

Major initiatives fact sheet: the local church as a learning community

“Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do His work and build up the church.” Ephesians 4:11-12, NLT

One of the centerpieces of the Congregational Vitality department’s portfolio is forming the structure for a learning organization, one in which churches with great talent and capacities in specific areas (e.g., local and global missions, discipleship, evangelism) can share their best practices with other churches—to build up the body of Christ.

To do this, many organizations use the “teaching churches” concept. Typically, these are top-down systems, selecting large churches with great success in a ministry area to function as “schools” for other churches, offering workshops, etc. For the Florida Conference, our system is emerging as a **learning communities** model that organically grows around the best practices of, and learning events offered by, local churches, no matter the church size.

The goal is to offer an increasing number of ways for churches to benefit from the experiences of one another.

A “Beyond the Classroom” Strategy

These communities may begin with a live classroom event at a church, and the learning extends beyond it. For six months, event attendees engage in networking that can include monthly 30-minute web-based workshops for digging deeper into a particular topic. The communities also provide a forum for sharing ideas, developing implementation strategies, celebrating successes and building accountability. The Congregational Vitality department believes that this learning community model will result in a higher conversion rate of ideas to actions.

This model was first tested in conjunction with the Real Ideas learning event in March 2015 (hosted by Van Dyke Church). Attendees of the three discipleship sessions were invited to pilot an ongoing learning community model around that topic. There have been five web workshops to date, with one remaining that will be open to the general public in November 2015.

The second learning community will be built in collaboration with the Missio Ecclesia (Church on Mission) event in February 2016, hosted by Grace Church, Cape Coral. This learning community will focus on how to help a local church become more mission-shaped, and, once again, participants will be attendees of the live event. Congregational Vitality expects to build several more learning communities in 2016.

For more information, contact Janet Earls, Congregational Vitality, jearls@flumc.org or visit www.flumc.org/congregationalvitality.

Next Fact Sheet Topic: An Invitation to Grace

