



G U I D E L I N E S

Christian Education

Plan for Lifelong Faith Formation





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Diana L. Hynson,
Revised by Carol F. Krau

Discipleship Ministries

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

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Blessed to Be a Blessing

If you are reading this Guideline, you have said yes to servant leadership in your church. You are blessed to be a blessing. What does that mean?

By virtue of our baptism by water and the Spirit, God calls all Christians to faithful discipleship, to grow to maturity in faith (see Ephesians 4). The United Methodist Church expresses that call in our shared mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, or the *Discipline*, ¶120). Each local congregation and community of faith lives out that call in response to its own context—the wonderful and unique combination of God-given human and material resources with the needs of the community, within and beyond the congregation.

The work of servant leaders—your work—is to open a way for God to work through you and the resources available to you in a particular ministry area, for you are about God’s work. As stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), servant leaders are entrusted with the precious and vital task of managing and using God’s gifts in the ongoing work of transformation.

In The United Methodist Church, we envision transformation occurring through a cycle of discipleship (see the *Discipline*, ¶122). With God’s help and guidance, we

- reach out and receive people into the body of Christ,
- help people relate to Christ through their unique gifts and circumstances,
- nurture and strengthen people in their relationships with God and with others,
- send transformed people out into the world to lead transformed and transforming lives,
- continue to reach out, relate, nurture, and send disciples...

Every ministry area and group, from finance to missions, engages in all aspects of this cycle. This Guideline will help you see how that is true for the ministry area or group you now lead. When you begin to consider all of the work you do as ministry to fulfill God’s mission through your congregation, each task, report, and conversation becomes a step toward transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Invite Christ into the process to guide your ministry. You are doing powerful and wonderful work. Allow missteps to become learning opportunities; rejoice in success. Fill your work with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

God blesses you with gifts, skills, and experience. You are a blessing when you allow God to work through you to make disciples and transform the world. Thank you.

(Find additional help in the “Resources” section at the end of this Guideline, in *The Book of Discipline*, and through <http://www.umc.org>.)

Begin with the End in Mind

As we plan for ministry, the starting point is our mission: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world (see ¶120 in *The Book of Discipline*). The process for fulfilling our mission is described in ¶122:

We make disciples as we:

- proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome and gather into the body of Christ;
- lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley's Christian conferencing;
- send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.

To better remember and understand this process, it might help to think in terms of H.O.P.E.:

- **H**ospitality (seeking and welcoming)
- **O**ffering Christ (inviting people to explore their faith and commit their lives to God through Jesus Christ)
- **P**urpose (nurturing people in living their faith through the means of grace)
- **E**ngagement (sending people into the world to address the needs of our communities)

We live in a world desperate for hope, for purpose, and for meaning. This core process describes how disciples come together for worship, learning, and reflection, and then go to live as Christ's representatives in their families, workplaces, schools, and communities.

The core process describes the elements needed in an intentional plan for discipleship. Ask yourself: "What is our plan for making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? How do we interpret our plan to our congregation? How will we offer hope?"

The Purpose of Christian Education

Education is as natural a part of life as breathing. From the day we are born, we are learning. As babies, we explore our fingers and toes. We are taught our ABCs and how to tie our shoes. We discover what we like to eat and what we don't. We learn to approach the world from a standpoint of trust or mistrust. And we go on from there. Life is about learning, growing, adapting, and learning some more. It follows, then, that we must be taught the ABCs of our faith. That, simply stated, is the role of the ministry of Christian education, although there is more.

Form, Inform, and Transform

All of life's experiences serve to shape us into the people we are and will become. The baby who learns basic trust is formed in a very different way from the child who doesn't. The teen who easily learns life's tasks has a distinctly different path from the teen who struggles to grasp those lessons. Whatever happens (or doesn't happen) has an effect on our character, values, decisions, and behavior. As Christians and as teachers or leaders in Christian education, we carry tremendous responsibility and opportunity to forge values and behaviors that are biblically based, theologically sound, and faithfully lived out. We endeavor to form people as Christian disciples for the transformation of the world.

The ministry of Christian education and formation is a teaching ministry. Content—facts, dates, explanations, maps, meanings—is central to this ministry. It's important to know the who, the what, the when, the how, and why of our faith as it is recorded in the Bible and beyond. It is hard to live by the words and life of Christ if we have not read or learned them.

However, information, no matter how crucial, cannot carry all the weight of Christian education ministry. Knowing about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian tradition is just a part of the whole. Knowing God through Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the saints of the church, is what takes us from being biblically literate students to being mature disciples who actively love God and neighbor. Knowing *and* experiencing lead to transformation.

While it is true that all of life shapes us, we are not necessarily formed with the values and principles of faith that God desires. As we learn and develop in God's grace, we are necessarily changed—transformed—as we grow into the likeness of Christ. Becoming Christ-like is the ultimate goal for the well-formed, informed, and transformed Christian disciple.

A Biblical/Theological Foundation

For John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, there was no holiness except for social holiness. One learned and cultivated one's relationship with God and then went out to love and serve God and neighbor. Holiness of heart and life includes both knowledge and vital piety. We call the distinctive gift of the Wesleys for making meaning the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

Grounded in Scripture

Of the above four filters, *Scripture* is primary. In discerning the meaning of a portion of Scripture, making a decision, devising a course of action, or focusing one's values, the first step is to examine the Bible. Each text can be weighed against other texts so that nothing is simply pulled out of context.

Faith formation is mandated in Scripture. The Proverbs, for example, have numerous short, pithy sayings praising the virtue of wisdom and learning, starting with the first one. "Wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD [meaning the righteous life], / but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). While wisdom is to be valued, it is not an end in itself. "Hold on to instruction; don't slack off; / protect it, for it is your life" (Proverbs 4:13; see also Proverbs 2–3).

