

## ***Missional Vital Signs:***

### ***An Introduction for Congregational Leaders, Lay & Clergy***

(A Preparatory Script for PowerPoint Presentation)

*What follows is a suggested script which can be used in preparation for using the PowerPoint presentation by the same name. After reading it several times while clicking through the slides, a presenter can probably set the script aside and run with the slides. You might try printing off handouts and taking notes on the handouts.*

**Slide 1:** Title Slide

**Slide 2:** How do congregational leaders know if the congregation's ministry is doing what Jesus asks us to do? Unlike mowing the grass, the goal is neither so obvious, nor can you tell so easily if you are accomplishing it.

**Slide 3:** So how is our congregation doing? And how would we decide whether our congregation is doing well? By whether our members are happy? By whether the institutional powers-that-be are happy? By counting nickels and noses? What are the vital signs we look at in determining the health of our congregation's ministry?

**Slide 4:** Through the years, the Annual Conference has asked congregations to do a variety of congregational reports. The intentions have been good. But some of the reports have asked questions that left many of us . . . wondering. And some of the questions were so complicated it was difficult to take them seriously.

**Slide 5:** Yet it's an important question: Are we being faithful as a congregation to what Jesus calls his follower to be and do? As we seek to answer this question about our authenticity, three other questions need to be answered. First, what is our mission from Jesus? Second, when we are fulfilling His mission, what does it look like? And finally, how can we best measure the fruitfulness of our congregation's ministries so that we might know if we are improving or not?

**Slide 6:** Increasingly our denomination is clear: the Biblical mission of every congregation is to **"make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."** To put it less succinctly, it is the mission of congregations to help people become fully devoted, grown up followers of Jesus Christ who are joining Jesus in life-changing, Kingdom impactful ways in world.

**Slide 7:** While many congregational leaders can repeat our official, Biblical mission, knowing what fulfilling that mission really means day-to-day in the life of a congregation is another matter. In recent years, denominational leaders around the world have been adapting Bishop Schnase's five practices of fruitful congregations as vivid and practical ways of describing the core process of making disciples that make a Kingdom difference in the world. The essential practices of disciple-making congregation are **Passionate Worship, Radical Hospitality, Intentional Discipling, Salty Service** and **Extravagant Generosity**. These are the essential practices of missionally effective congregations because they also describe the essential characteristics of a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. As people mature spiritually, they grow into disciples who worship passionately, extend to

others the radical hospitality of God's grace, are intentional about becoming followers whose character and actions are more like Jesus, unselfishly pick up their crosses in salty service to others, and respond to the needs of others with extravagant generosity. A fruitful congregation cooperates with the life-transforming work of the Holy Spirit to mature disciples so that they can make a Christ-like difference. These five practices, then, are what every congregation is called to do and do well in ministry to be an authentic community of Christian faith.

**Slide 8:** But how can you know when your congregation is living into these discipling practices well? To be sure, measuring the fruitfulness of a congregation's disciple-making ministry is like measuring the smoke from a burning bush. How can you possibly measure whether a congregation is growing in "worshiping in Spirit and in truth", or extending forgiveness to those who have wronged them, or being more responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit or being less judgmental in relating to others? Still, after significant discussion and prayer, the Cabinet identified one measurement for each of the five practices that gives an indication – an imperfect indication, to be sure – but a significant indication of how a congregation is doing in each practice of ministry. As the trends of these measurements are looked at over time, congregational leaders can use them to help discern whether they are becoming more or less effective in a particular core ministry practice.

**Slide 9:** Just the thought of measuring ministry sends many congregational leaders into confusion and anxiety. Like the weigh-in at a Weight Watcher's meeting, no one is excited about being measured. Still, the weigh-in helps people know if they are doing what they really want to do – lose weight. Healthy congregational leaders need objective feedback information on the effectiveness of their ministry so that they can make informed decisions about becoming even more effective.

**Slide 10:** As has already been said, numbers don't tell the whole story about a congregation's fruitfulness in ministry. That's a given. To really understand if a congregation is faithfully and fruitfully living into the 5 practices, more than just numbers must be considered.

