

The
Faith-Sharing
Initiative

Participant's Manual



FAITH-SHARING INITIATIVE

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Permission is granted to make copies of this material specifically for use with the Faith-Sharing Initiative of the General Board of Discipleship following the initial training by the General Board of Discipleship team.

History shows us that we, in the U. S., have been open and receptive to the Holy Spirit during the last decade of the last two centuries. In the 1790s, there was a great spiritual awakening in our country. As the decade began, there were few Methodists. But as the frontier moved westward, we adapted the unchanging gospel message to fit the spiritual hunger of the culture. Therefore, by 1800, there were more Methodists than any other denomination in the U. S.

Then, in the 1890s, there was another great spiritual awakening. We were receptive to the changing world around us. There were great economic and political changes, as well as spiritual ones. As we moved through the decade, we again adapted the gospel message to fit the spiritual hunger of the culture.

Today we find ourselves not only in midst of a new century but of a new *millennium*. Because we live in a time of rapid change and transition, people are open and receptive. We are on the threshold of yet another great spiritual awakening, and you have been called to adapt the unchanging gospel message to fit the spiritual hunger of the people.

You have been selected as a leader for the **Faith-Sharing Initiative**. As a leader in your congregation, district, or conference, you have been called by God for this particular ministry at this particular time.

As a leader, it is expected that you will be familiar with the following:

- Faith-Sharing* (Revised & Expanded 1996), by H. Eddie Fox & George E. Morris
- The Faith-Sharing Video* (Revised 1996)
- The Faith-Sharing Congregation*, by Roger K. Swanson & Shirley F. Clement
- The Faith-Sharing New Testament*
- The Personal FRAN Plan*

Other resources that would be helpful:

- The Once and Future Church*, by Loren Mead
- Church for the Unchurched*, by George G. Hunter Jr.

You will be expected to help your local congregation fulfill the expectations and covenant of being a **Faith-Sharing Congregation**.

You will be expected to work with a team of persons to help teach, train, and equip persons to:

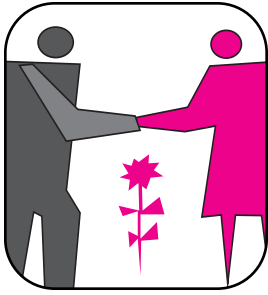
- ▶ Become leaders in the Faith-Sharing Initiative in local congregations
- ▶ Become effective witnesses to the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ through sharing faith in everyday situations and circumstances
- ▶ Fulfill the expectations and covenant of being a **Faith-Sharing Congregation**

You are an instrument of God's grace. Be aware of God's leading in your life as you make yourself open to be an instrument through which God leads others. May God's deepest blessings be yours in your service in Christ's love.





The question is, Why should we share the Christian faith with others?



Session 1

The purposes of this session are:

- ◆ To gather, in prayer and song, as a Christian community
- ◆ To establish the context of the new missionary situation of the church in our time
- ◆ To challenge the notion that religion is, after all, a private affair to be kept to oneself

The Context and Motivation for Faith-Sharing

Defining Our Terms

evANGELism?

“Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:10,11, NRSV).

Evangelism “is the process of spreading the gospel of the kingdom of God by word, deed, and sign in various contexts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, and then waiting and watching in respectful humility and working with expectant hope” (H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris, *Faith-Sharing*).

Evangelism is *telling the good news* of God’s kingdom come in Jesus Christ. Consequently, we do not “evangelize” anyone other than Christ. Evangelism is heralding Christ. We may “evangelize” *among* a group of people, but we do not evangelize any one person. In other words, we do not *convert* anyone. Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our work is to tell the good news story.

1. The first answer is that THE TIMES demand it.

Three ages of the church:

- a. Apostolic Church (Pentecost to A.D. 321)



b. Christendom (A.D. 321 – ?)

c. Missionary Situation (? to present)

2. The second answer is that OUR FAITH demands it.

a. God is a seeking, saving, and sending God.

“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you’ ” (John 20:21, NRSV).

b. Human beings need God.

Romans 3:9-26

3. The third answer is in OUR OWN STORIES.

Small Group Fellowships

Introduce yourselves to one another.

Share with one another the following scripture passage, using *The Faith-Sharing New Testament* and/or the overhead/slide. Talk about what this means to you and respond to the question: What have you heard God whisper in your ear during this session?

(4) when I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God (5) because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. (6) I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ (Philemon 1:4-6, NRSV).

When the leader indicates that it is time to close, pray with one another, for one another as faith-sharers, for our leaders, and for the churches from which we come, that they may become faith-sharing congregations.

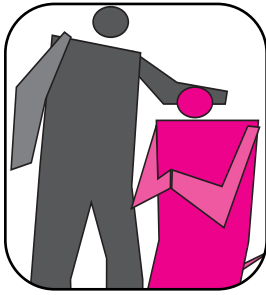
Additional Information: *Faith-Sharing* by Fox & Morris, pp. 13-18, 24-26.

Assignment

Read the Preface and the section on “Basics of Christian Conversion and Discipleship” in the front of *The Faith-Sharing New Testament*, as well as the section “The Essentials for Leading a Person to Christ” in the back.



The question is, What is the faith we share?



Session 2

The purposes of this session are:

- ◆ To explore biblical models of faith-sharing
- ◆ To share personal faith stories

What Is the Faith We Have to Share?

- ◆ Centered
- ◆ Personal
- ◆ Relational

(See #14 in front of "The Faith-Sharing New Testament" and pp. 33-37 of "Faith-Sharing.")

Biblical Models of Faith-Sharing

1. Saul becomes Paul: Acts 9:1-19a

A dramatic experience of coming to Christ.

