

# **The Challenge of New Member Retention and Assimilation**

## **Peacemakers**

**Nathaniel Dean**

**Paul Gallogly**

**John Heavener**

**Al Rowe**

**Ellen Trueblood**

**Evelyn Wages**

**Leadership UMC 2007 – 2008**

# **The Challenge of New Member Retention and Assimilation**

## **Executive Summary**

**Goal:** To identify factors that positively impact the retention and assimilation of new members in order to come up with a series of recommendations that could be utilized by our churches to create an environment that lives up to our creed of “open hearts, open minds, open doors”.

**Process:** We looked at several different types of programs within a church that could create the proper environment that would allow the smooth assimilation, as well as assist in the retention of our current congregation memberships. This included a survey, review of selected published writings, and sharing of personal experiences from our churches.

**Scripture References:** Matthew 28:19-20; Revelation 2:1–3: 22; Ephesians 4:4–5; Philippians 1:9–11; Hebrews 10:21-25 and 13:15-16

## **Survey Results**

The survey included a small sampling from 16 different United Methodist Churches with a total of 109 new members responding.

The survey focused on three different issues:

1. What brought you into the church for your first visit?
2. What brought you back to the church for your second visit?
3. Ranking priority of programs designed to help assimilate the new member

Those responding to the survey indicated they most likely received a personal invitation to visit the church or they attended a community outreach event and then decided to visit the church. Once they visited a church, the number one attraction that drew them to join that particular church was getting involved in a small group. They were also led to stay in a church with Bible-based sermons. Having a shepherding program and/or membership class to assist them in getting involved in the church was a major factor in their decision to join the church. Survey responders indicated they were looking to join a church with an outreach in missions. Churches offering opportunities to grow spiritually, to join in warm fellowship, and to participate in missions with specifically planned support are more likely to see visitors become active members of the congregation.

## **Introduction**

As our group discussed our own churches and the challenges they face, it was noted that one common concern was how to get people who visit our churches to move toward becoming true disciples of Christ. There are often visitors in the pews, but frequently they do not go on to become an active part of the church. The project we selected is titled "The Challenge of New Member Retention and Assimilation" because we believe we will not make disciples unless we find some effective means of incorporating visitors into the congregation so that they have the opportunity to grow spiritually and to serve Christ.

## **Biblical Guidelines to Fulfilling God's Purpose for the Church**

Matthew 28: 19 -20 tells us what Jesus would have us to focus on. He promises to be with us as we strive to make disciples of all nations. In our busy culture, people need a relationship with Christ, but they often do not find a church home where they can grow spiritually and serve God.

In addressing the subject of Congregation Assimilation & Integration, it is helpful to study the evaluation by Christ of the seven churches addressed in the book of Revelation in the Bible. The message of these evaluations was not only true for these individual churches but also applies to all generations of the church throughout history. This message delineates the pitfalls which face all churches and are the traps which we should be prepared to meet and conquer. Thus, we would all profit by heeding the exhortations given to these seven churches.

The first church addressed was the Church of Ephesus. The Lord pointed out that while they had persevered and did not tolerate wicked men, they had forsaken their first love, i.e. their sincere love of, and devotion to, Christ. Christ urged them to "Repent and do the things you did at first." But he went on to warn them "If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." However, he went on to state that "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life."

The next church addressed was the church at Smyrna, which was located some 30 miles north of Ephesus. They were opposed by the ungodly Gentiles and the Jews as a synagogue of Satan. However, Christ urges them to not be afraid of what they were about to suffer. He told them they

would suffer persecution to the point of death but that if they were faithful he would “give them the crown of life”. He then promised them, “He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

The next church addressed was the church at Pergamum. Though they had remained true to their faith in God they were nevertheless guilty of what is referred to “as the teachings of Balaam” and practiced the teachings of the Nicolaitans. Christ's word to them was sharp and to the point; Repent or He would come to them and fight against them with the “sword of my mouth”. However, as in the other messages, a personal message is given to those who will listen. “To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.”

The church at Thyatira was condemned because it tolerated apostasy. They “tolerate[d] that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teachings she misleads My servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols.... I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways... Then all the churches will know that I am He who searches hearts and minds and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.” But again He concluded by saying “To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations.....”

The church at Sardis was described as spiritually dead and had no commendation. The message to that church is one of unrelieved judgment and warning to repent. Christ said, “Remember therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” But some individuals in the church were still attempting to serve the Lord thus Christ said to them, “Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with Me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels.”