**Slide 11:** So, why even try to measure ministry? First of all, Jesus cares about fruitfulness. In John 15 Jesus uses the image of the grapevine, associating us with the branches. Faithfulness keeps us connected to the vine, but beyond staying connected, we are expected also to be fruitful. It is obvious in this passage that more fruitfulness is better than less fruitfulness. Secondly, measuring keeps us focused on what's really important. "You get what you measure." The Conference leaders are asking us to measure the 5 practices because these are the Biblical practices that are at the heart of a congregation's mission. Finally, by observing the trends over a period of time, leaders can know if their congregation's practices are becoming more or less fruitful. This objective feedback loop enables a congregation to make adjustments in how they go about ministry – or as John 15 puts it, "be pruned" in order to bear more fruit.

**Slide 12:** Let's look at the measurement that will be used for each of the practices, starting with **Passionate Worship**. The best indicator for this is the average number of persons worshipping at primary weekly worship services. The assumption

is that if they are connecting with God in meaningful ways, they will keep coming back. The best way to look for trends is to look at the percent of change, from one yearly average to the next or from the average one month compared to the same month's average a year ago.

**Slide 13:** The best indicator for the practice of **Radical Hospitality** is the total number of persons received into membership by either professions of faith or reaffirmations of faith. The assumption here is that the real fruit of sharing Christ's grace with people is them responding by accepting Christ as their Savior and Leader and joining with other persons in learning faithfully to live as His disciples. The comparison figure will be the number of persons in average worship it takes for each profession of faith. For example, if one year a congregation averaging 100 in worship had 2 professions of faith, that would be 50 persons per profession of faith. Let's say the following year this congregation averaged 128 persons in worship and had 4 professions of faith. That would be 32 persons per profession of faith, which is evangelistically better than 50 persons per profession of faith the previous year.

**Slide 14:** The best indicator of **Intentional Discipling** is the number of persons involved in weekly face-to-face discipling groups. Wesley was clear that discipling does not occur so much in worship as in small groups where people know one another and are able to talk personally about following Jesus and their struggles to do so faithfully. The comparison figure will be the percent of average worshipers involved in intentional discipling small groups. For example, if there are 100 in worship and typically 25 of them are in some discipling small group or one-on-one discipling relationship that means that 25% of the congregation is involved in intentional discipling. Improvement in this practice involves increasing the percent of the congregation involved in intentional discipling small groups.

**Slide 15:** **Salty Service** was the most difficult practice to determine how to track because we have not traditionally measured this aspect of our life together. After much thought and prayer, the Cabinet has decided that the best way to track Salty Service is to have people self-select weekly during worship whether they have spent at least one hour the previous week as a Salty Servant to persons outside of the congregation. The comparison figure -- like Intentional Discipling -- is the percent of worshipers who say they have been salty servants weekly. A congregation improves in this practice as a greater percent of their congregation self-selects that they have been salty servants each week.

You probably have all sorts of questions here. Hold them for the moment. Hopefully, we will answer most of them in just a bit. If not, there will be a time for questions at the end of the presentation.

**Slide 16:** For this final practice, **Extravagant Generosity**, we want to get a sense of the total giving of worshipers to budget, capital and missional concerns weekly. The comparison figure will be the average amount given per worshiper weekly. As Extravagant Generosity increases, congregations will see the amount of giving per average worshiper increase.

**Slide 17:** That's a lot of information in a short time and we need especially to talk more about the Intentional Discipling and the Salty Service measurements. But here is

some good news! Four out of five of these Missional Vital Signs every congregation already reports annually. And we now have a website that presents the figures we have been reporting in both graph and data chart formats.

**Slide 18:** The website can be accessed by clicking on the Missional Vital Signs logo on either the Conference website or the Congregational Transformation website. To see a congregation's Missional Vital Signs, click on the congregation's district and then on the name of the congregation. Set the period of years that you want to view and then click on "Get Report Data."

**Slide 19:** Each of the practices (except for Salty Service, which has no historical data) will have a graph and chart something like this. The blue line will graph the primary measurement – in the case of Passionate Worship, average weekly worship attendance. You can click the little box to the bottom right of the graph and turn on or off the comparison figure, which is generated by the website and is graphed in orange.

