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The people of The United Methodist Church®



# VITAL CONGREGATIONS

2012  
STATE OF  
THE CHURCH  
REPORT

*Responding to the call  
for more vital congregations in  
The United Methodist Church*

# VITAL CONGREGATIONS

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

It has been a remarkable year for The United Methodist Church, filled with meaningful discussions about the future of our denomination. Some of the most exciting conversations have centered on the initiative to create more vital congregations.

Critical research conducted in 2010 found that 15 percent of United Methodist congregations in the United States were considered “highly vital.”

As a result, the Connectional Table and the Council of Bishops embraced a 10-year adaptive challenge to increase vitality across the denomination, especially in places where churches have been on the decline. The CT and the COB also affirmed the Vital Congregations Initiative, created to equip congregations and conferences with tools and methods to increase, measure and sustain vitality. This initiative has inspired widespread, fruitful learning and planning to increase vitality and embody the spirit of Christ in congregations to make world-transforming disciples.

Because of this Spirit-filled movement, the 2012 State of the Church Report focuses on vital congregations. This edition captures some of the traditional statistics of our church but also highlights the ways in which our denomination is engaging the adaptive challenge. Annual conferences and congregations in our worldwide connection are finding new ways to share the Good News of Jesus Christ, revitalizing the United Methodist movement in places of need. We praise God and celebrate the growth and vitality of our churches in Africa and the Philippines and will continue to find ways to strengthen our global connection.

We invite you not only to learn more about the United Methodist movement to increase vital congregations through this report, but also to become an active participant in the adaptive challenge by offering your God-given gifts with a willing heart.

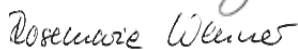
In Christ,



Bishop Michael Coyner  
GENERAL COUNCIL ON FINANCE  
AND ADMINISTRATION



Bishop Bruce Ough  
CONNECTIONAL TABLE



Bishop Rosemarie Wenner  
COUNCIL OF BISHOPS



**2012  
STATE OF  
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REPORT**

**D**uring the past quadrennium, the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table initiated extensive research that surveyed thousands of church leaders throughout The United Methodist Church. The findings were summarized in the Call to Action report, which highlights the adaptive challenge to

**“redirect the flow of attention, energy and resources to an intense concentration on fostering and sustaining an increase in the number of vital congregations effective in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”**

## **INCREASING VITALITY THROUGHOUT THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

The 2012 General Conference witnessed an important moment in the life of the denomination. For the first time in our history, 72 United Methodist annual conferences, representing more than 26,000 congregations around the world, stood before the General Conference and presented their goals for ministry in five areas: average

worship attendance, professions of faith, growth through small groups, engagement in mission and generous giving to mission. We praise God for the planning and work happening right now toward a fruitful decade of discipleship!



Angelo Stabler with Guidance to Success (GTS) program students. Stabler, a member of the Omaha Tribe and recent graduate of Nebraska Wesleyan University, founded the GTS youth club for at-risk middle and high-school students in partnership with First United Methodist Church in Lincoln, NE.

*Courtesy NWU/Lane Hickenbottom/Lane Photographics*

## **STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP ACROSS THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

The General Conference created a new Central Conference Theological Education fund of \$5 million and approved \$7 million to fund theological education for young leaders in the United States.

The General Conference approved proposals by the 2009-12 Study of Ministry Commission to create a more streamlined process for transitioning ineffective pastors from the itinerancy. These recommendations were supported by the Call to Action.

The Council of Bishops, comprising active and retired bishops, agreed to reorganize its life and ministry, in part to address the adaptive challenge. The council will meet once a year. Active bishops will meet at other times to focus and work collaboratively to strengthen conferences and to grow vital congregations.

These steps will set us on a path toward a stronger and more vital church.

Congregants of a United Methodist Church in Bo, Sierra Leone, worship together.