We would expect the Wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes) to champion learning, but this mandate is also found elsewhere. Deuteronomy 6, for example, is part of the address of Moses to the people of Israel, who have just received what we know as the Ten Commandments. This lengthy discourse by Moses, giving over to the people what God has commanded him, is not intended simply for the immediate hearers, but for their children and their children's children. These statutes and ordinances have a purpose.

You must carefully follow the LORD your God's commands along with the laws and regulations he has given you. Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight so that things will go well with for you and so you will enter and take possession of the wonderful land that the LORD swore to your ancestors. . . .

In the future, your children will ask you, "What is the meaning of the laws, the regulations, and the case laws that the LORD our God commanded you?" tell them: We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. But the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand'" (Deuteronomy 6:17-21).

God's instruction is practical (the laws and regulations that describe the righteous life); lifelong (telling your children in time to come); and life-giving ("the LORD brought us out . . . with a mighty hand").

The Old Testament foundation is reinforced in the New Testament. The most prevalent witness is Jesus—the master teacher and storyteller. The ultimate point of most of the parables is to draw a portrait of the kingdom of God—what it looks like and the character of those who will inherit the kingdom. Yet many, if not all, of the parables are open-ended, leaving room for the hearers to work with them in their own minds, drawing out the lessons meant just for them. Lessons we work out for ourselves are the ones we remember most.

We are forgetful, though, and Jesus prepared his first disciples and us for that eventuality. In his last, long conversation with his intimates, Jesus promised them support: “I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. . . . The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you” (John 14:16, 26). The entire Godhead—Father/Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit—is involved in providing us with wisdom and knowledge and in empowering us to teach and nurture others in the faith, so that we may have life.

Informed by Tradition

Tradition refers to the long history of God’s action in the communities of faith and through the history of the church. Tradition includes language we use to express our faith, symbols, rituals, stories, and sacraments. As United Methodists, we share the broad Christian tradition with other Christian groups. We add the history and tradition specific to the Methodist movement and the Evangelical United Brethren.

Practices that help to mold Christian character and to cultivate a relationship with God are referred to as *spiritual disciplines, ordinances, or means of grace*. Wesley mentions several means of grace in his rules for the covenantal groups he organized:

- the public worship of God;
- the ministry of the Word, either read or expounded;
- the Supper of the Lord;
- family and private prayer;
- searching the Scriptures;
- fasting or abstinence.

(See “The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies,” ¶104, in the *Discipline*.)

Enlivened by Experience

Experience refers not only to one’s own experience but also to the witness of others’ experiences. Through experience, we hear God speak through Scripture and tradition. We recognize, acknowledge, and celebrate God’s love and grace in our lives. We discern how our faith applies to our daily lives, and we learn what it means to be a disciple.

We use experience to interpret Scripture for today’s context. Our experience intersects with Scripture and tradition in ways that help us identify our understanding of who God is, who we are in relation to God, and what we are called to be and do as God’s people.

Confirmed by Reason

Reason is that God-given gift of thinking critically and working out decisions thoughtfully. In facing the challenges of everyday life, we use our reason to consider how God is active and present and what our response should be in order to be aligned with God’s will.

Reason allows us to ask questions, explore alternatives, and integrate new information and experience into our perspectives. Reason assists us in testing our assumptions and determining their validity in light of Scripture, tradition, and experience.

The Quadrilateral and Christian Education

Wesley believed that, together, these aspects of faith (along with others that involve service and peace with justice) would give the Christian—particularly the novice Christian—structure, focus, and practice in the things that cultivate the faithful and spiritual life. Each is valuable in its own right, but together, they help the Christian disciple to develop a well-rounded relationship to God through Christ that cares for both the soul of the believer and that believer’s participation in church and society.

As a leader or teacher in Christian education, you will want to instill in your teachers and students the importance of being knowledgeable in the Scriptures and the Christian tradition and being skilled in interpreting experience thoughtfully.

Christian Education and Vital Ministry

The term *Christian education* is often considered to be synonymous with Sunday school. Sunday school often conjures up an image of an old, not-so-effective classroom model of delivering content. Vital ministry engages the whole person—one’s thoughts, one’s values, and one’s actions. When teaching and learning the faith is effective, people experience the presence of God through Jesus Christ in their small groups, worship, service, and their homes. They are listening for God’s call, discovering their gifts for ministry, and living their faith wherever they find themselves.

Much has been said about vital ministry, often referring to the lifespan or health of the congregation as a whole. Christian education and formation is intimately involved in the vitality of a congregation as it transmits the faith, tells our corporate story, gives us insight into how to live and what to value, and transforms us into the image of God. When Jesus said to his followers, “Don’t be afraid, little flock, because your Father delights in giving you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32), he was telling them in the most caring and compassionate way that God wants abundance and wholeness for all of us. Christian education and transformation is one ministry that helps us understand the kingdom that God envisions and how to live in it. As beneficiaries of that grace, we share it with others.

Getting Started

You have consented to assume a leadership position, perhaps with great eagerness, perhaps with some trepidation. Now it is time to get started. This Guideline will give you basic information about the ministry, what needs to be done or considered, and how to dig in. Most of the topics here have links or books for more information. Be sure to check the Resources section.

What Are My Responsibilities?

Your responsibilities will probably include planning and visioning, working with teachers, handling administrative details, and more. Clearly, the extent of your particular work depends on what position you have assumed. While these teams or positions will be defined and identified by local churches in their own way, this Guideline will be helpful for you if you are

- the chairperson of the Christian education team
- the church school superintendent
- the leader of small-group ministry (also see *Guidelines: Small Group Ministry 2017–2020*)
- the leader for a specific age-level (there are separate Guidelines for you)
- the staff member related to Christian education.

If you are in a small-membership church, you may fill all of these functions as well as teaching (also see *Guidelines: Small-Membership Church 2017–2020*). If your church has some or all of these positions, you automatically have ministry partners. You will want to clarify with them how these responsibilities are divided and handled.

This Guideline is written mainly for the role of the education chairperson, because that position has the broadest range of responsibilities. This Guideline is suggestive. You will not be expected to do everything that is covered here. However, the more you know about what could be done, the more complete your ministry of education will be.