2. On the road to Emmaus: Luke 24:13-32

Welcoming the stranger.



3. Timothy is nurtured by family: 2 Timothy 1:3-5

4. Andrew invites his brother Simon: John 1:40-42

Social network of family.

5. Philip invites his friend Nathanael: John 1:43-46

Social network of friendship.

6. Simon Peter struggles with the faith

7. A village is invited by an outcast: John 4:39-42

Interactive Small Group Model for Sharing Faith

In groups of three, respond to the following questions as directed by the leader:

(Introduce yourselves to one another.)

1. Who in your family or extended family most influenced your faith journey?
2. Who outside your family or extended family most influenced your faith journey?
3. Share with your small group a time when you responded “yes” to Jesus or to God’s working in your life.

Close the time by praying for one another in your small group.

Reflection Time

Have the total group come together. Discuss the questions:

1. What did you hear?
2. What did you experience?
3. What did you learn?

When You Get Home: A Personal Exercise

When you get home, you may want to take time to identify your own faith journey. Spend time writing your own spiritual autobiography. Initially, you may want to use a couple of pages. Leave your autobiography for a couple of weeks and when you come back, condense it into one page.

Sharing your faith is more than sharing an autobiography. You are invited to tell your story, pointing to the living Christ as active in the drama of your life. Sharing faith is more than an interesting exercise. It is a way of rehearsing the story we have to tell so that the center of our journey—our relationship with Jesus Christ—remains the center. Sharing our faith journeys and the ways we feel God’s nudging and prodding in our lives helps us clarify the word we are hearing. Speaking our story aloud is a way of participating in mutual accountability with others in the faith community, and even with strangers.

Keep these questions in mind while creating your “Spiritual Autobiography Chart”:

- ◆ **Who** has had the most to do with your being a Christian?
- ◆ **When**, along the way in your life, have you experienced moments in which your relationship with the living Christ truly made a difference?
- ◆ **Why** have those moments been significant in your faith?

- ◆ **What** is your current experience as a faith-sharer? In what ways are you growing in faith? In what ways does your relationship with the living Christ make a difference in your daily living, relationships, lifestyle, and decisions?

When You Get Home: An Exercise for Small Groups in Your Church

T E L L I N G A N D L I S T E N I N G M O D E L

- ◆ In groups of three (*teller, listener, observer*), participants tell their stories.
- ◆ One person (*teller*) tells his/her story or any part of it the teller feels comfortable sharing with the group. The story must be the teller's own—not a story of someone else with whom the teller is familiar. Each person is allotted seven minutes.

The teller might include one or more of these points:

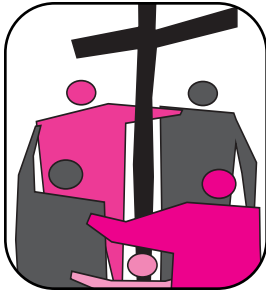
- ▶ What Jesus Christ means to me in my life
- ▶ What my life was like before accepting Jesus Christ
- ▶ How I became aware that I needed Christ; how Christ meets my basic needs
- ▶ Who influenced me most to accept Christ as my Lord and Savior
- ▶ How I came to trust Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior
- ▶ How I discovered ways of serving in the name of Jesus in the world

Or the teller might focus upon a particular faith experience and how that experience has made a significant difference in the teller's daily living, relationships, lifestyle, and decisions.

- ◆ Another person (*listener*) listens to the teller and asks questions (for clarification only). The listener does not tell parts of his/her own story, even if he/she identifies with the teller's story.
- ◆ The third person (*observer*) observes and does not ask any questions or speak until the last three minutes of the segment. At that point the observer affirms the listener at points or postures that indicate he/she was listening and asks questions of the teller for clarification.



The question is, How do we share our faith?



Session 3

The purposes of this session are:

- ◆ To become acquainted with the principles of faith-sharing
- ◆ To prepare for faith-sharing

Principles for Faith-Sharing

The first four are foundational for those that follow.

1. Be clear about your purpose.
2. Faith-sharing must be grounded in prayer.
3. God is far more interested in our availability than our ability.
4. To do the mission of Christ, one must have the mind of Christ.

1. Fitness for Faith-Sharing (Means of Grace)

Sharing faith demands an openness to the Holy Spirit. The key is to continually yield your life to the Spirit. This involves spiritual diet and spiritual exercise. We must be committed to developing spiritual fitness in order to grow as disciples of Christ. There are appropriate ways to prepare for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley referred to these ways as the means of grace.

- ▶ Prayer and fasting

▶ Study of Holy Scriptures

▶ Worship

▶ Regularly receiving the Lord's Supper

▶ Christian conversation/conferencing

Additional information: *Faith-Sharing* by Fox and Morris, pages 134-35. (See article in Appendix 1, "Where Are We Leading the People?" by Daniel T. Benedict.)

The following four are specifically listed in the video you will view.

- ▶ Take the person and the environment seriously.
- ▶ Make invitational statements.
- ▶ Listening opens the door.
- ▶ Don't say "you"—say "I."

Note: The next two were discussed in the last principle:

Don't say "you"—say "I."

- ▶ We do not tell people *whom* they should believe or *what* they should believe. We tell them *why* and *what we* believe.
- ▶ Witnessing is most effective when done in the first person.

The following close out the section on "Principles of Faith-Sharing."

- ▶ It is better to expose our vulnerability than to pretend invulnerability.
- ▶ If people volunteer information, we can rest assured they wish to tell us more.

Keeping the principles in mind, answer the following questions:

1. Which of these do I think I do well?
2. With which one do I need the most help?

Additional information: *Faith-Sharing* by Fox and Morris, pages 91-105.

