



## **CLERGY CIRCUIT GUIDEBOOK**

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## Table of Contents

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
UNITED METHODIST MISSION STATEMENT	2
MOUNTAIN SKY AREA QUADRENNIAL VISION (2016-2020)	2
CIRCUIT PURPOSE STATEMENT	2
FOCUSED ON DISCIPLESHIP	2
<b>CLERGY CIRCUIT EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS</b>	<b>3</b>
GOALS FOR CIRCUITS	3
SUGGESTED CLERGY CIRCUIT MEETING AGENDA	5
EXAMPLE OF A BASIC COVENANT	6
CASE STUDY GUIDE	7
<b>CIRCUIT LEADER EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS</b>	<b>8</b>
CIRCUIT LEADERS	8
GOALS FOR CIRCUIT LEADERS	8
INFORMATION SHARING AND CONFIDENTIALITY GUIDELINES	8
COVENANT OF MOUNTAIN SKY CIRCUIT LEADER TEAM	11

# Introduction

## United Methodist Mission Statement

*“To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”*

## Mountain Sky Area Quadrennial Vision (2016-2020)

*“Living into Beloved Community”*

## Circuit Purpose Statement

*The purpose of circuits is to provide opportunities for lay and clergy leaders of local congregations to meet regularly with colleagues for worship, faith development, spiritual formation, mutual support, accountability, peer learning, resource sharing, mission strategy, and experimental collaboration.*

## Focused on Discipleship

All circuit activities should be designed to strengthen disciple-making ministry within the circuit, focusing in the areas of Devotion, Worship, Mercy, and Justice.

### What is a Disciple?

*“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 following the way of Jesus Christ.”*

—Mountain Sky Area Definition



# Clergy Circuit Expectations and Goals

*“Peer learning binds people together, breaks isolation, increases trust, enhances leadership and morale, and fosters a common sense of mission. It’s an expression of a missional connectionalism.”* —Robert Schnase, *The Seven Levers*, pg. 65

All licensed pastors, provisional elders, full elders, provisional deacons, and full deacons appointed to serve as the pastoral leaders of a congregation(s) are appointed/assigned to a church or charge, and assigned to a circuit. Certified lay ministers serving as pastoral leaders of a congregation are eligible to attend. Pastors are responsible not only to the church/charge to which they are appointed but to the work of the circuit as well. **Participation in clergy circuit meetings is an expectation of all clergy in these categories.**

Deacons, elders appointed to extension ministry, and retired clergy are not expected to participate in clergy circuit meetings. They may, if they wish, organize meetings that focus on the unique needs of their ministry areas.

In addition to clergy circuit meetings, regular gatherings of laity and clergy are encouraged for the purpose of strengthening disciple-making ministry within the circuit. These gatherings should focus on increasing the capacity for disciple-making at the local church level.

## Goals for Circuits

- Provide intentional spiritual formation as a Wesleyan Small Group.
- Provide opportunities for peer learning.
- Collaboratively develop mission strategy for circuit.
- Renew investment in the Connection.
- Explore and investigate needs of clergy and congregations within circuit.
- Increase the capacity for disciple making and lay leadership development within the local congregations in the circuit.

Regular clergy circuit meetings will be the primary way each circuit will interact. Circuits are encouraged to develop a basic covenant that covers expectations around participation in the group. An outline of a basic covenant is provided below.

Clergy circuit meetings are intended to be focused on peer learning and coordinating shared ministry. Peer learning can be facilitated in many ways. The default option for circuits is through the use of case studies. At each meeting one person should present a case study using the format provided in this document. Case studies are an opportunity to ministry issues by asking appropriate questions and theologically reflecting on the situation presented. It is not about *fixing* or *giving advice*. It is about mutual exploration and learning.

Circuits are encouraged to explore opportunities for shared ministry between the participating congregations. Circuits will need to evaluate the possibilities for mission and ministry in their area as well as the varied resources each congregation can bring to the table. The focus should be on how congregations can cooperate to make a larger impact in their community in a way that focuses on one or more areas of discipleship (i.e., Devotion, Worship, Mercy, and Justice).

