

FCJ Spiritual Growth Team Revised Report

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Introduction:

What is spiritual growth? We define spiritual growth/development as growing deeper in relationship to God through study, prayer, service and relationships. It involves many stages as we mature in faith and may look different for different people.

Charge from FCJ Report: The charge for our team comes from action item #4 of The Fruitful Congregations Journey Ministry Action Plan:

"#4: CREATE AN INTENTIONAL SYSTEM FOR CONNECTION AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

*The Lead Pastor, in consultation with the coaches, will put together a team of five people on or before August 31, 2015, to create a plan of spiritual development **for those within the congregation as well as those served by the congregation.** Just as every person within the church needs to grow in their commitment to Jesus Christ, **the church must find ways to invite those whom they serve to join in a spiritual growth process.** The team will explore the necessary opportunities for entry onto the spiritual growth plan that may or may not be present including small groups, Bible studies, prayer meetings, service opportunities, mission trips, and additional Sunday school classes.*

The purpose of the spiritual growth plan will be to help each person discover where they are on their spiritual journey and assist them in moving forward to a deeper spirituality in their lives. This plan will encourage each person to:

- **Connect and grow** in their relationship with Jesus Christ;
- **Be transformed** by studying the principles of the Christian faith;
- Use connection opportunities with other believers for **support and accountability**;
- **Be in service** to others for the purpose of the **mission**;
- **Invite** others to a **relationship** with Jesus and His church; and
- Further **discern** his/her call to **spiritual growth and leadership**.

This plan will be presented to the Church Council for adoption by February 28, 2016."

Our understanding of the charge (scope): Keeping in mind the key words in bold in the statements above we feel the charge includes the following:

- Look at existing opportunities for spiritual growth at FUMC as well as possible development of new ones.
- Make everyone aware of the opportunities for spiritual growth.
- Make it clear that spiritual growth is an intentional act, one that people must choose, rather than something that can be absorbed passively.

Our goals: Our church has already identified Spiritual Growth as a core value and an element of the vision. Our main goal is to strengthen spiritual growth as a core value and as a congregational identity at FUMC for individuals, groups and for the church as a whole. We seek spiritual growth opportunities that meet the needs of all age groups in the church.

Resources we used:

- *Deepening Your Effectiveness* – Glover and Lavy
- *Move: What 1000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* – Hybels
- *Reveal Focus: The Top 10 Things People Want and Need from You and Your Church* – Hawkins and Parkinson
- *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* – Searcy and Thomas
- Met with Sheila Wilimitis, Discipleship & Outreach Director at Delphi UMC, to learn more about Delphi’s focus on small groups and other spiritual growth programs.
- Met with Shari and Glen to discuss children and youth programming.
- Met with Church Staff to gain feedback on draft outline.

Recommendation Plan outline: The recommendations in this report come after several months of team meetings, reading, research and prayer. We hope the council and the church as a whole, will give it prayerful consideration. This report is intended as a guide for use by an implementation team, which would make these recommendations a reality, should the church council approve them.

We recommend recruiting an implementation team that would both launch the new initiatives and become a permanent “Spiritual Development Team” to continue to support these initiatives.

Recommendation #1: Integrate a system of small groups into the fabric of life at FUMC using our own adaptation of the model found in the book *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups*. Small groups have traditionally been long term but this approach involves classes meeting together on a semester term basis. This system of small groups better accommodates additions of new members, allows for people to change groups so joining a group doesn’t feel like a major life commitment, allows greater variety, and is better at building new leaders from the ranks of assistant leaders.

To emphasize these distinctions from traditional small groups we suggest they be promoted as **Growth Groups** or **Connection Groups**, or another name as determined by the Spiritual Development Team. We use the generally recognized term small groups in the rest of the report.

- **This effort would require complete support and buy-in from staff and church leaders to succeed.** Each full-time staff member should participate in the small groups initiative and contribute to the program’s success.
- **How many Groups?:** The church will initially need a minimum of 15 small groups to accommodate the interests of the congregation. This number would likely increase

later to more than 20 groups as we get closer to the Visioning Team’s goal of 80% of the regularly attending congregation being part of a small group.