Job Descriptions

A job description may seem a bit formal or unnecessary, but it is important for several reasons:

- You need clarity about what you are expected to do.
- If expectations are in writing, there is no confusion.
- Clear expectations help you evaluate the education/formation ministry and your leadership.

- When everyone has the same understanding, you lessen the risk of disagreement, lack of follow-through, unclear goals, disappointments, and unexpected problems. You increase the possibilities of effective and efficient leadership, ministry satisfaction, and problem solving.

TIP

If you have not received a list of responsibilities, ask for one. If there isn't one, work out your own, in consultation with the church council.

If you need to develop your own list of responsibilities, read this Guideline and whatever other resources help you. Ask your predecessor how he or she organized, administered, and led. (Don't just repeat what he or she did without being sure that is the best way to go.) Live with the ministry for a while, work with your team, and then codify and record the responsibilities.

Lead the Ministry

Leaders analyze what is happening currently, assess what is missing or needed, and look ahead. Ideally, you will both manage the ministry that is and anticipate the ministry that could be. As you anticipate that future, you can plan strategies and goals that will get you there.

This list will be customized for your church, but you may expect to

- lead meetings of your team to plan and assess what is happening and what needs to happen;
- lead efforts to create education and formation settings for people of all ages;
- establish a plan for identifying teachers and small-group leaders;
- support teachers so that they are equipped personally and spiritually to continue in their class or group;
- arrange for substitute teachers or group leaders;
- explore curriculum options, order curriculum and supplies;
- work out and manage a budget;
- identify, promote, and monitor the necessary policies, procedures, and Safe Sanctuaries® guidelines, including arrangements for background checks;
- communicate the accomplishments, opportunities, and needs of this ministry;
- evaluate the overall ministry and the various events, classes, and teachers.

As a designated leader, you are also a member of the church council, representing the broad area of Christian education and formation. Ideally, the goals and strategies of the education/formation ministry support, and are supported by, the other ministry areas.

Ministry Partners

You are not and should not be alone in your Christian education leadership, even if you are in a very small-membership church. Whether you are the chairperson, Sunday school

superintendent, and only teacher all rolled into one, you are not, and should not be alone. One person should not be guiding the entire course of Christian education or making unilateral decisions about curriculum, events, or other programming.

Primary Partners

Teachers and Group Leaders. In any size congregation, you will want a good relationship with the people who are involved directly with learners and group members. (More on this in the next section.)

Age-level Leaders. Mid-size or larger congregations may divide responsibility for Christian education and formation according to age-level. This could include a children's coordinator, youth leader, nursery workers, and so on. While each age-specific leader is responsible for that age group, a vital ministry will coordinate the flow of learning and experiences so that children and youth can progress as smoothly as possible from one level to the next. (This is seldom smooth, though, as people come and go, start at different ages, attend as they wish, and mature at their own rate.) When the leaders of the different ages, including adults, have an intentional plan to help people progress, not only according to age, but also according to faith development, the disciple-making process is more fruitful.

Families. The parents, guardians, or other family members of the learners will want to know what the plan is for their children, youth, or themselves. As you keep people informed, you may also find among them prayer partners, substitute teachers or nursery helpers, chaperones, and future teachers.

The Pastoral Leader. When the pastoral leader is the only staff person, you will want to work closely with the pastor to ensure that what happens in all settings for Christian education and formation supports and is supported by the worship ministry (and evangelism, missions, and so on). In smaller churches, the pastor may be the only person with a theological education. He or she can be a great partner in helping to identify the theological direction of various curricula, which is particularly important if you deviate from United Methodist curriculum resources. The pastor may also provide some basic Bible instruction for the teachers.

Staff Related to Christian Education. If there is a staff person (paid or volunteer) who works in Christian education, discipleship, program, or one or more age-levels, he or she may be expected to work in partnership with you. In addition, this staff person may have primary responsibility for visioning and planning for Christian education. Be clear that you wish to be a partner.

Secondary Partners

Church Council. You are a member of the council; and together, the council members will engage with the pastor and other staff (if any) in the visioning, planning, and implementation of all the church's ministries. Your role will be to ensure that the ministry of Christian education and formation is a vital part of the entire disciple-making process in your church.

Other Church Leaders. Become familiar with the responsibilities of the other leaders with whom you will work on occasion. If there is an issue related to maintenance,

equipment, or building codes, for example, you will take it to the trustees. When you work on devising and maintaining a budget, you will do so in conjunction with the finance committee or the treasurer. If a small group or class wants to offer a special emphasis or presentation in worship, you will discuss those plans with the pastor and/or worship committee. When gathering people to form your Christian education team (if you do that yourself), you may ask for assistance from the committee on nominations.

It is generally wise to think holistically, so that when you embark on a course of action, you consult with or inform others who may have a stake in those plans or who will be affected by them. People are much more supportive when they are kept informed and included appropriately in planning.

Planning

Often, one of the first steps in planning is to ask, “What should we do?” This is an important question, but not the first question. A prior question is, “What do we want to accomplish?” To answer that, we need to be clear about our mission and to develop a vision of what the mission will look like in our context.

Mission and Vision

The mission of any organization states why the organization exists. A mission statement identifies what we must do in order to be who we say we are. The mission of The United Methodist Church, as already stated, is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” Your congregation may have a written mission statement that relates to the denominational statement. Your ministry team may want to write a clear description of how Christian education and formation relates to the broader mission of making disciples.

A vision is a portrait of what your mission will look like when it is accomplished. While disciple making is never fully accomplished, we must have some idea of what a disciple looks like to know if we have “made one.”

So, if the church’s mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, the vision is “disciples are . . .” followed by a description of the characteristics and behaviors of disciples who fulfill ministry in your setting.

For example, imagine you are a member of First UMC Downtown. Your mission statement could be “Through our Christian education and formation ministry, we form, educate, and nurture disciples of Jesus Christ. We envision disciples who are grounded in Scripture, steeped in love for the ‘least of these,’ and engaged in life-giving service in the name of Christ.” Mission is the frame for what you do; vision is the picture of what it looks like when you have succeeded.