*Mike DuBose/UMNS*



# WHAT IS A VITAL CONGREGATION?



*A vital congregation is one that grows over time, engages more people in its community, involves more people in ministry and mission and invites people to give generously to mission.*

## VITAL CONGREGATIONS:

- » **grow disciples** in faith and fruitfulness. (Galatians 3:28)
- » **involve people** in life-giving ministries. (Matthew 28:18-20)
- » **engage disciples** passionately in seeking justice and mercy. (Micah 6:8, Luke 4:17-21)
- » **give generously** to the work of God's mission and ministry in the world. (2 Corinthians 9:10-12)

## A VITAL CONGREGATION HAS:

- » inviting and inspiring worship,
- » disciples engaged in mission and outreach,
- » gifted, equipped and empowered lay leadership,
- » effective, equipped and inspired clergy leadership,
- » disciple-forming small group ministries, and
- » strong children's and youth ministry.

"Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands." Matthew 22:36-40, *Common English Bible*

The Rev. Myrna Bethke holds baby Elizabeth Anne Binder on the day of her baptism at the United Methodist Church of Red Bank, N.J. *Courtesy Gwen Kisker*

The United Methodist Church counts two types of members: baptized and professing. Baptized members are all persons who have received Christian baptism in a United Methodist church or have transferred their baptized membership from another church. Professing members are baptized persons who have come into membership in The United Methodist Church by profession of faith. Professing membership is an expression of our baptismal covenant in which we profess our faith in God and declare our desire to live our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.

## UMC STATISTICS

	TOTAL CLERGY	ORGANIZED CHURCHES	REGULAR PREACHING PLACES	ANNUAL CONFERENCES	ACTIVE BISHOPS*
AFRICA	9,209	4,637	4,462	29	13
EUROPE	1,058	1,108	217	21	4
SOUTHEAST ASIA	1,712	1,371	282	24	3
UNITED STATES	45,186	33,614	N/A	59	46
TOTAL	57,165	40,730	4,961	133	66

\*These figures represent the number of bishops anticipated to be in place by Sept. 1, 2012. As a result of actions of the 2008 and 2012 General Conference, an additional bishop will be elected in the Congo Central Conference and active bishops in the U.S. will be reduced by three.

## PROFESSING MEMBERSHIP

CENTRAL CONFERENCE/REGION	2000 MEMBERS	2010 MEMBERS	CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP	% CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP
AFRICA CENTRAL	166,434	450,686	284,252	170.8%
CONGO	630,697	2,231,726	1,601,029	253.9%
WEST AFRICA	379,425	1,508,696	1,129,271	297.6%
CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN EUROPE	21,725	16,162	-5,563	-25.6%
GERMANY	38,536	32,305	-6,231	-16.2%
NORTHERN EUROPE AND EURASIA	19,110	15,293	-3,817	-20.0%
PHILIPPINES	56,780	145,642	88,862	156.5%
UNITED STATES	8,292,531	7,570,541	-649,893	-7.8%
TOTAL	9,605,238	11,971,051	2,412,998	25%

The United Methodist Church also records the number of constituents in each congregation. Constituents are all unbaptized children, church school members and others who are not members of the church but are in relationship with a congregation and for whom a local church has pastoral responsibility. In 2010, United Methodist churches reported 1,614,351 constituents worldwide with 1,559,305 in the United States and 55,046 in the central conferences.

## THE VITAL CONGREGATIONS GOAL-SETTING CHALLENGE

### DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST:

- » worship regularly,
- » help make new disciples,
- » grow in their faith,
- » engage in mission, and
- » give to mission.

In 2011, the Vital Congregations Initiative began in response to the Call to Action research that found 15 percent of United Methodist congregations in the United States to be "highly vital." The findings were based upon an index of three factors: attendance, growth and engagement (Towers Watson Report, pp. 18-19).

The percentage of congregations in each jurisdiction identified as "highly vital," according to the 2010 General Council on Finance and Administration Vitality Index, is:

North Central Jurisdiction	11.58%
Northeastern Jurisdiction	10.96%
South Central Jurisdiction	19.15%
Southeastern Jurisdiction	15.84%
Western Jurisdiction	20.02%

The Vital Congregations Initiative invited local United Methodist congregations to set specific and measurable goals of fruitfulness for their ministries for the next quadrennium. The goals were presented to the 2012 General Conference, with more than 73 percent of congregations in the United States and four central conference episcopal areas participating.