Participation in Faith-Sharing: The GRACEful Pattern

The following is a pattern for sharing faith. There have been many patterns, but the GRACEful Pattern is distinctively Wesleyan. Because it focuses on grace and frees the faith-sharer to focus on faith-sharing, it is a useful tool. Remember: We are evangelizing the gospel, not the hearer.

G = GOD'S GRACE IN CHRIST JESUS FOR ALL

- God's grace in creation
- God's grace in redemption
- God's grace in hope and eternity

R = RECOGNIZING AND REPENTING OF OUR SIN

- Receiving salvation in Christ
- Responding in trust
- Reconciling grace, being put right with God through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection

A = ACCEPTING GOD'S FORGIVENESS

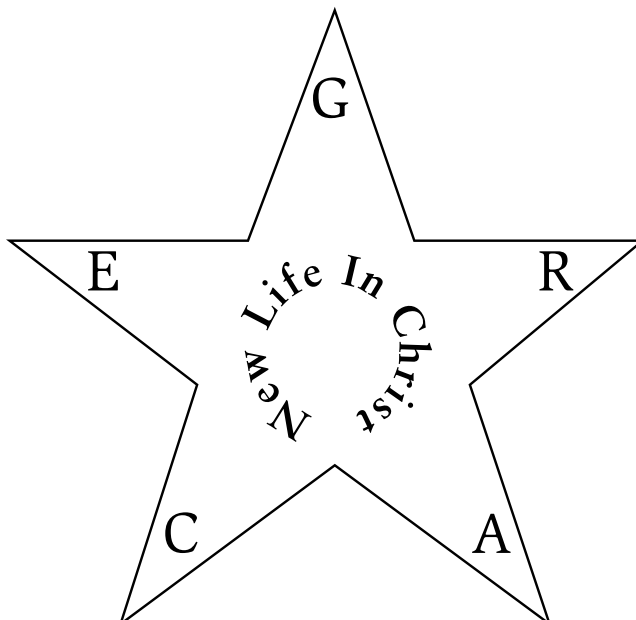
- Acknowledging Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior
- Assurance through the witness of the Holy Spirit
- Awareness of the continuing grace of God

C = CONFESSING FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS

- Committing in trust to Christ Jesus
- Commencing the way of Christ
- Continuing the walk with Christ

E = ENTERING INTO THE REIGN OF GOD

- Entering into the fellowship of the church
- Entering the way of the grace-filled life
- Entering into the mission of God





The question is, When do we share our faith?



Session 4

The purposes of this session are:

- ◆ To establish when faith-sharing is appropriate and helpful
- ◆ To experiment with faith-sharing through role playing

Beginning with the Word

The Parable of the Sower and of the Seed Growing Secretly
(Mark 4:3-9 and 4:26-29)

Bridging the Gap

In faith-sharing be sure to keep in mind:

1. We need _____ we seek to reach.
Why do they live as they live and do what they do?
What is important to them? What determines their lifestyle?

2. We need to help them discover _____ that
are so deep they require more than a natural explanation if they
are to have a full meaning.

3. We need to ask and look for those _____ where the gospel is likely to be relevant and meaningful.

4. We need to recognize that _____ works in all people, preparing them for the hearing of the gospel.

Four Points of Faith-Sharing

In *The Pastor as Evangelist* (Westminster Press, 1984), Richard Stoll Armstrong identifies four points at which faith may be shared with another.

1. **Come-in points.** The witness should be listening for opportunities to pose a faith question, or to respond to one. Come-in points are invitations to join the dialogue.

2. **Plug-in points.** Plug-in points are those places in conversation and relationships where your faith can plug into another person's faith experience. These are situations where we, very sincerely, can say, "I can relate to that."

- 3. Take-on points.** There will be times when you may have to challenge a faith statement. Walk very carefully! Be positive and creative in the way you present your challenge.

There are two rules to keep in mind regarding take-on points:

1. Be candid about your feelings.
2. Watch your language—both verbal language and body language.

- 4. Take-off points.** It is sometimes necessary to answer a faith question or to clarify a faith issue. The person we are sharing with is asking for information that we have.

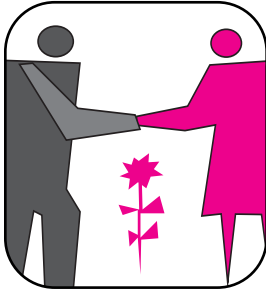
Small Group Sharing

- ▶ When in the last three weeks was there a conversation or occasion for sharing your faith? Did you take the opportunity to do so? What were the results?

- ▶ Based on what you have learned and experienced, what would you now do differently?



The question is, *What are the next steps we need to take as a Faith-Sharing Congregation?*



Session 5

The purposes of this session are:

- ◆ To explore the expectations and covenant of being a Faith-Sharing Congregation
- ◆ To develop a local church strategy for the faith-sharing initiative

1. The Faith-Sharing Congregation

The Primary Task or Evangelical Flow *(see illustration on page 18)*

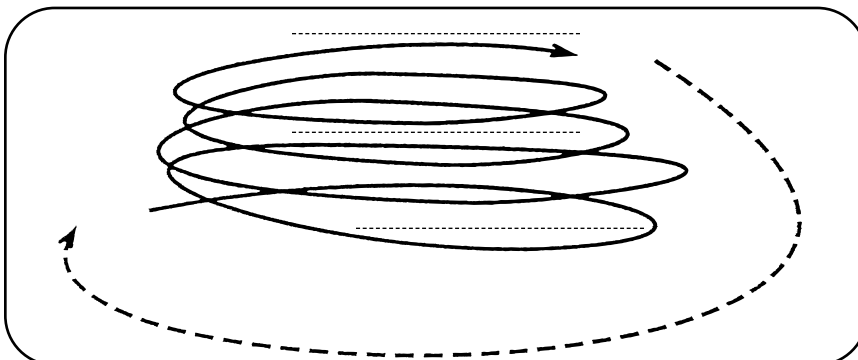
- ◆ Reaching out to people, receiving them into fellowship
- ◆ Providing opportunities for them to grow in their relationship with God
- ◆ Nurturing them in the Christian faith
- ◆ Sending them out to serve the ends of the kingdom in the places where they live, work, and play

The primary task or evangelical flow is expressed through “hospitality evangelism.” Faith is shared through a congregation’s lifestyle of hospitality.