The city of Philadelphia is unusual in that its name means “brotherly love”. The city was rich in agriculture . The message to the church in Philadelphia is unusual in that it is almost entirely praise in contrast to the message of Sardis which is almost entirely condemnation. Christ declared that there

was an open door before the church at Philadelphia. The church was commended because, while its strength was small, it had been true to the name of Jesus. Though there was apparently opposition to the church on the part of certain Jews who were unbelievers, the church was commended for enduring patiently. Thus Christ made a promise, "I will keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth." Most of the book of Revelation concerns the Great Tribulation and the terrible judgments that will be poured out on the earth. Thus it is significant that the church at Philadelphia will be kept from the whole hour of trial. What is promised to the church at Philadelphia here is, in effect, a promise that they will not enter the period of tribulation that will come on the whole unbelieving world. And again Christ closes with an appeal to the individual, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit has to say to the churches."

And lastly, the church at Laodicea was described as a church that was bankrupt and without any redeeming features. They were what Christ described as "neither hot nor cold". Christ stated, "So, because you are lukewarm-- neither hot nor cold-- I am about to spit you out of My mouth." The church was guilty of having religion without any sincere faith or energy to serve the Lord. Part of their problem was they were a wealthy and prosperous city and had failed to comprehend their spiritual needs. Therefore, Christ said to them, "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked..... Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."

As we study these churches, we are reminded that to fulfill our purpose, the church must "keep its first love" and fix our eyes on Jesus and his love and concern for all people. Helping people learn Biblical truth has to be a priority. The admonitions to some of the churches in this scripture indicate they were giving less than their best effort to God and were not expending real energy to make sure all the members stayed "on fire" for Him. In today's culture, persistent dedication is required to keep the focus on Christ and to expend constant energy to make sure all members are maintaining a true relationship with God.

## The United Methodist Book of Resolutions

The Lord's admonitions to the churches is generally covered in our Book Of Resolutions. Resolution 77 is entitled "Inclusiveness in All Dimensions". This section encourages every Conference, District and local church to develop comprehensive programs that place emphasis on inclusiveness -- cultural, racial, lingual, and in regard to gender --throughout the life and ministry of the Church. Among other things it provides that each church become trained and enabled to reach out to surrounding communities. This includes increasing their knowledge and understanding of the people and cultures who reside within their communities.

The theme of inclusiveness is further expressed in Resolution 107 which specifically provides for the use of appropriate technologies to make essential communications accessible to people who are hearing and/or sight impaired. Furthermore, Resolution 361 specifically provides "that God is the Creator of all people and all are God's children in one family; that racism robs all human beings of their wholeness..." And further that the United Methodist Church is determined to eliminate all forms of institutional racism in its ministry. Resolution 189 further notes that in many cases women and girls live on the margins of society because of the sins of prejudice and discrimination and the Church does not condone such discriminatory treatment.

Furthermore, as a worldwide denomination, the Church declares that religious liberty, the freedom of belief, is a basic human right that has its roots in the Bible. Paul admonishes Christians with these words, "Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another?" (Romans 14:4, Resolution 239) This understanding is fundamental to our religious heritage. In addition, we must never forget that the earth and all that is in it belongs to God. However, God has promised many blessings to those who live by his biblical standards. God gives back to you in the same measure that you use to give to God. (Luke 6:38) "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. ((Malachi 3:10)

Thus as we prepare to attract and welcome new members into our sanctuaries we should bear in mind the exhortations of Christ and lead our

new members into a ministry that is obviously holding true to His teachings. A church that exhibits perseverance in following the word of the Lord and whose faithful deeds are open for all to see will prosper. A vigorous and healthy church is one that will attract and keep all who enter its doors.

### The United Methodist Motto and Purpose



Open hearts. Open minds. Open doors.

### **The people of the United Methodist Church**

The United Methodist Church has declared “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ”. Thus, the church as a whole has adopted the Great Commission. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2004 edition, states “Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.” (p. 87) The mission of the local church is listed as one of welcoming – worshiping – nurturing – sending. (p. 88) The mission of the church at large and the mission of the local congregation is well aligned with the Great Commission and the deliberately planned programs that effective churches offer.

### Concerns

While the people of United Methodist Church proclaim that “We believe in God and in each other,” the lack of growth in our churches in the United States suggests that we are not inclusive when we make that statement. If we were providing an atmosphere of inclusion, where visitors feel that the statement also includes them, we should be growing. To overcome that issue we must immediately put a program of new member retention and assimilation into action. We must leave our “comfort zone” and truly meet visitors with open arms.