Collectively, the goals of these congregations and conferences for the next quadrennium are:

Average Worship Attendance	3,648,626
Professions of Faith	794,074
Small Groups	443,952
People Engaged in Mission	806,770
Mission Giving in U.S. Dollars	\$3,655,637,550

Achieving these goals will require the support and collaboration of the church's leadership, agencies and conferences.

Bishop Hans Växby (back, right), who leads conferences in Russia, Ukraine and Moldova, preaches during a commissioning service for new United Methodist missionaries serving through the General Board of Global Ministries. *Cassandra Zampini/UMNS*

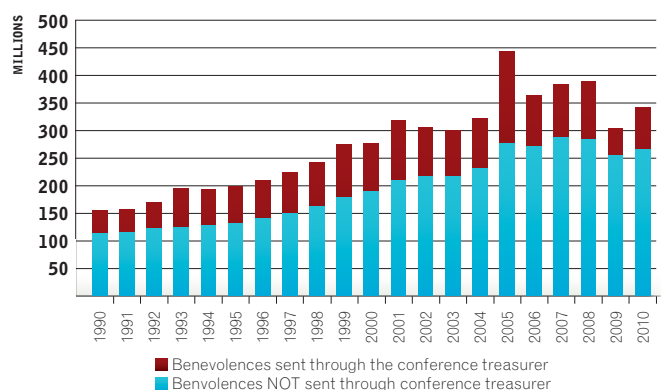


## FINANCIAL STATISTICS

### OUR FINANCIAL FUTURE

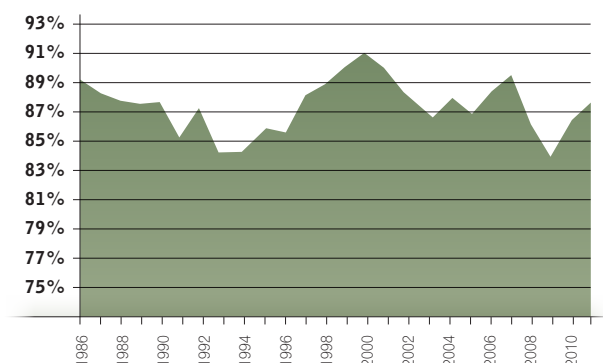
For the first time in the history of The United Methodist Church, the 2012 General Conference approved a general church budget lower than the previous quadrennium. The general church budget for the 2013-16 quadrennium is \$603.1 million, a reduction of 6.03 percent from the 2009-12 quadrennium. For more information, visit [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org).

### GIVING TO ALL NON-APPORTIONED BENEVOLENCES, 1990-2010 (U.S.)



In 2010, United Methodists in the U.S. jurisdictions gave a total of \$341,383,538 in benevolences, an increase of \$38,255,587 from 2009. Of this, \$73.5 million was sent through the conference treasurer for a variety of funds including The Advance, which experienced a 146 percent increase in 2010 following the devastating earthquake in Haiti on Jan. 12, 2010. Also included are six general church offerings, World Service specials, the Youth Service Fund, annual conference Advance specials, conference Special Sundays and other benevolences sent through the conference treasurer.

### PERCENTAGE PAID ON APPORTIONMENTS TO ALL GENERAL FUNDS, 1986-2011 (U.S.)



**2011**  
Total Apportioned:  
**\$149,472,006**  
Amount Paid:  
**\$130,885,848**  
Percentage:  
**87.6%**

The seven general apportioned funds are the World Service Fund, the Ministerial Education Fund\*, the Black College Fund, the Africa University Fund, the Episcopal Fund, the General Administration Fund and the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund.

\*Twenty-five percent of the apportionments and receipts for the Ministerial Education Fund are retained by the annual conferences and not included in these figures.