See Hebrews 13:2.

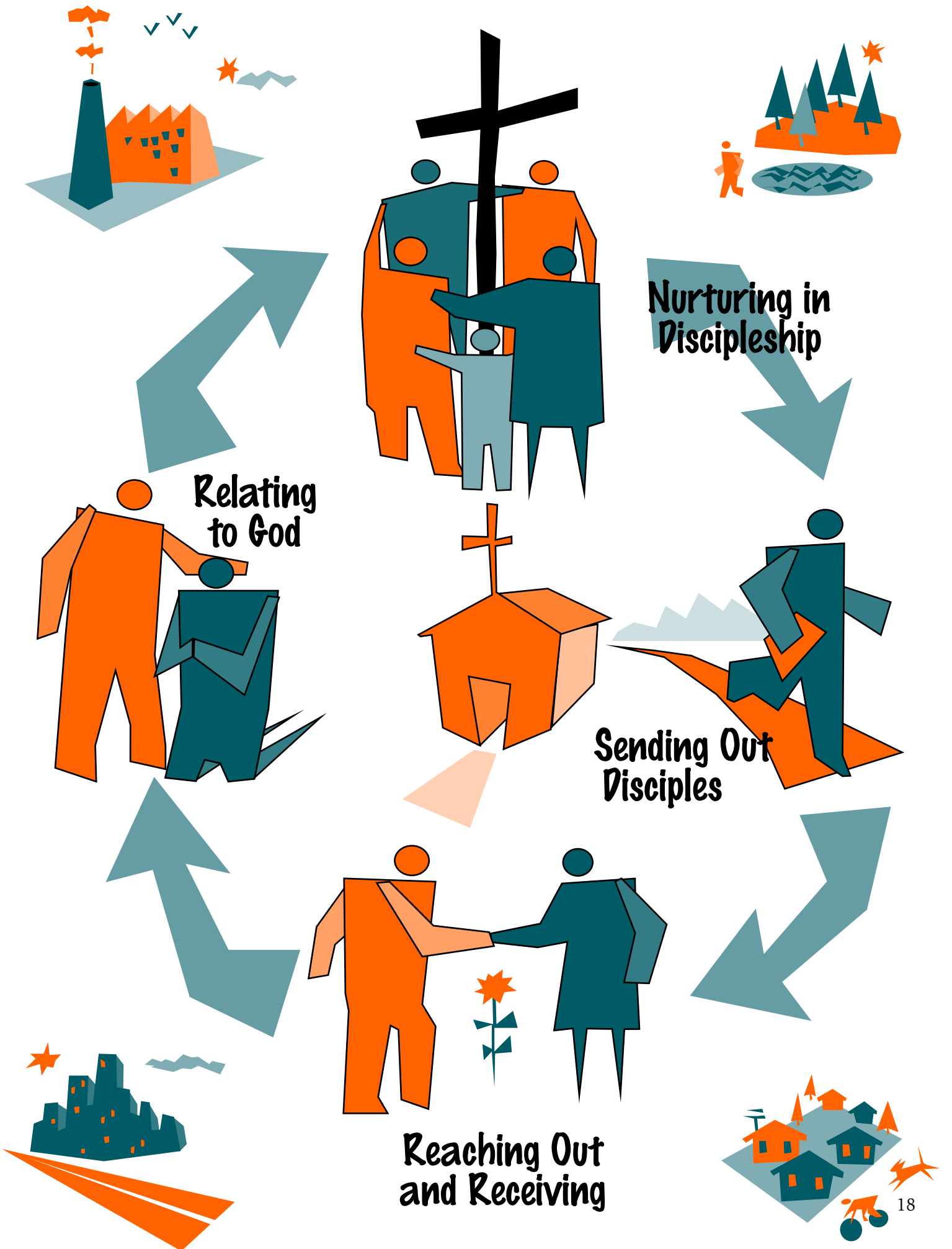
The following are the three movements of hospitality evangelism:

SPIRITUAL SPIRAL



Quest for Quality, A New Way of Thinking Notebook (Nashville: Discipleship Resources)





◆ **Inviting (welcoming)**

Reaching out to receive persons as honored guests

◆ **Introducing (belonging)**

Incorporating guests into the community as members of the church family

◆ **Initiating (discipling)**

Discipling members through study, prayer, fellowship, and service; incorporating them into the reign of God; sending them out to serve in the name of Jesus Christ.

Additional information: *The Faith-Sharing Congregation* by Swanson and Clement, pages 15-30.

In your church groups, complete the FRAN Plan on the following page.

Are you willing to:

- Pray daily for the persons you have listed?
- Perform intentional acts of kindness for at least one of those persons over the next two weeks?
- Invite that person to be their guest in worship sometime in the next four weeks?