Once you have clarity about your mission and vision, then you can begin to plan the goals and strategies, which are smaller, more specific pictures of the interim steps that cumulatively lead to the big picture. What would need to happen at First UMC Downtown to fulfill the stated mission and vision? Three goals are indicated in the vision. People who are

- grounded in Scripture,
- steeped in love for the “least of these,”
- engaged in life-giving service.

The strategies by which you will implement the goals might include:

- basic Bible study opportunities for all ages;
- coordinated worship and study opportunities that center on parables of the kingdom;

- serving a weekly meal to the homeless community, with prayer and conversation after the meal;
- thematic studies that combine learning about and practicing the spiritual disciplines, particularly prayer and justice;
- coordinated work with the missions committee for service/mission opportunities in the community and beyond.

Making Your Mission and Vision “Stick”

Possible Barriers:

- Too many options that diffuse your focus
- Discarding a good idea if the strategy doesn't work
- Everyday distractions

Possible Support:

- Keep the vision in front of your ministry team
- Celebrate your successes
- Learn from your mistakes
- Develop partnerships

Early success in achieving an easily reachable goal breeds further success. Those “victories” are life giving and motivating. However, guard against the temptation to plan activities that will “work,” but that will not address the breadth of discipleship needed in your context. First UMC Downtown, for example, may start with a VBS for their church this summer. A longer-term goal that aligns with their mission and vision (loving the “least of these”) may be to offer a community VBS that includes children who are normally overlooked and also offers courses for parents that will address their financial, educational, social, and spiritual needs.

Assess Your Current Ministry

Begin by taking a good look at what is already happening and how it happens. Having a handle on the current reality will give you an idea of where the needs are, what the strengths are, what your assets are, and what you have on hand to enable this ministry to go forward.

Discover:

- What classes and small groups are in place? What ages are covered?
- Where are all the supplies and equipment stored? Who keeps track of them?
- Who are the teachers, group leaders, and substitutes? Where can you find their contact information?
- What events or special happenings are being planned, and who is planning them?
- What is your budget, and what is included in it?
- How do decisions get made? Who are the decision makers?
- What policies and procedures do you need to know? (Examples include the Safe

Sanctuaries® policies, how things get ordered and paid for, what is done in case of fire or other emergency, and what is supposed to happen if a minor is sick or injured).

- Is there any important history you should know?
- Where are there gaps in your ministry? What needs are not being addressed?

Set Priorities

It is important in your planning to use the mission and vision as filters for the ideas you develop. Many of the plans conceived by your team will be excellent, but you can't do everything. The way you choose is to hold up the idea against the mission and vision. If the idea, no matter how wonderful, does not lead to the end you have envisioned, you should think carefully about whether to do it.

Capacity is another element in prioritizing. Do you have enough people, time, money, skill, motivation, space, equipment, and supplies to do what you want? Guard against "scarcity thinking," focusing on what you do not have. Look broadly for all the available assets, both now and later, with some planning and careful work.

Jesus told his followers that he came so that they and we would have an abundant life, and we do (see John 10:10). But we forget sometimes. Even a tiny congregation with a very modest budget has some space and some people who have gifts. What are those gifts? Start with that and then think prayerfully about how gifts and vision combine for ministry.

Develop **short- and longer-term goals** and strategies. Plan for immediate successes as a way to encourage your team to work on longer-term plans. When long-term plans are conceived, it will be helpful to target a completion or launch date, then work backward. If we are to develop a community VBS within five years, what specifically has to be done by the fourth year, the third, and so on back to the present? Once those interim targets are set, you can determine if you have the capacity to meet each one (all other things being equal) or if you need to push the target further out. This allows for strategic thinking and planning so that all the foundational steps are in place.

Leading Successful Meetings

- Get the date and the room on the church calendar and notify team members.
- Create an agenda; know what you want to accomplish.
- Start with prayer or another spiritual practice to center the team.
- Start and end on time.
- Create "ground rules" or a covenant for how you will work together.
- Provide information needed for full participation in the meeting.
- Encourage different viewpoints and divergent ideas.
- Document decisions that are made; include timelines and responsibilities.
- Ask for feedback about what works well in the meetings and what needs to be improved.
- Monitor progress between meetings; keep team members informed.

Leading Meetings

Part of your work includes meeting with your team. Be clear about the purpose of each meeting, and plan accordingly. Consider how much time will be needed to accomplish the purpose of your meeting, and limit the number of items you include in your agenda.

At a new team's first meeting, you may want to spend time getting to know one another, listening to dreams and hopes, exploring gifts and passions, and reviewing (not evaluating) the current ministry. Subsequent meetings may include evaluating what is going on in light of the current mission and vision statements, if you have them. If not, asking several "what if" questions would be in order to help the team develop a vision. The next step would be to examine how the current plans help to achieve the vision, then to identify any big gaps. That is where the planning process may develop.

Teachers and Team Members

You may already have an education team in place—or age-level councils or some other subgroup related to Christian education and formation. If you are in a large or mid-sized church, the committee on nominations and leader development may recruit your entire team. However, in many cases, you will have to pull together this team yourself.

Forming a Team

One typical way to form a team is to recruit people we know or who have a passion for the work that the team is to do. That certainly makes some sense. What can happen, though, is that there are particular functions needed to implement the strategies of the team but no one on the team with those skills. The other side of that picture, then, is to think through the specific kinds of skills or gifts needed and then recruit people who possess them.

Most likely, you will work from the midpoint. Your ministry team may be constituted in part by people who are there by virtue of their own leadership role, such as a church school superintendent, curriculum secretary, or staff person. Even if your entire team is “inherited,” you may be able to expand where you need to in order to have the resident skills required.

There is a certain “chicken and egg” process in forming a team with the particular skill set. The team does the visioning and planning, but until the planning is done, you may not have identified all the skills needed on the team. So, start with what you know: the details of the current ministry.