Many United Methodist churches have visitors who come to the church once or twice, but then don't return. According to research done by main-line Christian churches, guest retention is between 10 to 20 times more significant than the number of visitors to your church. When guest retention occurs, and new members are added to the congregation, helping those people become an active part of the church is an additional challenge. New member assimilation is essential if those members are to move toward true discipleship.

The statistics for attendance in our churches is also reason for concern. A United Methodist church in the United States that has a Sunday worship service attendance of 200 or more is in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile of the church's congregations, while most of our churches have Sunday worship service attendance of less than 100. Given the population increase in most geographic areas, it is obvious there are many people who have not yet been reached by a local church.

However, like everything else in life, the church mission requires planning and action. A leadership team should be formed in each church that will focus on new member retention and assimilation. It is important to realize up front that we must develop plans for growth - for new member retention and new member assimilation - but we should realize that only God can make a church grow!

## **What can be done?**

The Peacemaker project is an attempt to offer some possible solutions for churches wanting to answer the call of the Great Commission and to fulfill the mission of the United Methodist church. The remainder of this report is an attempt to assist churches of all sizes across our denomination.

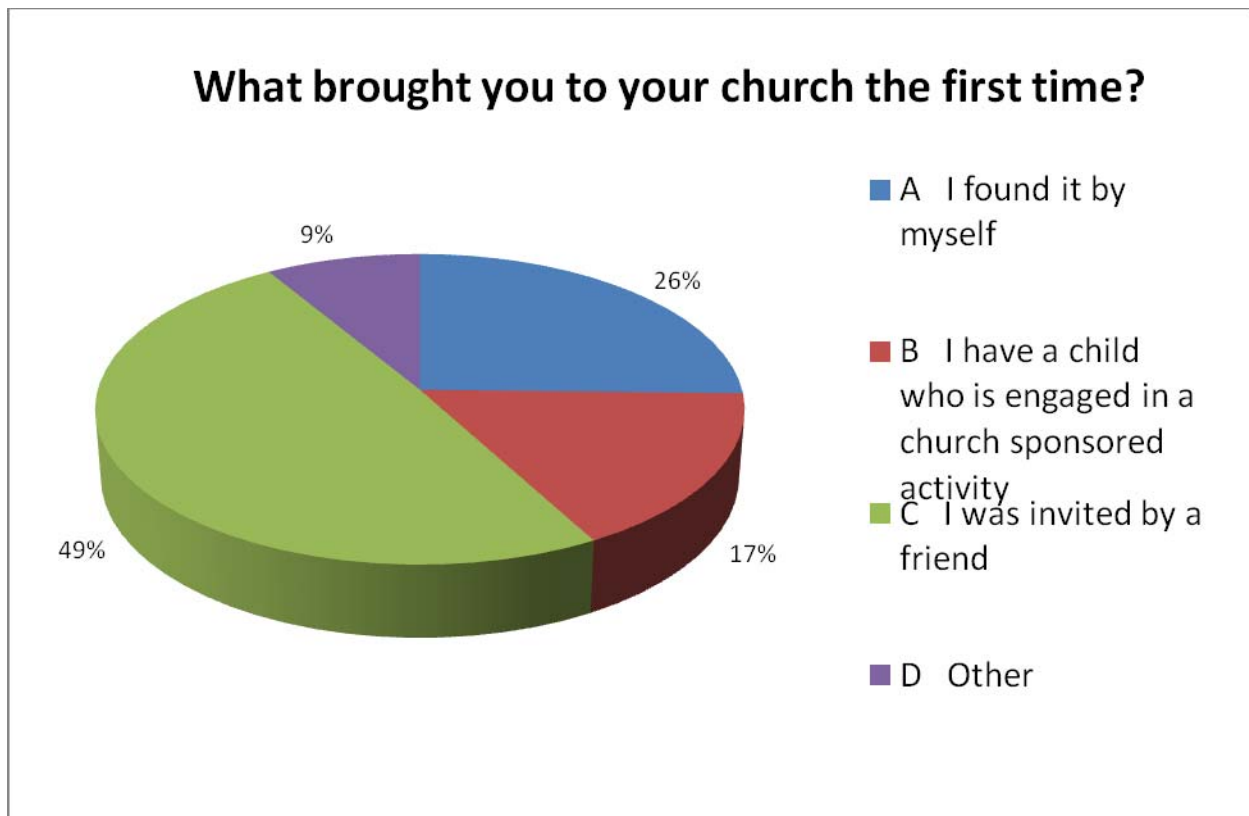
### Survey Results

The survey included a small sampling of new members of churches in the North Georgia conference. Sixteen churches are represented in the responses collected. Of the 109 responders, some attend large membership churches and some represent small, rural churches where they were the only new member in the last year. All of the 109 responders had joined their respective churches within the last year. The intention of using a survey was to determine if new members' thoughts and feelings