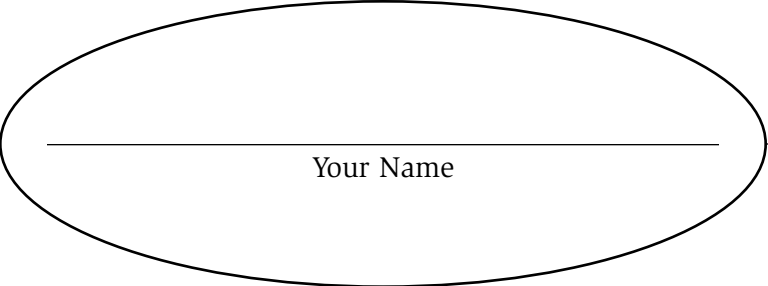
The Faith-Sharing New Testament

It is critical that the congregation be a vital, dynamic community of faith where people reach out to people, receive them into fellowship, provide opportunities for them to grow in their relationship with God, nurture them in faith, and send them out to serve the ends of the kingdom in the places where they live, work, and play. Questions about leadership and vision are not to be taken lightly. Vital congregations will always be led by Christ-centered men and women whose primary focus will be on equipping people for ministry, and on innovative action to “do the gospel” in new ways. If we do not have a community of faith in place to nurture persons seeking to grow in spirit and in truth, we advertise something we cannot deliver.

FRAN PLAN

A Ministry for Reaching the Unchurched Christian and the Unchurched NonChristian

Who are unchurched persons? Anyone who has not been to church in six months.
Identify these persons in your network of relationships.

FRIEND _____ Name _____ Address _____ Phone	RELATIVE _____ Name _____ Address _____ Phone
 _____ Your Name	
ACQUAINTANCE _____ Name _____ Address _____ Phone	NEIGHBOR _____ Name _____ Address _____ Phone

COVENANT

- I shall pray for these persons daily.
- I shall be attentive and listen carefully to the nudging of the Holy Spirit to develop our relationship further, to invite them to worship or study, or to invite them to meet the living Christ.

Adapted from the FRAN PLAN by Donald Haynes (Discipleship Resources, 1998)



EXPECTATIONS AND COVENANT FOR THE FAITH-SHARING CONGREGATION

*Covenant to be considered by the local church following participation
in the training component of the Faith-Sharing Initiative*

1. Pastor and congregational leaders hold the vision for the whole congregation becoming a faith-sharing congregation

- ◆ Use *The Faith-Sharing Congregation* by Roger K. Swanson and Shirley F. Clement as the foundational resource for moving toward this vision.
- ◆ Create a culture of hospitality in the congregation.
- ◆ Encourage people to identify and to share their own personal story.
- ◆ Model for and enable families to be intentional centers of faith development.

2. Training, teaching members to share faith

- ◆ Faith-Sharing Classes
 1. Form at least one class of six sessions using the following resources:
 - *Faith-Sharing*, by H. Eddie Fox and George E. Morris (Discipleship Resources)
 - *Faith-Sharing Video* (Discipleship Resources)
 - *Faith-Sharing New Testament* (Cokesbury)Consider appropriate times for your congregation. Some churches use the 50 great days from Easter to Pentecost for faith-sharing training.
 2. Continue with other classes during the year. The goal is to train at least 33% of the members in faith-sharing within the first two years (for churches with average attendance up to 300) and within four years (for churches with average attendance of 300+).
 3. Consider forming new small groups following each of these sessions for the purpose of encouragement and growth in discipleship.
 4. After completing the faith-sharing training, hold a gathering/rally/celebration every six months to provide support and to encourage people to invite others to worship, to small group participation, and to share their faith.

Present replacement copies of *The Faith-Sharing New Testament* to those who have given their copies away.

◆ New Members

1. Present a gift copy of *The Faith-Sharing New Testament* to new members.
2. Include new church members, both those received by transfer and those received by profession of faith, in faith-sharing classes during their first three months of membership.
3. Following participation in faith-sharing training, consider forming small groups for mutual encouragement and growth in discipleship.

3. Recovering of Celebration of Pentecost

- ◆ Have a major churchwide celebration of Pentecost which includes:
 1. Baptisms and/or Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant
 2. Reception of new members
 3. Dynamic worship with praise and testimony
- ◆ Include the meaning of Wesley's experience at Aldersgate as part of the celebration.
- ◆ Highlight the missional ministry of the congregation.

4. Encourage the Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting.*

Specifically encourage prayer and fasting by the whole congregation during the faith-sharing training. Often people will make a commitment to such disciplines for a specific block of time but would hesitate to make a commitment for an open-ended period of time. This shorter commitment of time may encourage them to continue in these disciplines.

Encourage prayer and fasting at other times of the Christian year, such as during Advent, in Lent, or between Easter and Pentecost.



5. Intentionally develop worship services that are seeker-sensitive and visitor-friendly; identify times of the year when visitors are likely to be present; and follow up with persons who have visited. For example:

Beginning of school year
Easter-Pentecost
Advent-Christmas
Mother's Day
Lent

Contemporary Worship for the 21st Century
by Craig Kennet Miller and Daniel T. Benedict
(Discipleship Resources) may prove helpful in
your planning.

6. Network with other faith-sharing congregations in your district to develop a strategy for inviting other congregations in the district to be part of the Faith-Sharing Initiative.

7. Preparation for the conference training event

The local church team agrees to pray each day for their congregation and for faith-sharing ministry through the congregation. They agree to meet at least once prior to the conference training to look at the local church covenant and to begin to explore equipping the people for faith-sharing.