# NEXT STEPS:



The Rev. Jerry Herships (left) offers Holy Communion to a homeless man in Denver, Colo. Herships leads AfterHours Denver, a United Methodist congregation that began in July 2011 to serve the poor and unchurched of metro Denver. *Carey Moots/UMNS*

## FIRST WAVE OF LEADERS TO FORM LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Vital Congregations Initiative plans to assemble annual conference leaders who are willing to take on the challenge to double the number of highly vital congregations in the United States. Annual conferences are invited to participate in the first wave of leaders willing to be a part of a learning community to hold one another accountable and track their progress using quantitative and qualitative tools and methods. This group will begin with a two-year covenant and then move forward, aligned and focused over the next 10 years to respond to the Call to Action. Through the work of these conferences and many other efforts across The United Methodist Church, we believe the church will regain momentum as it increases the number of people living transformed lives for the sake of God's mission in the world today.

## STRATEGIES TO SUSTAIN AND INCREASE VITALITY IN CENTRAL CONFERENCES

Central conferences experiencing membership decline are also renewing their focus on church vitality. The Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe shared its successes and challenges with the 2012 General Conference and reported on goals to increase vital congregations into the next decade.

More than a dozen new churches have been planted or integrated into the Central and Southern Europe Central Conference during the 2009-12 quadrennium, reaching more young people and migrants. The provisional annual conferences of Austria, Bulgaria-Romania, Hungary and Serbia-Macedonia, and the annual conferences of the Czech and Slovak republics and Poland, have experienced stability or steady growth in membership over the past few years. However, in the largest annual conference, Switzerland-France-North Africa, The United Methodist Church in Switzerland with 6,000 professing members continues to experience a decline in membership that began 70 years ago. In 2010, annual conference members adopted a strategy "to make more disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" with specific goals for 2010-18 that include:

- » increasing new professions of faith,
- » coaching local churches in turn-around processes,
- » increasing the number of migrant churches, and
- » supporting more "fresh expressions" of church ([www.freshexpressions.org.uk](http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk)).

The Switzerland Conference also has goals to sustain efforts to support "Connexio," the mission board with its network for mission and *diakonia* in the episcopal area and in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia and Chile), Africa (Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe) and Cambodia with \$2.5 million USD per year.

## A QUICK LOOK

# FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS UPDATE

In 2008, The United Methodist Church set out to strengthen ministries in the Four Areas of Focus: developing Christian leaders, planting and revitalizing faith communities, engaging in ministry with the poor and improving health globally. To date the emphases have resulted in planting nearly 1,000 new faith communities worldwide, securing 6,700 candidates for ordained ministry, engaging 400,000 people in mission trips and distributing nearly one million mosquito nets in Africa.

*Here are some snapshots of activities on the general church level.*

## 1 DEVELOPING PRINCIPLED CHRISTIAN LEADERS FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

The interagency Leadership Table created the Spark12 program, named for the first 12 who became passionate disciples of Jesus Christ. The program invests in young entrepreneurs, allowing them to launch innovative ideas that will transform the world. The program provides funding, coaching and resourcing to bring these ideas to life. Spark12 will award \$175,000 for projects that will launch in January 2013.



Leading the new Spark12 initiative are (from left) the Rev. DJ del Rosario, Spark 12 executive director; Patrick Scriven, director of communications; the Rev. April Casperson, director of public relations; and Joseph Kim, director of community care. *Kathleen Barry/UMNS Photo Illustration*

In the Bulacan Philippines Conference of the Manila Episcopal Area, leaders are using a new performance evaluation system for church leaders. This system will assist in evaluating church workers' effectiveness and fruitfulness. Bishop Daniel Arichea Jr. reports that the cabinet has appointed a small group to study the new system to consider implementing it throughout the episcopal area.

The Zimbabwe East and West annual conferences brought together 68 leaders to evaluate existing opportunities for church development. "On the other side of the world our denomination is declining in membership," Bishop Eben Nhwatiwa told the participants. "It is a scenario we must strategically plan to avoid." Conference leaders analyzed

the impact of political, economic, social and technological factors on their ministries and agreed to set discipleship goals in the five key areas identified by the Vital Congregations Initiative.