As you take a closer look at everything already in place, you can back up a step to envision what it takes to implement those plans. Video presentation coming up in worship? Your team may need someone who is tech-savvy. Planning for a community-wide vacation Bible school? Your team will definitely need someone who is a good manager and handles details well. Having a church school-sponsored breakfast each week for the community’s needy children? Your team may require someone who knows how to organize and prepare food for a crowd. When you and your existing team members have some clarity about your goals (or hopes and dreams), you will identify the skills and gifts resident on the team already and then can work to expand as needed. The pastoral leader and committee on nominations may be able to suggest people. If the church keeps an up-to-date file from “gifts and talents” surveys, that would be a good place to start.

TIP

You can always form a short-term project team for the occasional activities that require special skills. You don't have to have every possible gift represented on the team at all times.

Care and Nurture of Teachers

Your teachers are the greatest assets—other than the Trinity—that your ministry area will have. Research has shown that the teacher is seven times more important than curriculum resources or anything else. An excellent teacher can pick up the poorest piece of curriculum and make a go of it, but excellent curriculum in the hands of a poor teacher will seldom, if ever, carry a successful class alone.

Invite People to Teach

In informal surveys, groups of teachers and other education leaders were asked to jot down the words or phrases that were used to recruit them. Typical responses included “We need you”; “It’s easy and won’t take much time”; “We’ll help you”; “You’ll be good at it”; “The kids asked for you”; even, “I’m dying, and I need you to take my place.” (Honest!) Then the group was asked to note words and phrases that identified themselves as teachers or leaders. Those typical responses included “Gifted”; “Sharing my own learning”; “Mentor or guide”; “Compassionate”; and “Nurturer.”

To be fair, the first set of answers also included remarks like “You have a great gift” or “You are wonderful with children.” And the second set of responses also included “Inadequate” or “Insecure.” Nevertheless, what was most characteristic of the recruitment statements was that they were dismissive, desperate, or deceptive. The self-assessments, however, generally revealed that teachers feel valuable, valued, and passionate about sharing their knowledge and nurturing those in their charge.

Any invitation to work with a class or small group should convey the important role of leadership, the connection between the class or group and your mission of disciple making, the expectations you have of teachers and small-group leaders, and the support teachers and leaders can expect.

TIP

Adult classes and small groups often find their own leadership. While you may not have responsibility for inviting leaders for adult groups, it’s a good idea to keep a list of effective teachers with any particular knowledge or skills they may have (e.g., biblical scholarship, leading discussion, parenting, and so forth.)

Safe Sanctuaries® policies require more than one adult when working with groups of children or youth. Depending on the size of your groups, you may need additional adults as teachers or aides. In addition to safety and size issues, two adults increase the creative teaching possibilities and model diverse ways of expressing faith, learning, and living as disciples.

Keep these points in mind:

- **Be honest!** Asking a gifted and busy person to do something and then hiding, distorting, or “dumbing down” the details is unfair and insulting. Know what the obligations are and state them honestly. If you aren’t sure about something, confess and find out.
- **Identify the gifts of the person you are inviting.** People often have a mental image of what a “teacher” should be, and they may not think they match that image. Your invitation should help them understand the characteristics and abilities they bring to a setting for learning. People are more likely to say yes when they recognize that they have something to offer.
- **Provide a personal invitation.** Call and/or visit the people you want to invite. General announcements in a worship service or fellowship setting are generally unhelpful and ineffective for securing the leadership needed for your ministry. Follow up your initial conversation with either another conversation or an email.
- **Give the potential teacher time to think and pray.** Do not expect an immediate response. Let potential teachers know there are at least three possible responses: “Yes,” “No,” and “Let me make a counter offer.” For example, there may be reasons why someone is unable to take on the responsibility of teaching, but they would be willing to serve as a substitute when needed. Or they may not feel adequate working with teenagers, but they would be happy to work with a small group of young adults. Always keep the door open for another request at a better time.
- **Communicate expectations clearly.** Know what you want to happen in and beyond the classroom. Don’t be afraid to set high expectations. It is not enough that a teacher shows up on time, prepared. Indicate what character traits you’re looking for and what behaviors you expect. Provide a job description in writing. Tell them about policies or procedures that will affect them (such as the need for a background check).
- **Set boundaries.** Establish the lines of accountability related to budget, choosing curriculum resources, group members’ safety, and procedures for any activities planned outside the usual group meeting time. Teachers need to know how to get supplies, what expenses can be reimbursed, what information is needed if taking a group of minors on an outing, etc.
- **Plan for teachers’ continuing spiritual development.** Help teachers continue to develop their relationships with God so that they can express their faith with authenticity. Provide help through resources (print or electronic), face-to-face meetings, spiritual disciplines, and worship.
- **Develop a covenant with your teachers.** As a group, identify the values and behaviors that you will use as the standard for faithful leadership. Invite teachers

and the appropriate staff or team members to sign the covenant. Make copies and distribute to each individual teacher or small-group leader.

Caring for Teachers

Here are a few ideas for showing appreciation and support for teachers:

- Affirm what teachers do and who they are.
- Provide an orientation for new teachers. (Returning teachers may attend as a refresher.)
- Consecrate teachers, learners, and faith-formation ministry in worship.
- Offer opportunities for teachers to strengthen their knowledge and skills for teaching.
- Maintain a cadre of substitute teachers who can step into a class or small group when a teacher needs to be away.
- Invite feedback from teachers about how effective your faith-formation ministry is and how it can be improved.

Evaluation and Measurement

You, your team, and your church want to have a vital ministry. Regular evaluation with established measures allows you to avoid the twin dangers of (1) continuing ineffective processes or programs and (2) evaluating simply by way of numbers. One way to guard against the “we’ve always done it that way” syndrome is to build into plans when and how you will evaluate and the measures by which you will judge your efforts. The evaluation process brings together your vision and mission, the goals and strategies used to bring that vision to fruition, and the measures by which you compare your results with your desired outcomes.