8. Follow-up to the conference training experience

The local church team will covenant to study and meditate on the scriptures included in the "Basics," in *The Faith-Sharing New Testament*, using one of the 24 issues each day for 24 days and to reflect on how this relates to faith-sharing in their context. The team will meet at least twice in those 24 days to share insights and to pray together. They are also encouraged to participate in the Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting during the 24 days.

The local church team will then begin to develop a strategy for following the total covenant and for enabling the congregation to become a faith-sharing congregation.

*** Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting**

1. Each Thursday, after the evening meal until mid-afternoon on Friday, eat no solid food.
2. Pray for faith-sharing in the community, for The United Methodist Church around the world, and for all Christians in their ministry of sharing the gospel and inviting others to seek God in Christ.



Next Steps . . .

Using the Expectations and Covenant—what are our next steps?

Which leaders in our congregation should read *The Faith-Sharing Congregation: Developing a Strategy for the Congregation as Evangelist* by Roger K. Swanson and Shirley F. Clement?

What must we do to begin training and teaching members of our congregation to share faith?

What resources do we need?

What classes/training do we use?

Sunday school classes?

New member classes?

Other classes?

Who will be our leaders?

How will we support and encourage one another?

When do we introduce and encourage the Wesleyan Pattern of Prayer and Fasting? Do we need to become intentional in practicing and encouraging the practice of the means of grace? As individuals? As a congregation?

What must we do to become a seeker-sensitive and visitor-friendly congregation?

What can we do to become more intentional in emphasizing and celebrating Pentecost?

What must we do to carry out a faith-sharing initiative in our congregation and community?



Appendix 1

Where Are We Leading the People?

Daniel T. Benedict

A new call to the means of grace. The phrase, *the means of grace*, has floated in my awareness since seminary days. Like so much in professional ministerial training, the concept remained in the academic clouds and did not touch my sense of ministry or my own practice of prayer and spiritual discipline. It simply did not register on the screen. Then along came Albert Outler and the “new” section in *The Book of Discipline, 1972*: “Doctrine and Doctrinal Statements and The General Rules.” The blip on my radar screen was fleeting but real.

“Wherever this [desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from sin] is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits . . . By doing no harm . . . By doing good . . . By attending upon all the ordinances [means of grace] of God such as

The public worship of God.
The ministry of the Word,
 either read or expounded.
The Supper of the Lord.
Family and private prayer.
Searching the Scripture.
Fasting or abstinence.

(From “The General Rules” in
The Book of Discipline, 1992, ¶67, pp. 71-73)

Then along came Covenant Discipleship and Walk to Emmaus. My awareness of the means of grace began to bite down on my daily experience and my vision of congregational life. David Lowes Watson’s influence upon me and my understanding of ministry was profound.¹ The experience of being in a weekly group where other members of the *laos* held me accountable for my use of the means of grace and for my discipleship in the world brought new dimensions to my understanding of Christian community.

Recently, the blip has been larger, more frequent, more insistent! Andy Langford, former staff member of the Worship Unit of the General Board of

Discipleship and currently pastor of China Grove UMC in North Carolina, keeps saying: “The United Methodist Church is *a means of grace church*.” More recently, Ezra Earl Jones, Executive General Secretary of the General Board of Discipleship, has been asking leaders, “What current activities take the time and attention of church members?” The responses are predictable and revealing: committee meetings, pancake breakfasts, youth lock-ins, Administrative Council, *ad infinitum, ad nauseum!* Then he asks, “What did John Wesley urge people to attend to?” People respond: Pray, care for the poor, study the Word, partake of the Lord’s Supper, fast, meet weekly for accountability, do acts of mercy, no harm. The point is clear: to a large degree, our churches focus too much on institutional activities and programs in a time when people are longing for meaning, love, and God. Of course, churches need organization and structures, but that is not what churches are for!

Ordering the life of the congregation

What is emerging in my thinking is how central to the pastoral task of leadership the means of grace are. *Presbyters* (“elders” in UM usage) are chosen, ordained and appointed to lead congregations in Word, Sacrament, and Order (see the Ordinal in *The United Methodist Book of Worship, 672*). Most pastors take the first two with great seriousness. With equal gravity, pastors seek to order the life of the congregation—generally with an eye to the latest management (more recently “leadership”) thinking and in conformity with *The Book of Discipline* (generally with more attention paid to the organizational parts than the “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” part). Why this is so, if I am correct, is the subject of another article.

The consequences of failing to focus on the Christian life rather than on the organization of the church are poignantly symbolized in E. Stanley Jones’ confession of his own experience. As a teenager attending a revival, he responded to the invitation to heed the gospel. However, he did not



experience conversion until two years later. Reflecting on that experience he wrote, “I fumbled for the latchstring of the Kingdom of God, missed it . . . [and] took church membership as a substitute.” (See *For All the Saints*, Clifton F. Guthrie, Editor). How many people hear the call of Christ and settle for church (organizational) membership because congregational life failed to focus on the Christian life and the presence and identity of God to be experienced through the means of grace?

Ordering congregational life to God through the means of grace

What if leaders—pastors and those who share in leading the community of faith—focused their work on creating settings in which people could experience the presence and identity of God using the means of grace? What if leaders worked to ensure that every member and seeker had opportunity and encouragement, not only to hear the Word proclaimed and partake of the Lord’s Supper, but to learn and exercise those disciplines that sustain their living in and for the reign of God?