- Developing a model that fits FUMC:
 - Generally follow the *Activate* model while adapting it to specific needs/interests of FUMC.
 - Small groups meet together weekly or bi-weekly, mostly in homes.
 - Continue to learn from Delphi UMC and others.
 - Develop leaders for small groups by personally encouraging existing teachers and potential new ones to take on classes. To support them we envision brief targeted training opportunities and periodic joint meetings to support each other and share ideas. Could also draw on the Leadership Development FCJ effort to help identify new leaders.
 - Include a variety of intensities/approaches/topics to accommodate a wide range of needs and levels of involvement in the church. FUMC is diverse and needs something more than a one size fits all approach.
 - Will require staff time but not hiring new a staff member. Demands on staff time will be higher the first year but will diminish in years 2 and 3 as the program leadership matures.
 - Will require several dedicated volunteers as described in the structure below.

What constitutes a Small Group?

A small group consists of about 5-20 people with a facilitator or leader. Members gather for connection, learning, prayer and service. The focus of the group might revolve around diverse topics, life stages or specific activities. Groups encourage accountability and develop leaders. We propose that spiritual growth occurs most consistently in a group. We are assuming the small groups meet weekly, but bi-weekly or even monthly meetings are an option.

Proposed Small Group Structure (for up to 25 Small Groups):

The structure for small groups would be similar to that used in *Activate*.

A staff member would work together with the implementation team to recruit those needed for launching the initiative.

Brief job descriptions are outlined below (see “Activate” book on pages 104-106 for more details).

Staff liaison – is fully committed to the small groups system and assists the coach as needed. Promotes the small groups, e.g. ensuring there is time in services dedicated to promoting small groups, that resources are available for email and print advertising of the groups. Regularly meets with the small groups coach and supports them. Prays for the coach daily.

Small groups General Manager: Serves 5 small groups Coaches. This optional position is needed when the number of groups reaches about 25 and more than one small groups coach is needed.

Small groups Coach – Serves 5 small groups Team Leaders: prays for team leaders daily. Communicates with team leaders once a week and meets with them once a month. Forms groups to meet the church's goals once a semester. Organizes promotions/advertising. Regularly meets with staff liaison.

Small group Team Leader – Serves 5 small group Leaders (or 4 if also leading a group). They would pray for the group leaders daily, and communicate with the group leaders once a week by phone, email or in person. Meet with group leaders once a month and help recruit group leaders once a semester.

Small group Leader – Serves up to 20 small group Members. Facilitates group discussions & prays for group members daily. Attends group leaders training & communicates with his/her team leader as needed. It is also their responsibility to be looking for new leaders from within their group & supporting the apprentice leader.

Apprentice Leader or co-ordinator – ideally these would be the same person, but the roles could be split if necessary. The co-ordinator will assist the group leader with organizational tasks (reminder emails, prayer request distribution). The apprentice leader would facilitate group discussion once or twice a semester. They would also pray for group members daily.

Small Groups – Example Timeline for launch.

NOTE: This is only an example timeline. Implementation by other teams would depend on identifying committed leaders ready to make this recommendation a reality. The implementation team would decide when to begin the work.

Year 1:

May – FCJ Spiritual Growth Team presentation to church council.

June – Church council vote on FCJ Spiritual Growth Team proposal.

June – Recruit Implementation Team and small groups Coach.

June – September – Implementation team and coach plan groups strategy, materials, guidelines, recruit small group Team Leaders.

September: Soft launch: Sunday school classes (and some other current groups) organized and scheduled using new team.

September: Begin coordination with missions groups and leaders to design opportunities for small groups to participate in service.

September - October – small group Team Leaders recruit small group Leaders and Apprentice Leaders.

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November – Staff Liaison, small groups Coach, Team Leaders and Group Leaders meet for training.

December – Small Group Leaders finalize plans for curriculum, order materials and create promotional materials. Some advance promotion begins (just to build anticipation).

Year 2:

January 1- February 5 – Small group promotion and signups.

January 29 – Small groups begin meeting.

February – May – Coach and at least 1 Team Leader attends new member lunches, invites new members to join an *open* group.