What Are Measures?

Measures (you may hear them called *metrics*) are indicators of activity and impact. Your mission and vision statements and your established goals and strategies suggest possible measures for use in evaluation.

Intentionally developing strategies and measures to evaluate them will strengthen your ministry in the following ways:

- Having a plan gives focus and direction. It helps to see where there are gaps and needs in a holistic educational ministry.
- Strategies and measures can be communicated to the church council and the congregation. Approval and ownership increase as communication happens thoroughly and frequently.
- Teachers know what is expected and how you will evaluate. They can align their teaching with your strategies.
- Your strategies and measures help identify areas for ongoing teacher development.
- Evaluation focuses on the strategies and measures, rather than on people who are involved in faith formation.

Let’s return to our example of First UMC Downtown. The Flow and Measures Grid below will give you a visual example of possible measures. In this case, the desired outcomes are for “disciples who are grounded in Scripture, steeped in love for the ‘least of these,’ and engaged in life-giving service in the name of Christ.” The flow of activity that leads to that vision is to form, educate, and nurture. It’s helpful to define what you mean by each of these indicators. Unless you have clarity about what you meant, you can have numerous opinions about whether you did what you intended to do.

**Flow and Measures Grid for Christian Education at
First UMC Downtown**

	Form	Educate	Nurture
Definition	Shape congregational members of all ages in Christian values	Teach the Scriptures—what they mean and how they are applied—and the church’s heritage of witness and service	Care for congregational members and model discipleship in the form of outreach, witness, and service
Results	People demonstrate compassion and work for peace and justice	People can name the major people and stories in the Bible, the Christian church, and The United Methodist Church	People live as disciples of Jesus Christ, serving others and mentoring new disciples
Strategies	F1. Practice spiritual disciplines in every class and small group F2. Collect items for flood buckets or health kits (UMCOR)	E1. Provide classes and small groups for all ages. E2. Equip people for theological reflection. E3. Offer confirmation class for youth and/or young adults.	N1. Equip people as mentors, coaches, or spiritual directors N2. Tour mission sites in your annual conference N3. Take work teams to build or renovate homes or other community spaces
Measures	F1a. 75% of classes and small groups incorporate spiritual disciplines weekly F1b. Group members report that their relationship with God is enhanced through the practice of spiritual disciplines F2a. Items were collected for XX number of flood buckets or health kits F2b. People verbalize ongoing concern for others affected by flooding, famine, disease, etc.	E1. All ages are involved in a class or small group E2. People engage in theological reflection in classes and meetings and in their homes and workplaces E3. Young people participate in confirmation classes and express a commitment to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ	N1a. Mentors, coaches, or spiritual directors are paired with other people for spiritual growth and development N1b. People state the value of having a mentor, coach, etc. N2a. People can describe how The United Methodist Church serves the needs in their communities N2b. People provide financial and human resources to support missions N3a. XX percentage of your congregation participates in a work team on a yearly basis N3b. People demonstrate compassion, care, peace, and justice in their lives

Types of Measures

Quantitative measures are the easiest to define because they can be counted. For example, 100 people attended Bible study, or there was a 22 percent increase in participation in the Sunday school service project. These measures serve a purpose, especially if numbers that we want to increase are actually decreasing. Changes in numbers indicate that something is changing, although it doesn't tell us what.

Numbers can't tell us what is actually happening to the 100 people who attended that Bible study, and that is really what we need to know. We need *qualitative* measures to indicate the impact ministry has. Qualitative measures help us determine whether participants are being formed in Christian values. When "growth in Christian discipleship" is the goal, the measures have to identify changes in character, spiritual maturity, knowledge of the faith, and shifts of behavior.

Our baptismal vows set the context for faith formation ministry. (See the Resources page for documents related to baptism.) Outcomes for that ministry may include people growing in their ability to describe what baptism means and in their commitment to live in ways that are consistent with our baptismal vows. These are signs of spiritual growth. Consider how these measures and indicators of spiritual growth might demonstrate our baptismal vows:

- regular participation in worship
- personal stories attesting to spiritual growth and change
- decrease or elimination of behaviors incongruent with the gospel
- greater financial investment in ministry
- investment in ministry and nurture of children and youth
- participation in continuing education and formation activities
- modeling of Christian practices within the home
- consistent practice of one or more works of piety (devotion and worship)
- engagement in works of mercy (service), peace, and justice
- greater evidence of the "fruit of the Spirit" (see Galatians 5:22-23)

Evaluate Ministry

Who performs evaluation depends in part on what is evaluated. Your education team, possibly with the church council, will assess the major strategies and goals you developed against the measures you established. An annual review of the overall plan should suffice, although it is helpful to conduct interim evaluations of specific parts of the plan. Waiting until the end of the year for feedback on the summer program will lose a lot of detail; too much time will have passed.

This is what your team will want to evaluate:

- **The function of the team itself.** Is there a balance of gifts against the needs and skills among team members so that the ministry is accomplished? Are the meetings productive and satisfying? Are members following through well with what they have agreed to do? What additions or changes would be helpful?
- **The long- and short-term plans.** Are you meeting your short-term goals? Are the

interim steps of the longer-range plan being accomplished? What problems or barriers have been overcome and what remains? Who is designated to work at what? Is that happening? How well? Are the plans accomplishing your vision? How can you tell?

- **The specific strategies**, against your measures, as described earlier.
- **The teachers and group leaders, by themselves.** Providing a structure for self-reflection will help them identify accomplishments, strengths, needs for training or nurture, and so on.
- **The teachers and group leaders, by others.** Those others might be you, the team, the group members, parents (for children's classes or groups), or some combination. Again, when teachers know the expectations and measures, there should be few surprises, particularly if they have been asked to do some self-assessment first.

Dealing with Poor Outcomes

Seldom will everything run smoothly, with exactly the right people who possess exactly the right gifts. If you are not getting the results you want, first determine if the strategies are ineffective or have not had time to work. Regroup there, as necessary.

