

---

# SUPPORTING VITAL CONGREGATIONS & COMMUNITIES

---

## CULTURE

---

### **Acts 2:42-47**

*“The believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, to the community, to their shared meals, and to their prayers. A sense of awe came over everyone. God performed many wonders and signs through the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Every day, they met together in the temple and ate in their homes. They shared food with gladness and simplicity. They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone. The Lord added daily to the community those who were being saved.”*

As the churches that make up the Mountain Sky area, we will move from seeking safety and security to living as holy, risk-taking, transformational communities. We will offer hope, healing, and nourishment for abundant life. Laity and clergy will partner as we attend to the movement of the Holy Spirit in our context. We will name where God is at work and invite others to join in what God is doing.

## DEFINITIONS

---

**A disciple is** someone whose life is being transformed by the love of God the creator, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and by practicing the ways of Jesus Christ.

**A vital church is** one that invites new people into a life of discipleship and deepens the discipleship of those who are part of their community in an intentional way.

## MAKING AND STRENGTHENING DISCIPLES

---

*Jesus told his followers, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given to you,”* (Matthew 28:19 -20). And those commands were, *“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandments are greater than these,”* (Mark 12:30-31).

To make new disciples, we first have to be disciples. We have to show by example that we love one another – that we respect differing views, and we show kindness and respect to each other. Disciples, in turn, will inspire a renewed movement towards greater disciple making by living out the foundational Christian practices found in the Wesleyan Cross of discipleship (see below). The cross focuses on two axes. The first is the call to love God and love neighbor. The

second axis embodies John Wesley’s focus on personal and social (communal) holiness. These two axes combine to give us four distinct areas: devotion, worship, mercy and justice.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, embedded into the movement a focus on deepening the discipleship of fellow Methodists as well as inviting new people into a life of faith. In many cases, however, the modern church has done a better job creating members than disciples. We have cultivated an environment where our congregants understand the obligations of church involvement but are not as able to experience to the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding this situation, we must boldly claim the truth that the living God is still at work around the world, in our neighborhoods, and in our lives. **Seeing and recognizing this is key to any congregation’s future health.**

Building on the Wesleyan Cross of discipleship we will develop a shared language consistent across conference, district, circuit and local church levels. This will be a language that will unite our efforts and will be flexible enough to allow for contextualization across our area.



**Devotion:** These are acts where an individual’s focus is oriented toward God. This could take the form of a daily prayer practice before bed or when you rise. It could be reading a book or devotional resource, a practice of gratitude or self-reflection. It could be a form of physical prayer through movement, meditation, or dance.

**Worship:** is much more than what happens on Sunday mornings. It is any corporate activity that orients a group toward God. It could be through singing, communal prayer, discussion of scripture, communion, or deep sharing in Wesleyan small groups.

**Mercy:** These are acts where the attention of individuals or faith communities is directed toward other individuals. These include participating in missions like food banks, community meals, recovery groups, and free stores. While those ministries might serve several people at a time, it is individuals who benefit from the effort.

**Justice:** These are acts where the attention of the individual or faith community is aimed at correcting larger systems that devalue the God-given dignity of people. This could be advocating for the rights of the poor, the abolishment of the death penalty, or other social justice causes. In all cases we engage in ministry *with* those on the margins helping their voices to be heard.

The overall goal of living out these elements is to shift the culture of local churches to a hopeful and positive understanding of what God is doing. Inherent in this is Wesley's prescribed movement toward intentional disciple making that focuses on local engagement.

---

## RESOURCING LOCAL CHURCHES

---

The following are resourcing priorities that are critical to shifting local church culture toward greater vitality. These resources must be presented not as obligations but as opportunities for the local church to thrive. They also need to be available to children, youth, families, and older adults.

- **Intentional Discipleship.** Practical tools for how our local churches can make disciples in an intentional way that sees not only devotion and worship but also mercy and justice as key to disciple-making.
- **Invitational Evangelism.** How to move beyond our fear and share the good news with new people in new ways.
- **Missional Engagement.** Making God's love tangible to our neighborhoods by engaging in works of mercy and advocating for justice.
- **Worship Excellence.** Supporting our churches to provide quality, spirit-led worship experiences that inspire and change lives.
- **Simple & Effective Local Church Governance.** How to align our church structure and ministry.
- **Stewardship & Finance.** How to create a culture of generosity amongst children and adults of all ages.
- **Cultivating Call.** How to lift up and continually support new leaders (laity and clergy) for the local church and beyond the church in our local communities.

## STRATEGIES

---

Our strategy to resource location congregations around the priorities listed above must become more holistic and focus on more than delivering content for congregations to assimilate. Instead, we need to take a more complete approach that focuses on delivering important information paired with spiritual and communal connections that bring us to life.

To ensure that any initiative focused on the health and vitality of our location congregations and communities has a holistic approach it needs to include opportunities to “Pray, Partner, & Practice.”

**Pray:** Practices of prayer and spiritual formation. These practices connect us to one another and to God’s greater purposes for us and our communities. Congregational work must be first and foremost rooted in spiritual practice that opens us up to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Congregations will need tools to equip them to better root their teams and committees in spiritual discernment.

**Partner:** Practicing collaborative learning and ministry. Congregations need to look both inside themselves and outside to the wider community to learn what God is up to. Teams, not individuals, need to lead the transformational work needed in our congregations and communities. Those teams need to partner with others through circuits and districts. They also need to partner with their community to better understand the needs and resources around them to practice asset-based approaches to community development. The conference must partner with and resource these teams on an on-demand basis, making relevant assistance available when it’s needed.

**Practice:** Everyone will need to conduct ministry experiments that make an impact. By identifying coaches, mentors, and partner congregations the conference can equip local congregations to get out into the community and make the good news real to new people. We will also develop useful and practical metrics that help congregations know if they are reaching their goals.

## NEXT STEPS

---

How will the conference live into its renewed focus on supporting healthy and vital local congregations? We have identified the following as important next steps.

- Partnering with circuits, each congregation will identify the strengths and opportunities for growth of your congregation based on the resource priorities listed above. Circuits need to become places of resourcing, discernment, and accountability as congregational leaders help move their congregations to a more healthy and vital place.
- Partnering with General Boards and Agencies, the Mountain Sky Congregational Development Committee, the Mountain Sky Community Engagement Committee and their related teams congregations will participate in continuing education events (in person, live stream, online videos). Every event has a follow-up (facilitated groups that

meet regularly after the event to help those who attend accomplish their goals) and all following the “Pray, Partner, & Practice” model.

- Partnering with the Congregational Resource Ministers, circuits will invest in communications technology that allows for virtual meetings and webinars. Identify where the gaps are in our technology are and what areas are lacking the resources to participate fully.
- Better utilize the Mountain Sky Communications Team to use social media to communicate with a wider audience. Connect the circuit leaders and/or Congregational Resource Ministers with the communications team to improve sharing of information.
- Removing ourselves from the silos of clergy and lay ministry, both clergy and laity need to be re-trained on the need for well-equipped laity (including youth and young adults) who are ready and able to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.
- To link existing youth and young adults to the “WHY” of vital congregation and communities strategies we need to invest in youth circuits as well as create opportunities for young people at the circuit and district level. Local pastors, clergy and laity circuits will encourage participation of their congregation’s youth in a student-led system for leadership allowing students to experience and learn leadership and discipleship in their own context with their peers. Create conference scholarships to further education as motivation for leadership excellence.
- Circuit gatherings that focus on “Pray, Partner, & Practice” and are a conduit for information sharing that goes both ways.