John Wesley was methodical in ensuring that the Methodist societies supported people in struggling to center their lives on the love of God and neighbor. He understood profoundly the forces that dissipated that love. The early Methodists aimed at abandonment of a whole way of life that was rooted in the values of society. The reason for the abandonment was the perception that the culture subverted discipleship and faith. Our celebrated but currently unpracticed heritage is one of accountability to a discipline counter to the culture, and, at the same time, living in that culture. As important as preaching and the Eucharist are, the hold the culture has upon people is such that it cannot be broken short of participation in a communal context where we watch over each other in love. My continuing longing in my current congregation is that while the preaching is excellent and the worship is transcendent and prophetic in its call, the other means of grace are not clearly taught and consistently practiced in the context of Christian community. The pastor is supportive of this in theory, but the priority and practice focus in other arenas at present.

The fabric of the means of grace

The means of grace treated piecemeal and used in a pick-and-choose manner border on being dry bones. When the means of grace are viewed as interactive and as a system, then they become a medium of vital faith development. Henry H. Knight III systematically lays out the interaction of the means of grace in his book, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life*.² He explores how the means of grace counteract the misunderstandings that dissipate the Christian life. The Lord’s Supper, scripture, preaching, the written prayers of the church, devotional writings, and hymns are means that present and make accessible God’s identity. The “identity of God” means of grace hedge against *enthusiasm* that mistakes self for God. Discipline, community, extemporaneous prayer, fasting, and the general means of grace (watching, self-denial, exercise of the presence of God, taking up one’s cross) nurture faith in the immediate presence of God. The “presence” means of grace hedge against *formalism* that claims too much for the church and our (Pelagian) activities.

Knight also explores the ways in which the warp and woof of the means of grace serve to avoid despair, complacency, and presumption, on the one hand, and move Christians in continuous growth toward the affections of hope, active love, and humility. The analysis helps leaders recover an understanding of the means of grace as a means to dynamic growth in the Christian life and how that life looks in the context of the congregational system. Knight helps the reader see how the means of grace function to “enable and invite a distinctive relationship with God and provide a way for the relationship to grow and deepen over time” (p. 175). He provides a very helpful chart of this interaction within each of the means of grace (p. 175), e.g.:

Misunderstanding Avoided

	<i>Despair</i>	<i>Complacency</i>	<i>Presumption</i>
The Lord’s Supper	Means to/ Earnest of the Promised New Life	Our Self- Offering in Love	Remembrance of Christ’s Offering for Us/Pledge of Life to Come

Christian Affections Nurtured

Hope Active Love Humility



Knight considers the disciplined community, the general means of grace, prayer and fasting, and scripture in a similar way, both in chart and narrative.

The patterning of experience

The practical result of full and consistent use of the means of grace is patterning of experience and shaping of the affections. Knight states the end to which the means lead:

“. . . the Christian life is fundamentally a recovery of the image of God, an imitation of Christ, a having of the mind of Christ, a loving as God loves.” (172)

Leaders in the church have primary responsibility for teaching and putting structures in place that allow all of the people to use the means of grace so that they are consistently and reliably nurtured in experience of the presence and identity of God and of faithful living and loving in the world.

While I am deeply grateful for the broad emphasis on “spirituality” in the last two decades in Protestant circles, I think the emphasis tends to lack a Wesleyan vision. My own retreats at monasteries, my use of the daily office, and other spiritual disciplines have been largely monastic and individualized experiences. Until recently, I have wished and counseled others to do the same hoping that the congregation would become stronger because of increasing numbers of devout and holy souls making a persistent pilgrimage. Only now is it becoming clear to me that the life and structure of the congregation must support people in such a journey and that it is a corporate enterprise which leaders must “order” if they are to fulfill their ordination vows.

While Wesley was steeped in Christian antiquity and practiced in the disciplines of the ascetic and monastic traditions, he refused to cater to the rich and religious who had the “leisure” to move toward perfection in love and the Christian disciplines. Rather, Wesley held that Christian perfection was a reasonable hope for every Christian. Leaving home and occupation was not its precondition.³ In this, most of our congregations appear to be far from Methodist in vision and in practice. What if leaders became skilled and focused on shaping communities that nurture faith and counteract dissipation as people seek to live and work as disciples in the world?

Toward a contemporary Wesleyan vision of ordering the congregation’s life

While I risk being discounted because I am now a “bureaucrat” in Nashville, I offer the following moves toward an ordering of the faith community’s life around the means of grace:

- ◆ *Refuse to settle for quick solutions and slogan-oriented approaches to faith development.* Get your conceptual framework in place and build on that. Too many of our churches operate out of a “hot-house” approach aimed at “touching lives” but failing to offer “good soil” in which Christians can grow and be sustained for discipleship in daily life. Wearing T-shirts for Jesus and a host of other activities have *mene, mene, tekel, and parsin* written on them! (Daniel 5:24-28).
- ◆ *Focus on the apostolic task of making disciples.* The current focus on seekers is a much-needed corrective, but in the end it will fail if congregations are not able to balance “pre-conversion” work with “conversion and continuing conversion” work. Relevance must lead to roots if there is to be good fruit. Balance precatechesis with ongoing catechesis.
- ◆ *Place a priority on the means of grace over organization and programs.* In preaching and working with leaders, teach and emphasize the means of grace. If this means streamlining structure and organization, be courageous and do it!
- ◆ *Initiate “little churches in the big church” (ecclesiolae in ecclesia) as a basic structure in congregational life.* While it would be a mistake to require every person to be in a small group for accountability, make “watching over each other in love” available to everyone, members and seekers alike.⁴
- ◆ *Change from “membership orientation” to Christian initiation as the focus for reaching out and receiving people.* On two counts membership orientation is short-sighted in most circumstances. First, most people today are not looking for a denominational organization to belong to; they *are* searching for meaning and God in their lives. On this score, many of



the “new evangelical” churches are ahead of United Methodists! They have their finger on the pulse of the longings of the human heart. Second, at the heart of any understanding of the means of grace is the baptismal covenant in which God joins us to Christ our head, and we pledge our trust and service “in union with the church.” On this count, the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults) of the Roman Catholics have it right in inviting people to join in a public journey of faith and life in the church.