If the issue is personnel, the person in question may realize this first after self-assessment. Other people may not realize the need or may not desire a change that must be made. Express appreciation and honor contributions, then work together to find out where those gifts are a better fit. Enlisting the support of the pastor or someone trusted by the person may be a benefit. Always strive for a win-win situation, "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15); this isn't a contest and shouldn't be a battle of wills.

Administration

Administration involves managing the nitty-gritty details of the Christian education ministry. You are responsible for ensuring that these facets of the work are done well, although some or all of them may be delegated to team members with skills in organization and attention to detail.

“Admin 101”

Some administrative tasks come up routinely. Most likely, you are not the only one with responsibility here, so find out the practice at your church.

Keep a Calendar

One tool that may help to keep you on target is a planning calendar. Your long-range planning tells you what has to be done by next year, but if it isn't on the calendar, with the interim steps needed to do everything, plans can be backed up indefinitely because steps didn't get started or completed on time.

In addition to a planning calendar, be sure to coordinate your plans and activities with the church calendar. All the ministry groups are making plans and setting dates, so be sure you are working together, not competing.

Record Keeping

You will want to maintain a list of names, contact information, important medical information, and other pertinent data for teachers, learners, and the classes and small groups offered. While there are still print-based resources for this task, you will probably find it easier to create a table in a text document or spreadsheet.

Here are some suggestions of records to maintain:

- The average number of people attending church school, small groups, midweek classes/programs (for charge conference information). You may record attendance, at least numbers, if not names.
- A roster of teachers and substitutes with contact information, perhaps with birthdays or other special days to remember through the year.
- Health or information forms for minor children and vulnerable adults.
- Permission slips for any off-campus activities.
- A list of regularly used supplies.
- A list of vendors/stores whose services you use or who carry the supplies you need for your ministry, and the church's tax-exempt ID number.
- Names of people you should contact in case of an emergency.

Policies and Procedures

A policy describes *what* must be done in a particular situation. Policies are directive; they are often instituted because of legal obligations, insurance requirements, safety reasons, or moral imperatives. A procedure describes *how* something is to happen, whether it is a policy or not. As you get acquainted with this ministry, pay attention to how things get done.

Find out what policies are in place already, if they are actually written down, and who the “custodian” of the policy is. (If there isn’t much in writing, begin writing the policies related to Christian education.) Trustees, for example, are responsible initially for bequests or material donations, by provision of *The Book of Discipline*. If a donor offers a new swing set for the playground, you must refer that gift to the trustees.

The unique setting of your congregation may require unique policies. Typically, churches have policies (or procedures) that relate to:

Safety

- a Safe Sanctuaries® policy (see the Resources section) for the well-being of minors and vulnerable adults, as well as for protection of the church and its members from liability
- for the use of playground or other equipment that is accessible on church property
- for health, first aid, or emergency situations
- for access to the church facilities, especially areas that may be locked

Vehicles

- drivers’ license/driving record requirements for use of church-owned buses, vans, or other vehicles
- use of private vehicles for church-related events
- age of drivers
- ratio of adults to minors traveling in any vehicles

Equipment, Supplies, or Space

- who is authorized to run equipment
- who purchases new equipment or supplies, how much they are authorized to spend, and with whom you can do business
- who decides how space is shared, who gets to store items and where are they stored

Money (see the next section)

Budgeting

You may have nothing more to do with the budget than submitting an annual request to the finance committee, but you are encouraged to be proactive about budgeting for your ministry area. Start with what you are already doing. Check with the church treasurer or finance chairperson to see the plan for the coming year. If there is a lump sum listed in the budget, find out what is included in it. Most churches will have a unified budget, meaning

there is only one. If your church takes an offering in the church school that is held in a separate budget for Christian education, learn how that process works and whether that is the only source of income to finance education needs. You may also take up an offering on Christian Education Sunday, though most, if not all, will go to the annual conference to administer. See the Resources section for more information about budgeting.

A typical budget detail may include:

- curriculum resources, Bibles for third graders, or books for the church library
- supplies—paper, art supplies, scissors, nursery items (like disposable diapers and wipes)
- equipment and supplies (DVD players, DVDs or CDs, batteries, video equipment, media carts, extension cords), replacement costs
- promotion and celebration (advertising, gifts for teacher appreciation)
- travel/transportation (field trips, busing for neighborhood children)
- teacher development (courses, books, speakers)

If you are to keep track of expenditures and needs, ask the treasurer for any forms (like check requests or requisition forms) that are used. Consider recruiting someone for your team who is skilled with budget and finance.

Some teachers are accustomed to paying for their own supplies, curriculum, or more. While this generosity is to be celebrated, a few caveats are in order.

- First, teachers should not be expected to bear these expenses. If this ministry is valued, that should be reflected in the church budget.
- Second, if teachers are expected to pay out-of-pocket expenses, they must know, when they are asked to teach, what a likely contribution is.
- Third, if teachers do offer these gifts, keep a record of what they spend. This can be done anonymously, but the church still must know the actual costs of this ministry so that the budget will accommodate it or will work toward it. Find ways to express appreciation.

Curriculum

Curriculum actually refers to the entire educational plan. “Curriculum resources” are the books, leaflets, DVDs, and such that are tools for teaching and learning. You and your committee may have responsibility for selecting and purchasing curriculum resources. Adult classes are usually free to obtain their own, and often do, but particular care is necessary for resources for children and youth.

The Book of Discipline requires that The United Methodist Church provide curriculum resources that are educationally sound and appropriately within the bounds of United Methodist theology. By extension, it is expected that United Methodist congregations will use those resources. You will find them in the Cokesbury online catalog. Official United Methodist resources are identified in the catalog with the UMC Endorsed icon.

Check the Resources section at the back of this Guideline for more information about selecting curriculum, getting catalogs, and using the advisors at Curric-U-Phone.

