

District Missional Strategy Teams

Introduction

A major component of the District Realignment Plan is the creation of a Missional Strategy Team in each district. It is recommended that these teams would consist of 12-15 of the district's most spiritually mature lay and clergy leaders to assist the District Superintendent in the role of Key Missional Strategist. Since the District Superintendent is the Key Missional Strategist the D.S. may chair this group or nominate a chair. Membership of this team will be inclusive, reflecting the diversity of people in the district without having representatives from specific groups. This team will hold before its members the questions from ¶661 in *the Book of Discipline*: "How are we intentionally reaching new people for Jesus Christ through our ministries?" and "How are we helping new people grow and mature as disciples of Jesus Christ through our ministries and areas of responsibilities?"

See the District as a Whole

One way that the Missional Strategy Team will need to function is to look at the district as a whole. Some of the key things for this team to consider include:

1. Plans for starting new churches and faith communities
2. Strategies for revitalizing existing congregations
3. Identifying which churches could be encouraged to relocate
4. Inviting churches to consider a "Vital Merger"
5. Encouraging churches to form cooperative parishes and less formal expressions such as cluster groups and group ministries.
6. Identifying churches who could have their potential assessed according to the guidelines of ¶213.

In order to see the district as a whole and to then look at the parts strategically the Missional Strategy Teams will need to make use of demographic tools such as Mission Insite. The use of demographics enables local churches and Missional Strategy Teams to see their communities in a different way.

Over time Missional Strategy Teams will develop written plans. Some districts may start with a Strategic Plan for the entire district. Some districts may develop a plan for a particular aspect such as a plan for starting new faith communities or a strategy for revitalizing existing churches while other district teams will just move from project to project. Since we are seeking a "grass roots" renewal effort we need to be careful not to think all Missional Strategy Teams will develop in the same way.

Identify Funding Sources

A key ingredient is to identify how the various components of a district strategy can be funded. There are grants available from New Faith Communities. Some projects may be more applicable for grants from New People New Places. Both New Faith Communities and New People New Places are looking to the District Missional Strategy Teams to provide confirmation that those who apply for grants are in alignment with the District Missional Strategy. Districts may also have other funding resources within the district such as district apportionments, fundraisers and endowments. Also churches and individuals may "buy into" a specific project and provide the needed funds.

Relationships

The District Missional Strategy Team does not work in isolation from other groups in the district or Annual Conference. It is expected that this group will work with other committees within the district. At times the District Missional Strategy Team will need to interact with Conference Boards and Agencies in order to accomplish its objectives. Conference Staff are available for consultation and training purposes. At times the Bishop and/or the Annual Conference may choose to work with and through the District Missional Strategy Teams to implement a coordinated Missional Strategy. United Methodists are a connected people and this connection is lived out through the relationships that are developed for accomplishing the mission of making disciples.

Develop Missional Areas

Another key ingredient of the Missional Strategy Team is to develop, encourage and resource the Missional Areas. It is hoped that these Missional Areas will increase the sense of connection by bringing churches together to think and live strategically for their area. It is through these local church networks that a vital web of interactive relationships among the clergy and laity will help to establish Missional Strategies that are accepted and implemented by local churches. It is possible that collaborative ministries and projects may be implemented by all of the churches in a Missional Area. However, it is also likely that only a portion of the churches will be involved in implementing a specific ministry, outreach project or new faith community. In order to implement a specific missional strategy interaction between the District Missional Strategy Team and the Missional Area Team(s) is advisable and encouraged.

Conclusion

District Missional Strategy Teams are to be diligent in research and in developing plans for the district. However, it must be kept in mind that flexibility is needed. Some missional strategies will need to change due to an unforeseen opportunity, a change in circumstances of a local church or a change in lay or clergy leadership. Sometimes adjustments must happen and Missional Strategy Teams must be nimble enough to adapt to these new circumstances. Hopefully the Team can discern where God's Holy Spirit is leading.

Sometimes the Missional Strategy Team will identify a church which needs to assess whether to close or redevelop its ministry in a new way. At times a church will "self-identify" and seek ideas from the Missional Strategy Team about what to do. At these times it is important to "speak the truth in love". Respect for the local church and the pastor are essential in helping churches to establish a legacy or to die with dignity.

It is also important for Missional Strategy Teams to maintain confidentiality. Sometimes a matter may be discussed first in this group which needs to be shared with a church and its pastor. Items that are shared too soon with others outside of the Team and the churches and pastors involved could torpedo a much needed initiative and strategy.

Each district will develop different strategies as each lives out its mission within the context of the district. However, the all-encompassing mission of the United Methodist Church remains a constant: "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world". It is our fervent desire that all of our District Missional Strategy Teams will be faithful to this mission.