March – Staff Liaison, small groups Coach, Team Leaders and Group Leaders meet for mid-term update, feedback, pep talk.

April – Begin planning for Fall 2017, Discuss possible summer events (outings, movies, etc.).

May – Small group meetings conclude. Spring end-of-term wrap up, Leaders meet for final evaluation of program.

August – Fall promotion, sign-ups.

August – New leader training.

September - Fall small groups begin.

October – Fall mid-term meeting.

October – November: Plan for 2018 Spring sessions.

December – Fall end-of-term wrap up, evaluation.

Recommendation #2:

Incorporate existing small groups and classes into the new semester-based system of promoting and coordinating small groups.

- Sunday school classes and applicable Wednesday programs could continue largely unchanged but would be promoted at the same time small groups are announced each semester. Ongoing classes would be encouraged to continue with additional support from the leadership in the group system.
- Sunday school classes would generally remain open to new members throughout the semester but adjust to the same schedule as the small groups. Class planning and promotions would be integrated so **all learning opportunities are seen as part of a coherent whole**. We would hope that existing SS class members would want to also try new small group opportunities.

- Provide targeted training for class leaders and potential new class leaders on topics they identify. Leaders in each of these areas should also meet together periodically with small group leaders to encourage each other and set goals for spiritual development.
- Establish guidelines and a path for developing new classes and ministry groups that includes goals for spiritual development and personal growth as a key element.
- Many of the functions of the proposed new Spiritual Development Team overlap the work of the Education Committee so we propose these efforts be combined.
- The Spiritual Development Team would coordinate with Missions Committee and other groups such as UMW to jointly promote missions activities and identify projects small groups may want to support as part of their outreach role.

Recommendation #3:

We recommend that a primary orientation of the church be to encourage and support intentional personal spiritual awareness, activity, and practices.

- Sermons, small groups, website content, etc. directed toward encouraging intentional personal spirituality and explorations of various spiritual practices
- Support materials and links for pursuing personal spiritual practices featured on the church website, and print materials available in church library
- Small groups provide individualized support and encouragement for intentional individual spirituality
- Spirituality mentorship be available from trained mentors which may include small group leaders, other congregation members, and staff
- Promotion of walk to Emmaus / Chrysalis / Great Banquet retreats, church camps, and other relevant outside programs
- Annual congregational two-week promotion focusing on renewing intentional personal spirituality including explorations of spiritual practices

We recommend that one member of the Spiritual Growth Team be primarily responsible for overseeing and promoting these initiatives, with support from the rest of the team as well as the staff liaison.

Recommendation #4:

We recommend that the Children’s ministries (age 0 through 6th grade) and Youth ministries (7th through 12th grade) each have support teams. These teams would support Shari and Glen in their work, help find volunteers as needed and would regularly review existing programs and collaborate in developing new ideas and programs.

For example; the Children’s ministry team might:

- offer ways to assist with Worship Express to help with the recent increase in attendance noted by Shari.
- review the current Sunday School program and how to increase numbers and recruit new teachers.
- review the Mid-kids program and how to retain children of this age, and possibly to include some spiritual activity other than on a Sunday morning.

The Youth ministry team might:

- look at improving long term communication & organization.
- assist with support for confirmation classes, specifically support for the retreat and reinstating the mentor program for confirmands.
- follow up on attendance for visitors as well as absences.

Youth Counselors, Sunday school teachers and Nursery workers must be trained in teaching e.g. what is expected/structure of the class, but also in safety procedures (tornado/fire etc.) and any child/youth specific information e.g. medical issues.

We feel a team approach can better identify enhancements to programming for children and youth that include opportunities for spiritual development and stronger emphasis on scripture and Bible learning. Please note that by Bible learning here, we mean age appropriate presentation of the stories in the Bible; not a shift away from using crafts, games and songs. We wish to highlight the amazing pre-school and children’s Bible times which Shari does on Wednesdays as a great way for children to experience and understand Bible stories.

In connection with recommendation #2 we suggest scheduling for Children’s and Youth Ministries be coordinated with that for the new small groups schedule to maximize convenience for families with children/youth. Coordination could help assure that when adult classes are meeting that children and youth typically would be also be meeting and conversely have weeks off at the same time.