**Slide 20:** In this case, we see the orange line which traces the percent of change from year to year. These graphs and charts can be printed by clicking the "print this chart" button. And for those that are interested in making a PowerPoint slide of the chart – well, just know that there is a relatively simple way of doing this.

**Slide 21:** While three of the measurements have been kept by every congregation for years, two of the measurements will require some changes: the Intentional Discipling measurement will have to be tightened up and the Salty Service measurement will be new to most congregations. Let's talk about them for a moment beginning with Intentional Discipling.

While congregations have reported Sunday school attendance and short term small group attendance historically, by June 1 the definition of intentional discipling small groups will need to be tightened up. Here is the definition that we will be using because this is the kind of small group environment in which disciples are most likely to mature.

An Intentional Discipling Small Group has at least 2 but no more than 15 persons that meet at least monthly – weekly is best. The members share a conscious and expressed commitment to training to follow and to be more like Jesus. This shared commitment is important and goes beyond intellectually learning more about the Bible. The group reads Scripture together and discusses how it applies in their daily lives. As they discuss, they are honest with one another and they pray for one another, both in the group and between the group meetings.

This means that all church groups are *not* intentional discipling small groups. There are groups designed for other purposes (for example, fellowship, education or service) that are not intentional discipling groups. A line dancing group wouldn't be an intentional discipling small group; a gathering of men for breakfast while listening to the mayor speak would not be, either. Neither would most Board of Trustee meetings, though administrative committees certainly could be structured as discipling groups. Some large lecture oriented Sunday school classes would be questionable, as they are realistically more like another worship service than a

gathering of persons intentionally committed to helping each other become more mature apprentices of Jesus Christ.

A Disciple Bible Study group would certainly count. So too would most Sunday school classes, if they are intentional about discipling their participants and not just educating or babysitting them. Alpha groups would count. Many youth groups are focused on helping each other become better disciples. Emmaus reunion groups could also be counted. So might a group seeking to apply God's Word to their marriage or to their parenting or to their financial life. Some choirs during their rehearsal study Scripture, discuss its implications, pray and share a commitment to help one another grow as disciples, as well as prepare to lead their congregation in worship; they would be an intentional discipling group. A team that gathers to do a particular ministry (like making Celebrate Jesus type visits in their community) might, if they took time to read Scripture, reflect together and pray before heading out. A Celebrate Recovery group would certainly be. And so would two accountability partners who meet weekly by phone to pray, read Scripture and encourage one another in their walk with Christ.

Every congregation will have to decide which of their groups fit this definition. Some groups may want to study the characteristics of an Intentional Discipling small Group and decide whether they feel that God is calling them to be seriously committed to growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. We will also need as a congregation to decide how to track the number of persons who are in Intentional Discipling small groups each week.

**Slide 22:** Let's return to the Salty Service measurement. The Cabinet says they chewed on this more than any other missional vital sign. **Why measure salty service?** After all, we haven't done so traditionally. So, why start now? The short answer is that we have been ignoring it and it is critical to fulfilling Jesus' disciple-making mission.

Imagine a doctor never taking anyone's blood pressure. This doesn't make much sense, really, because we know that blood pressure is a key way doctors tell whether a person is healthy or not. But let's assume that a doctor did not take anyone's blood pressure. Wouldn't you assume that a lot of people among her or his patients would have blood pressure problems that have gone unrecognized and untreated? Well, of course! And that's exactly what has happened with congregations.

The number one characteristic of declining congregations is that they become self-absorbed -- self-preoccupied with maintaining their beloved traditions, caring for their membership and maintaining their buildings. They have lost touch missionally with the community they have been chartered to serve. Like patients whose blood pressure has not been taken, they have left this critical aspect of their missional health unattended.