# Suggested Clergy Circuit Meeting Agenda

Timeframe: 2-3 Hours

Welcome:

- Building tour of the host church by host pastor
- Ministry highlights of the host church by host pastor

Worship:

- Prayer
- Devotion, Lectio Divina, or other Spiritual Formation Activity  
(<http://www.wholechurch.org/media/Spiritual-Formation-Booklet-1.pdf>)

Wesleyan Small Group Questions

- How is it with your soul?
- Where are you struggling in your faith right now?
- Where do you feel tempted in life?
- How are you overcoming those temptations?

Peer Learning:

- Discussion of current resource/book/video
- Case Study

Shared Mission Strategy:

- What events or trainings are coming up that we need to be aware of?
- Balcony Time: What is the big picture for our churches/conference?
- Who are our neighbors in this circuit?
- How do we engage them?

Schedule Next Meeting

## Example of a Basic Covenant

Adapt to fit the desires of your group:

We will attend each of our gatherings, beginning and ending on time. If someone has not arrived by the break time and has not notified someone in the group of their absence, they will receive a text or phone call during break time to make sure they are okay.

Cell phones will be silenced during meetings, and we will not text or email except on break. If phone calls must be taken, the person will step outside of the meeting space.

Confidentiality: We all agree to follow the confidentiality guidelines stated in this document above. (Circuit leaders should distribute the guidelines separately if these guidelines are not shared with the whole group.)

If a covenant issue arises with an individual or the group as a whole, the Circuit Leader will approach the topic in an appropriate and respectful manner. For example, a violation may warrant a mediated discussion between individuals or with the group as a whole.

## Case Study Guide

As you are developing your case study, please provide the following in written format at least three days before your circuit gathering:

**Background:** What is the context of the situation? What led you to this place and who was involved? What other pressures or circumstances were playing into the situation?

**Descriptions:** What happened and what did you do? Include only the essential facts.

**Analysis:** What issues and relationships were in play in this situation? What else was happening? Who were you as minister and leader? How was God evident or absent?

**Evaluation:** Estimate your own effectiveness in the event. Did you function effectively? Why? Why not? Did you do what you set out to do?

Provide two questions for the group to discuss that would be most helpful to you.

**Confidentiality:** *If you do not want to reveal the identity of real persons or institutions, please use fictitious names and places.*

# Circuit Leader Expectations and Goals

## Circuit Leaders

Circuit leaders are recruited by the district superintendents. Their role is to facilitate the development of the circuit, ensure regular clergy circuit meetings, and to consult with the DS about the progress the circuit is making.

Circuit leaders are not Supervising Elders. The district superintendent is the supervisor.

## Goals for Circuit Leaders

- Develop leaders within the circuit (Who could be the next circuit leader?)
- Engage in peer learning with other circuit leaders
- Collaborate with DS to ensure arrangement and scheduling of charge conferences within circuits (individually or as a group)
- Share with district superintendents issues that may surface.
- Partner with other Conference Leadership.
- Provide a brief report to DS after each circuit meeting: “Here’s when we met, what we discussed, questions raised, and here are resources identified.”

## Information Sharing and Confidentiality Guidelines

In order to protect trust in relationships, confidentiality is a high value in the church and among clergy. Clergy circuits, by the nature of the group and the conversation topics, necessarily create a circle of trust and accountability, in order to foster the spiritual and professional growth desired. Yet because of the nature of our United Methodist connection and our responsibility both to our local churches and to our respective conferences, these circles include conference leaders who may not be present in the gatherings, notably the district superintendent, the cabinet, and the bishop. Within this network of relationships, the circuit leaders play a key role between the circuit and the greater connection. Circuit leaders are members of the circuit and also relate directly to the district superintendent. As circuit leaders assist the district superintendent and convene circuits of clergy, questions of confidentiality will inevitably arise. Undoubtedly

the norms and expectations will form and reform as we work in these relationships. For the present, we ask the circuits to work within the following guidelines.