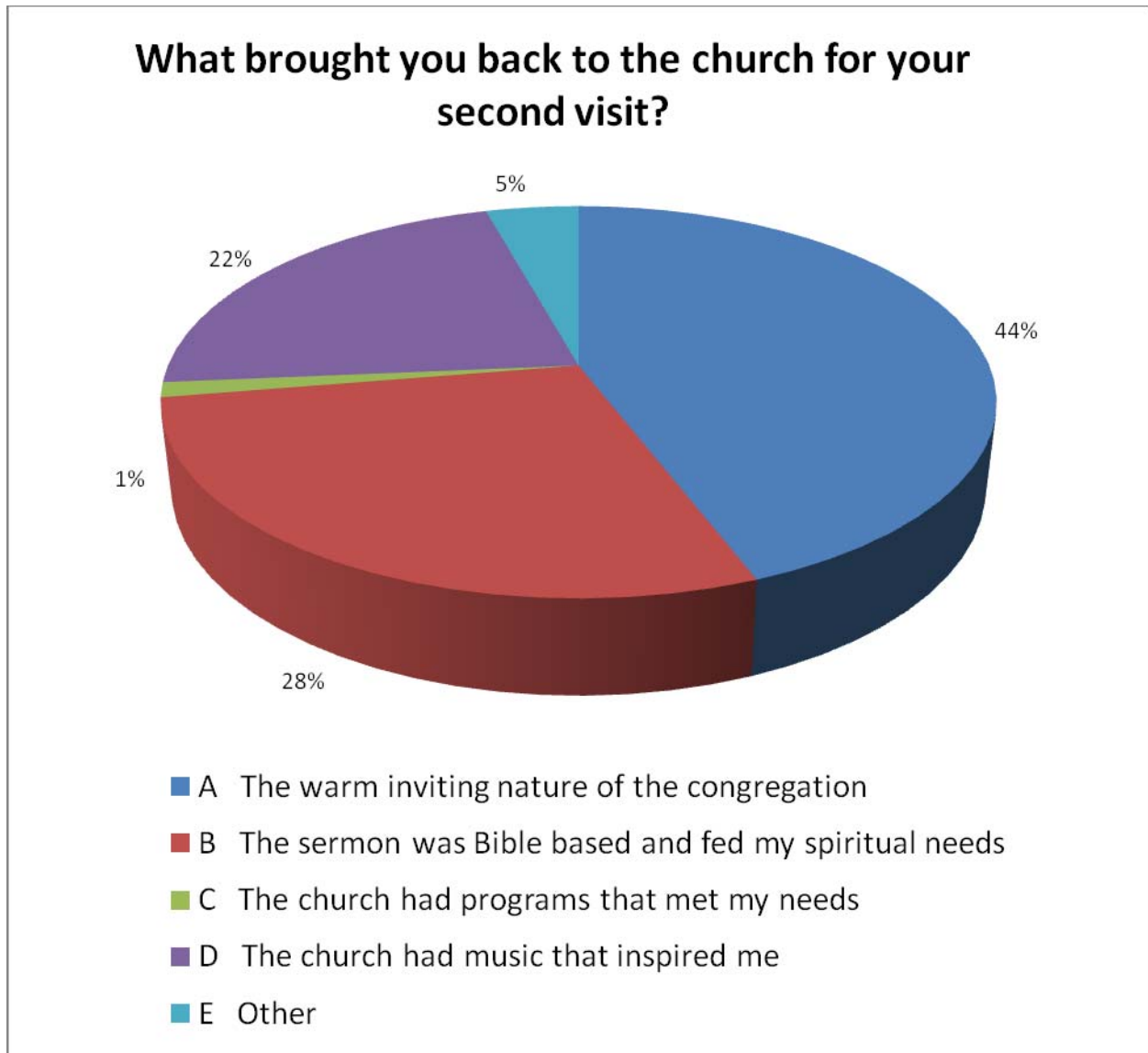
could assist churches with retaining current members and assimilating new members so they will become permanent members of the church.

The first section of the survey was designed to find out what brought people to visit a particular church for the first time. The most popular answer (49%) indicated the visitor was invited by a personal friend. This person to person evangelism was effective in bringing a potential member through the church door. The second most popular answer (26%) was the new member visited the church the first time because they found the church on their own. Further investigation might yield information as to whether the church was visible, in close proximity, or had some other attribute that helped it be “found”, but it is noteworthy that these people were actually looking for a home church seriously enough to visit the first time. Serious attention should be given to these serious seekers.