◆ *Plan liturgical celebrations with expectancy and high quality.* Nowhere else are the means of grace so concentrated as in the gathered assembly on the Lord’s Day. Scripture, the Lord’s Supper, written and extempore prayer, hymns, opportunity to take up the cross and commit to acts of self-denial—all can be incorporated for a rich experience of the presence and identity of God in Christ. Bring substance to worship by using the means of grace.

◆ *Be vigilant in seeing grace as God’s dynamic activity.* Both cold formalism and hot enthu-

siasm result in loss: formalism, the loss of the living God, and enthusiasm, the loss of objectivity about our need and our sin. In the former, we sacramentalists are in danger of confusing God’s action with our activities (doing liturgy right). In the latter, our evangelical side claims too much for our feelings and mistakes self for God. John Wesley sought to keep the balance when he preached, “. . . in using all means, seek God alone.”⁵

Congregational leaders are called to order the life of the congregation to the presence and identity of God through the means of grace. I propose that it is time to be finished with addiction to gimmicks and “new” approaches and fads, and to order the congregation’s life by using the means of grace to help ordinary people find and love God and learn how to love and serve neighbor.

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1 David Lowes Watson’s trilogy of books, *Forming Christian Disciples*, *Covenant Discipleship*, and *Class Leaders* (Discipleship Resources, 1991), offer a practical and clear approach to recovering the dynamic of early Methodism’s social and communal support system in the church today. The first of the three provides the conceptual frame for the other two books.

2 Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992). This is a *must read* book for evangelicals and sacramentalists alike, because Knight treats all of the means of grace in a systematic and interactive manner. I take full responsibility for the summary of his approach and hope that I have not done his work an injustice.

3 See Knight, p. 96.

4 See David Lowes Watson’s trilogy.

5 “Sermon 16: The Means of Grace,” *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, ed. Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984).



Appendix 2

Local Church Plan

1. Ministry Team

- A. Form a ministry team composed of participants in the Faith-Sharing Initiative training and other key persons who may hold the same vision.
- B. Begin to study and work through *The Faith-Sharing Congregation*. How can your congregation put into place a hospitality evangelism system?

2. Faith-Sharing Training

(using *Faith-Sharing Video*, *Video Leader's Guide*, *Faith-Sharing*, and *Faith-Sharing New Testament*)

- A. Establish classes or small groups for training
 - 1. Begin with new members; form a class.
 - 2. An adult or youth Sunday School class may want to use this as a study.
 - 3. Invite people who have begun to share their faith with others; form a small group for training.
 - 4. As new members or visitors come to church, ask them to be a new class/small group for the training.
 - 5. Continue to invite persons to participate in groups for training.
 - 6. Following the training, meet every 3 or 4 months for support and encouragement.
- B. Training sessions
 - 1. Follow the Video Leader Guide; study it and all the resources before beginning the first session/class.
 - 2. Each household should have a copy of the *Faith-Sharing* book and every participant should have a copy of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament*.
 - 3. At the beginning of the first session, include the material from the training session on context. It is important to help people understand the change in the times and the new challenge for sharing faith.
 - 4. As additional homework (to what is listed in the Video Leader Guide), ask each person to reflect on 6 of the 24 issues at the beginning of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament* before each session.
 - 5. Include the material at the end of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament* as you do session 5 in the video Leader Guide.

3. Live out the Local Church Faith-Sharing Covenant

- A. As a ministry team, read, study, and reflect on the 24 issues at the beginning of the *Faith-Sharing New Testament*.
- B. As a ministry team, encourage and support one another in prayer and fasting.
- C. Encourage the congregation to join in the Wesley Pattern of Prayer and Fasting during the Faith-Sharing training and at other times of the year (Advent, Lent, etc.).
- D. Begin to plan for the recovery of the Celebration of Pentecost in your church.



Appendix 3

Prayers for Sharing Faith

A PRAYER OF COMMITMENT

Lord Jesus Christ, I want you to be my Savior and Lord at this very moment.
I invite you to come into my life and take charge of me.
Remove from my heart any destructive thought, desire, or tendency that would prevent me from being your disciple.
Fill me with your Holy Spirit;
assure me that my sins have been forgiven and that I will live forever with you.

Every day of my life, help me to go where you want me to go, to do what you want me to do, and to say what you want me to say.
From now on I am trusting you to give my life a new direction and to do in my life what I cannot do for myself.

Point me to others with whom I can share my faith.
In the community of believers, send those my way who will affirm my commitment to you and help me to grow.
May I also seek and find opportunities both within and outside the church to tell others what you mean to me and can mean to them.

Signed _____

Date _____

A FAITH-SHARER'S PRAYER

Dear Jesus,
Help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go.
Flood our souls with your spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess our whole being so utterly that our lives may only be a radiance of yours
Shine through us and be so in us that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul.
Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus.
Stay with us and then we shall begin to shine as you shine, so to shine as to be a light to others.
The light, O Jesus, will be all from you.
None of it will be ours.
It will be you shining on others through us. Amen.

—*Mother Teresa*



FAITH-SHARING INITIATIVE RESOURCES

These resources are available for the Faith-Sharing Initiative Training scheduled with the General Board of Discipleship:

The Faith-Sharing New Testaments are available from Cokesbury, www.cokesbury.com, 800-672-1789.

Quantity discounts on the following resources are available to customers ordering directly from Discipleship Resources.

Please note that the discounts do not apply to the videos.

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