If you select and order curriculum resources, keep these things in mind:

- **Theological framework.** Is it United Methodist or compatible?
- **Age-level Appropriateness.** Can learners do what is suggested and understand what is said?
- **Inclusiveness.** Are people of various ethnic or ability groups represented and presented positively in images and content?
- **Ease of Use.** Is the skill level of the teacher sufficient for what the lessons require? Is the material too simple? Does the material require equipment or supplies that are readily available?

Publicity

Keep the ministry of Christian education and formation in the front of the congregation's mind. Communicating with the congregation has several purposes. It celebrates the teachers, learners, and lifelong learning. It supports and focuses on the church's vision and mission of disciple making. It encourages participation and lifts up the needs of the ministry. It offers a place for everyone to reflect on the Bible, share thoughts and experiences with others, and make meaning of what they encounter and do in life.

You are limited only by your imagination. Here are a few ideas on publicity to get you started:

- Recruit greeters or hosts to direct people to classes or groups.
- Inform the congregation about upcoming events and ongoing classes through the church's bulletin, website, newsletter, email, Facebook page, and so on.
- Use indoor and outdoor bulletin boards, signs, banners, or posters, especially for occasional or seasonal offerings for the whole church and community.
- Use conference communications, websites, and so on.
- Encourage the congregation, teachers, and class/group participants to share what participation means to them and to invite others to participate.

In Conclusion

A ministry of Christian education and formation requires attention to numerous details, planning for classes and events, ordering supplies and curriculum, dealing with classroom dynamics, equipping teachers, and much more. At the heart of it is the desire to serve God in the task of disciple making. Forming and transforming a people who know, love, and serve God is the ultimate goal. What call and privilege could be more important than that?

Resources

** Denotes our top picks. (See also www.umcdiscipleship.org.)

Leadership

**Christians Engaged in Faith Formation (www.cefumc.org) is a national organization for leaders in Christian education and formation. Leaders can participate in face-to-face meetings and online.

***Deepening Your Effectiveness: Restructuring the Local Church for Life Transformation* by Dan Glover and Claudia Lavy. (Discipleship Resources, 2006), ISBN: 9780881774757.

***Foundations*. Provides guidelines for education in The United Methodist Church, found at www.umcdiscipleship.org

***Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation*; see especially individual *Guidelines* for Adult Ministries, Ministries with Young People, Scouting and Civic Youth-Serving Ministry, Children's Ministries, Family Ministries (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2017.)

The Nuts and Bolts of Christian Education by Delia Halverson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), ISBN: 9780687071166.

Safe Sanctuaries: The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012), ISBN: 9780881776133.

***Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN: 9780881775433. Spanish, ISBN: 9780881774023.

Teaching Today's Teachers to Teach, revised edition by Donald L. Griggs (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), ISBN: 9780687049547.

Teaching and Learning

Christian Education in the Small Membership Church by Karen Tye (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780687650996.

The Church as Learning Community: A Comprehensive Guide to Christian Education by Norma Cook Everist (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), ISBN: 9780687045006.

Curric-U-Phone. Curricuphone@Cokesbury.com; (800) 251-8591.

Formation in Faith: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples by Sondra Matthaei (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780687649730.

****iTeach:** monthly e-letter for teachers

****Keeping in Touch: Christian Formation and Teaching** by Carol F. Krau (Discipleship Resources, 2014), ISBN: 9780881776.

Soul Stories: African American Christian Education, revised edition by Anne E. Streaty Wimberly (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), ISBN: 9780687494323.

Triangular Teaching: A New Way of Teaching the Bible to Adults by Barbara Bruce (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), ISBN: 9780687643523.

Web Resources

Look for these articles and workshops at www.umcdiscipleship.org

- Assess Your Congregation's Policies
- Assess Your Facilities and Equipment
- Assessing Ministry
- Budgeting for Christian Education
- Choosing Curriculum Resources
- A Comprehensive Plan for Teacher Development
- Creating Job Descriptions
- Development Through the Life Span
- Evaluating Your Ministry
- Forming an Effective Christian Education Team
- Getting the Word Out
- Meetings that Nurture Christian Education
- Planning for Christian Education
- Recruiting Teachers
- What Every Teacher Needs to Know

Effective Teaching for Transformation: a series of six ready-to-go 3-hour workshops, plus a demonstration workshop that blends elements of all six to give a preview of the series.

Helps for planning, evaluating, and measuring your ministry efforts: www.umvitalcongregations.com; look under the “Setting Goals” tab to locate assistance for the metrics required by your annual conference.

Local Church Discipler/Educator self-guided study resource: a series of six modules that are self-guided outlines for professional development for staff who are hired locally or from within their church to serve their church in some area related to Christian education, formation, and discipleship.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

General Board of Church and Society, www.umc-gbcs.org, 202-488-5600; Service Center, 1-800-967-0880

General Board of Discipleship (d/b/a Discipleship Ministries), www.umcdiscipleship.org, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>, 1-800-972-0433; The Upper Room, www.upperroom.org, 1-800-972-0433; email: info@umcdiscipleship.org.

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmmission.org, 1-800-862-4246 or 212-870-3600; email: info@umcmmission.org

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, 615-340-7400

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, www.gbophb.org, 847-869-4550

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcah.org, 973-408-3189

General Commission on Religion & Race, www.gcorr.org, 202-547-2271; email: info@gcorr.org

General Commission on the Status & Role of Women, www.gcsr.org, 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcumm.org, 615-340-7145

General Council on Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, 866-367-4232 or 615-329-3393

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting (General Commission on United Methodist Men), www.gcumm.org, 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, 615-749-6000; Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; Cokesbury, www.cokesbury.com, 1-800-672-1789

United Methodist Communications, www.umcom.org, 615-742-5400; EcuFilm, 1-888-346-3862; InfoServ, email: infoserv@umcom.org; *Interpreter Magazine*, www.interpretermagazine.org, 615-742-5441

United Methodist Women, www.unitedmethodistwomen.org; 212-870-3900

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.