**Regarding Confidentiality and Trust Among Circuit Members:**

1. Any information shared within gatherings of the circuits should not be shared with others outside of the circuit's circle of trust and accountability (circuit members, circuit leaders, district superintendent, cabinet, bishop) without the express consent of the one sharing.
2. Conversations about information shared within the gatherings should be limited to the gatherings without the express knowledge and consent of the one originally sharing (i.e., circuit members should not continue conversations about information shared by a member in circuit gatherings outside of the member's presence).
3. One-on-one conversations held between members regarding information shared within the circuit gatherings should be held to the same level of confidentiality as described above.

**Regarding Communication between Circuit Members, Circuit Leaders, the District Superintendent, and the Bishop:**

1. In most cases, personnel matters regarding clergy are the responsibility of the district superintendent and should be so directed.
2. Whenever practical, if a circuit leader has information about a pastor that should be shared with the district superintendent, that leader will inform the pastor that the matter needs to be shared with the district superintendent, and invite the pastor to share the matter directly.
3. Circuit leaders are obligated to share with the district superintendent any information that might affect a pastor's appointment or appoint-ability (concerns about health, family, ethics, or effectiveness): **NO SECRETS.**
4. Circuit leaders are obligated to share with the district superintendent any information that might create legal, ethical, or public relations liability for the conference.
5. Circuit leaders have a responsibility to inform pastors of these guidelines and to discourage pastors from sharing information with them that the pastor does not want shared with the district superintendent.
6. If any matter concerning a pastor or a United Methodist Church or church-related institution is going to be made public, pastors and circuit leaders should inform the district superintendent in advance: **NO SURPRISES.**
7. The district superintendent will not share confidential matters regarding a pastor with a circuit elder except with the permission of the pastor(s) involved.

8. Insofar as possible, the district superintendent will strive to create and maintain open and complete communication with local church SPRCs and pastors, with full sharing of information with all parties.
9. Whenever a concern is raised with the district superintendent about a pastor's performance or appointment, the district superintendent will ask for permission from the person raising the concern to share the concern with the pastor and the SPRC of the local church.
10. The district superintendent is an extension of the office of the bishop. Anything shared with the district superintendent must be available to the bishop at the discretion of the superintendent and bishop.

## Covenant of Mountain Sky Circuit Leader Team

### **What is asked of you?**

- A monthly meeting with the team of circuit leaders within the district
- A monthly meeting with the clergy in your circuit
- One hundred percent Connectional Giving / Mission Share support of your church, or commit that within three years, your church will be at 100% Connectional Giving or Mission Share support

### **What's in it for you?**

- Give and take with colleagues in an intentional covenantal community
- Exposure to excellent and emerging theology and training
- Leadership development in a team setting
- An opportunity to support clergy in your circuit: pastorally, personally, professionally, and spiritually
- Ministry of Oversight: Looking at the big picture and developing regional missional strategies

### **What does the Cabinet get out of this experiment?**

- Growth in our personal and professional lives
- New relationships of trust and accountability with colleagues
- Experience “grassroots” connectionalism
- Improved morale among clergy
- Renewed vitality of churches: more activity, more people involvement, deepening faith
- Reconnection of churches with their communities and neighborhoods
- Regional strategies for more effective disciple-making ministry for Jesus Christ
- More sharing among clergy and congregations
- Increased Connectional Giving payments as part of increased investment in the connection
- Increased cross-cultural sensitivity
- Relief for congregations at risk

### **The superintendent and the Cabinet remain responsible for:**

- Legal matters such as immigration, contracts, lawsuits, and property issues
- Disciplinary matters such as complaints, conference relations, and interpretation of the Discipline
- Personnel matters such as leaves, vacation compensation, and overall supervision

- Ordination support with district committees and BOM
- Appointment consultations and decisions
- Evaluation of pastoral effectiveness—including all relationships with the Staff Parish Relations Committees