God’s creation, an opportunity for growth and revelation.
2. **Allow the well to fill.** Open your heart and mind to God’s love, as incarnate in Jesus, reducing your anxiety and drawing you toward reconciliation and being a reconciler.
3. **Be well prepared.** Be prepared to listen for understanding, speak the truth in love, use your imagination, and be forgiving.
4. **Be well.** Accept forgiveness and healing so that you can be a mediative presence in the conflict.

Engage Others in Conflict Transformation

1. **Create a common well together.** Together analyze the conflict and design a collaborative process where everyone can participate and be responsible.
2. **Share the well.** Create a relational covenant that clarifies and affirms how everyone will be treated in the process.
3. **Drink deeply together.** Elicit stories of peak experiences, grace-filled moments and dreams of a preferred future.
4. **Let it flow.** Move from positions to interests and needs, generating options to reach consensus. Move from retribution to restoration by healing the harm, affirming accountability, and creating a new relationship.
5. **Be well together.** Celebrate each step toward healing and communion. Be prayerful, persistent, and patient.

Resources

**Indicates our top picks

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

- *The Academy for Spiritual Formation* is an experience of disciplined Christian community that emphasizes holistic spirituality—nurturing body, mind, and spirit. The program is for laity and clergy who hunger for deep spiritual experiences. There is a 2-year Academy experience or a 5-day Academy. See <http://www.upperroom.org/academy>.
- *The Walk to Emmaus* is a three-day experience exploring Christianity as a lifestyle. The name of this program comes from the Luke story of the risen Christ appearing to disciples who were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). The Emmaus weekend is highly structured and is designed to strengthen and renew the Christian faith. For more information, go to www.upperroom.org/Emmaus.

LEADER RENEWAL AND TRAINING

The General Board of Discipleship provides services and resources to enhance the ministry of congregations and individuals. GBOD provides consultation, training, research, print and electronic resources to Church leaders. For more information and free resources, explore the website at www.gbod.org and www.gbod.org/laity. An annual directory is available at annual conference or by calling (toll free) 1-877-899-2780, ext. 1793.

Many conferences and districts offer regular or occasional training and renewal events. Contact your district office and ask to be put on the mailing list for information. Your annual conference may sponsor mission trips, training events, and retreats for Church leaders. Find out if your annual conference has a website or regular mailing so you can be informed. These resources, print and electronic, offer materials for Church leadership. You will find recommendations and links on the General Board of Discipleship website.

GENERAL RESOURCES

- *Holy Bible*—there are many translations
- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2008*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2008. ISBN 978-0-687-64785-9).
- *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989. ISBN pew edition blue 978-0-687-33044-7) and *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (ISBN 978-0-687-03572-4).
- *The Interpreter* magazine (United Methodist Communications) The offi-

cial program magazine for United Methodist leaders. Seven copies are provided free to church leaders designated by the pastor.

- *What Every Leader Needs to Know* (series). (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004).
- *The United Methodist Primer, 2005 Revised Edition*, by Chester E. Custer (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005. ISBN 978-0-881-77-359-0).

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

- *Leading Beyond the Walls: Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched*, by Adam Hamilton and Lyle Schaller (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-687-06415-1).
- *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of The United Methodist Church*, by Thomas Edward Frank (Nashville: Abingdon Press, Updated Edition, 2006. ISBN 978-0-687-33531-2).
- *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, by Robert K. Greenleaf (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-809-1-05540-3).
- *Who Moved My Cheese: An Amazing Way to Deal With Change in Your Work and in Your Life*, by Spencer Johnson (New York: Penguin Group, 2000. ISBN 978-0-39914-446-2).

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

- *Each One a Minister*, by William J. Carter (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-881-77-375-0).
- *Equipped for Every Good Work*, by Dan R. Dick and Barbara Miller (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2001. ISBN 978-0-881-77-352-1).
- *Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts*, by Charles V. Bryant (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1991. ISBN 978-0-835-80-633-6).
- *Your Spiritual Gifts Inventory from Rediscovering Our Spiritual Gifts*, by Charles V. Bryant (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1997. ISBN 978-0-835-8-0819-4).

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

- *Keeping in Touch*, by Carol F. Krau. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999. ISBN 978-0-881-77-248-7).
- *Spiritual Preparation for Christian Leadership*, by E. Glenn Hinson (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1999. ISBN 978-0-835-8-0888-0).
- *The Upper Room Dictionary of Spiritual Formation*, by Keith Beasley-Topliffe (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2003. ISBN 978-0-835-8-0993-1).
- *Eight Life-Enriching Practices of United Methodists*, by Henry H. Knight III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001. ISBN 978-0-687-08734-1).
- *Accountable Discipleship; Living in God's Household*, by Steven W. Manskar (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000. ISBN 978-0-881-77-339-2).

- ***Opening Ourselves to Grace; Basic Christian Practices*, Produced by Mark Purushotham (DVD available from Discipleship Resources, 2007. ISBN 978-0-881-77-508-2).
- Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition*, by Steve Harper (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1995. ISBN 978-0-835-8-0740-1).
- ***This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*, by Gayle Carlton Felton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005. ISBN 978-0-881-77-457-3).
- www.gbod.org/smallgroup/cd

CHRISTIAN CONFERENCING

- Concepts in Leadership I*, by Brian Jackson and Sandy Zeigler, (download) from www.upperroom.org/bookstore, DRPDF7
- ***Leading in Prayer*, by Mary O. Benedict (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004. ISBN 978-0-881-77-492-4).
- ***Let the Whole Church Say Amen*, by Laurence Hull Stookey (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001. ISBN 978-0-687-09077-8).

CHANGE/CONFLICT

- Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change*, by David Cooperrider (New York: Amacom, 2008. ISBN 978-1-576-75-493-1).
- The Power of Appreciative Inquiry*, by Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2003. ISBN 978-1-576-75-2265-5).
- The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, by Sue Annis Hammond (Thin Book Publishing Co. 1998. ISBN 978-0-966-5373-1-49).
- Sacred Acts, Holy Change: Faithful Diversity and Practical Transformation*, by Eric H.F. Law (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002. ISBN 978-0-827-234-52-9).
- ***Inclusion: Making Room for Grace*, by Eric H.F. Law (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000. ISBN 978-0-827-2-1620-4).
- www.justpeaceumc.org

LAY SPEAKING COURSES AND LAY MINISTRY RESOURCES

- Lay Ministry Training Resources*, Catalog (Call Discipleship Resources 1-800-972-0433 to order.)

Learning and Leading courses are a new format for Lay Speaking Ministries courses. They are designed to be used in many venues (small groups, Sunday school classes, etc.) to equip all laity as they grow in their discipleship and ministry. See the catalog listed above.

- Director of Lay Leadership Development—General Board of Discipleship, 877-899-2780 ext. 7179