## NEW VITAL SIGNS WEB-BASED TOOL AVAILABLE

As part of the Vital Congregations Initiative, the General Council on Finance and Administration has created a new online tool to give local church leaders a way to track progress toward their goals on a weekly basis. The dashboard tool is called Vital Signs ([www.vitalsignsumc.org](http://www.vitalsignsumc.org)).

The Kansas Episcopal Area was among the first to begin using the dashboard, starting

with a rural district in Kansas West and an urban district in Kansas East. The Area provided training in every district in the state prior to the Jan. 1, 2012 rollout for all districts and invited any church that was ready to start earlier to sign up any time in 2011.

"We count people because people count," explained Kansas Area Bishop Scott Jones when asked about the use of metrics in strategies to revitalize congregations. "We also encourage our churches to share their stories because to us, the stories are as important – if not more important – than the statistics themselves. Those stories tell us how a church views itself and how it reaches out into the community in ways we can't see through simple numbers."



The children's choir of the United Methodist Church of Barangay Conversion in Nueva Ecija, Philippines, performs for a delegation of visitors.

Courtesy Laddie Perez-Galang

## ENGAGING IN MINISTRY WITH THE POOR

The ministry with the poor organizing effort created a campaign to raise awareness and educate people about issues of global poverty and to inspire them to engage in ways to make a difference through United Methodist ministries. The "With\*" campaign includes a website, [www.ministrywith.org](http://www.ministrywith.org), with resources for learning, mobilizing, connecting and engaging with ministries and people to eradicate poverty.

## 3 COMBATING THE DISEASES OF POVERTY BY IMPROVING HEALTH GLOBALLY

The United Methodist Church has raised \$22 million for the Imagine No Malaria campaign, an effort that is responsible for distributing 846,000 insecticide-treated bed nets throughout Africa. Expectations are that the one-millionth mosquito net will be distributed before the end of 2012. In addition, more than 5,000 community health workers have been trained to deliver mosquito nets and measure usage rates.

## 4 CREATING NEW PLACES FOR NEW PEOPLE AND REVITALIZING EXISTING CONGREGATIONS

In the past four years, nearly 1,000 new United Methodist worshipping communities have been started across the globe. Since 2009, more than 325 new United Methodist faith communities have been created in 12 mission initiative areas in Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe and Eurasia, many in impoverished and marginalized communities. In the United States, in partnership with the Path One initiative, annual conferences have planted close to 650 churches, with nearly half of those being racial-ethnic congregations. Approximately 12 new churches are being planted every month in the United States.

*Annual conferences and local churches continue to engage in thousands of ministries in these four areas, ministries that transform lives, communities and the world.*





# CONCLUSION

As we take steps to increase the number of vital congregations over the next 10 years, we celebrate the ministries of United Methodist congregations, conferences, agencies and institutions where disciples of Jesus Christ share the Gospel, change lives and transform the world through the Four Areas of Focus and beyond. We also acknowledge that the adaptive challenge to increase the number of vital congregations will require an openness to change and new approaches to leadership and learning. It will require a new understanding and practice of accountability and effectiveness. We believe we can meet this challenge.

We invite you to join us on this journey toward a more vital United Methodist Church through your prayers, your presence, your gifts, your service and your witness. Each of us makes a difference in this church and in this world, and for this we give thanks. May the glory be to God!

To learn more and participate in the Vital Congregations Initiative, visit [www.umvitalcongregations.org](http://www.umvitalcongregations.org).

This report was a collaborative effort with statistical data provided by the General Council on Finance and Administration and the Vital Congregations Initiative. Production support was provided by United Methodist Communications. To order additional print copies of this report, please contact the Customer Service Center at United Methodist Communications at (888) 346-3862 or by email at [csc@umcom.org](mailto:csc@umcom.org). To view this report online, visit [www.umc.org/sotc](http://www.umc.org/sotc).

Worshippers sing during a Wednesday evening gathering at Kingdom Builders Center at Windsor Village United Methodist Church in Houston.

*Mike DuBose/UMNS*

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## COVER PHOTO

The Rev. Carol Cavin-Dillon (center) prays for a sixth grader who has just confirmed his faith at Christ United Methodist Church in Franklin, Tenn.

*Kathleen Barry/UMNS*