If the Annual Conference has never asked congregations to focus upon this, there is a sense in which Annual Conference -- and congregational -- leaders have been like doctors that don't measure blood pressure. It is time that we step up to the plate and do what we should have been doing all along: measure salty service. For in

doing this, we help focus people's attention missionally out into the community – as Jesus and Wesley would have us do. Remember: we become what we measure. And that's what we want, because we want disciples to grow up spiritually and learn to be Christ-like servants. Without ministering to others, that never happens; people remain self-centered baby Christians.

There is one other reason that this is important. The world increasingly sees the church as irrelevant because they have not experienced the church making a positive difference in their community and in their lives. We talk about God's love, but if we do not demonstrate it in ways that make it real to unchurched persons in our community, how can they believe in God's love? And until we do, until we embody the love which we talk about and which Jesus in the parable of the sheep and the goats mandates, we will not have credibility with our unchurched neighbors.

So this is critical from several perspectives. But how do we do it?

**Slide 23:** We want to measure the percent of our worshipers who are involved in salty service to those outside our congregation through acts of mercy, justice, earth-care and relationship building ministries. We want to include persons who chose to be involved for at least an hour in organized missions sponsored by the church, and we also want to include those who chose on their own to be in ministry to others. We also want taking the measurement to remain as simple as possible so that we can build it into our regular routine just like counting the attendance or the offerings received each week.

So here is the idea that one of the DS's came up with: each week during the offering time, we encourage people to self-select whether they have been a salty servant in the week before and to present this to Christ as part of their self-offering, in response to God's love for us. This can be done by a simple show of hands in small worship services or by a particular indication on an attendance pad or by placing a Salty Service card in the offering plate. The Salty Service cards could be counted by the money counters and then placed back in the pews to be used again next week. We will experiment with what works best for us as a way of letting people indicate whether the previous week they joined Jesus as a Salty Servant to others. Can you see what a powerful message this will send to people about what disciples are supposed to be doing in the world as God's light and salt?

To be sure, this is going to take some teaching and reinforcement. But remember, the point isn't the numbers. The point is focusing on living into this essential aspect of what it means to be a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. Counting is just a tool for keeping people focused on what's important and for letting leaders know whether they are making headway.

**Slide 24:** Because this is a new emphasis, the cabinet knew that reporting once a year would be too little reinforcement and would also fail to give congregational leaders the feedback information needed to make significant improvements. So, every congregation is being asked to report the five weekly Missional Vital Signs once a month for each of the previous 4 or 5 weeks. Information will be **gathered weekly and reported monthly**.

To accomplish this, we will be asked to designate a Missional Vital Signs Reporter for our congregation. This person will receive an email shortly after the first of each month. In the email there will be a link which will take them to a page where five figures can be plugged in for each of the previous month's weekends. As soon as they are submitted, graphs will be seen of the weekly year-to-date activity for each of the five disciple-making practices on the Missional Vital Signs website we looked at earlier.

**Slide 25:** When does this all start? The first monthly email will go out in February, 2009. At this point, every congregation is asked to report their worship attendance, professions of faith and total offering for each weekend. Again, we have been gathering these figures weekly for years. All that we will be doing in February is beginning to report them so that they show up on our congregation's Missional Vital Signs website graphs.

Then over the next six months, we will go through a process of deciding how we are going to gather information on Intentional Discipling small groups and on Salty Service. Every congregation is asked to begin to report on all five practices by July, 2009. This will give us the time we need to talk to our members, explain why this is important and to begin to focus on these areas critical to effectively making disciples.

**Slide 26:** It is important for us to remember that it is not about the numbers. It is about us being faithful to what Christ calls us to do: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. And it is about us effectively living into the five practices in ways that cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming people's lives. The measuring and reporting is simply a tool to keep us focused and to give us feedback so that we know how we are doing.

**Slide 27:** In short, the Missional Vital Signs are tools for helping us improve our ministry effectiveness. That's why we will begin sharing our Missional Vital Signs with the whole congregation and connecting the measurements with the practices of ministry that are core to who we are. Our congregational leaders will be looking at trends in our Missional Vital Signs regularly and discerning what the trends mean for us. In some practices, we will be able to celebrate the great things that Christ is doing in and through us. With other practices, we will need to strategize how we can become more effective.

**Slide 28:** Now is a good time for some questions and comments.