Having church-sponsored activities in the community involving children also seemed to be one way people were brought into a particular church to visit. All of these avenues are important for churches to consider as they plan outreach to the community as they “go into the world” to invite people into the family of God.

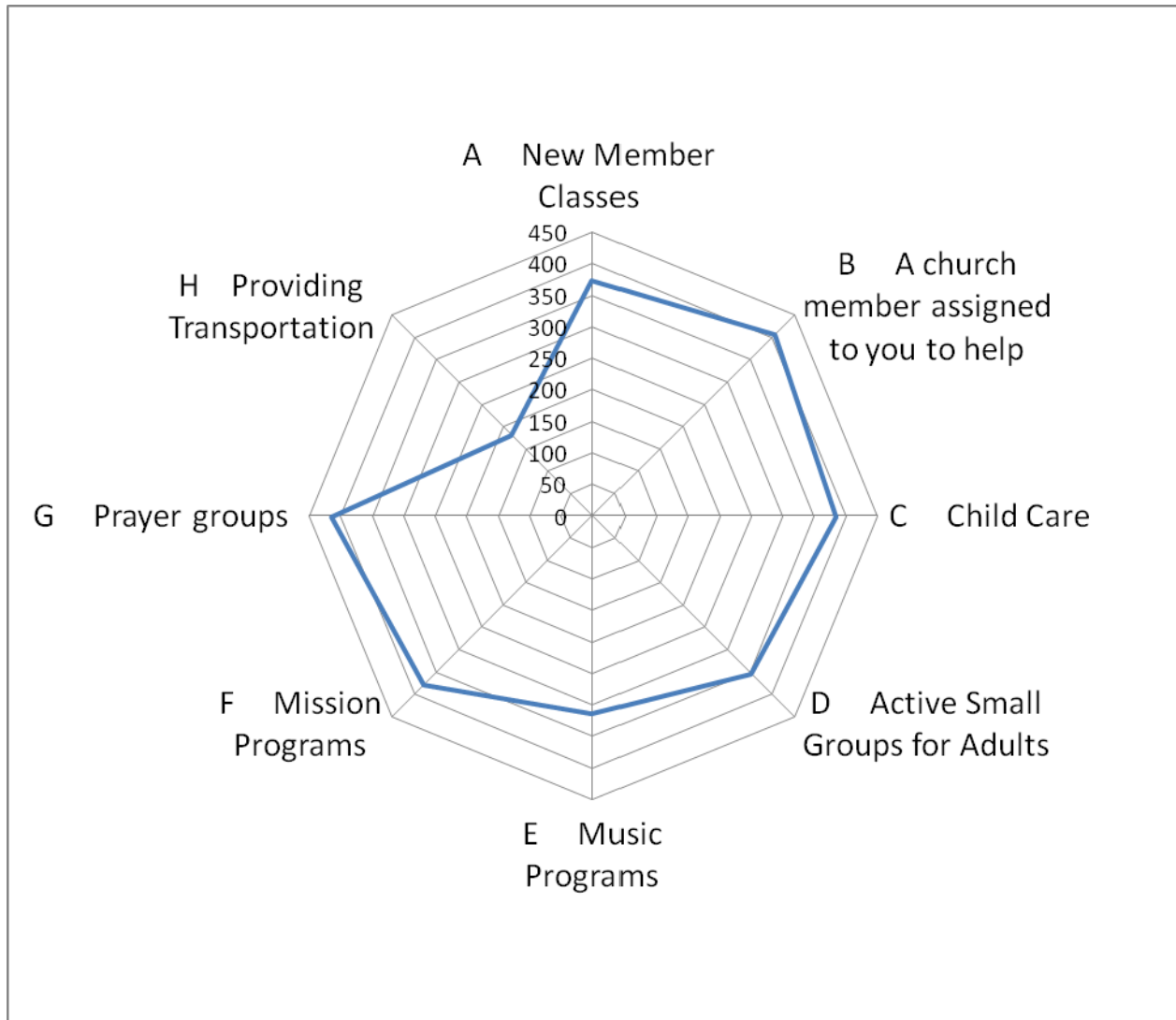


The second part of the survey deals with why those who have decided to join a particular church were willing to return to that church after their initial visit. The top ranking answers included the warm and inviting nature of the congregation (welcoming), Bible based sermons (nurturing), and the music was inspiring (worshiping). When visitors attend a church where the United Methodist local church mission is obviously the purpose of that church, visitors seem likely to return to participate in worship services.



The final section of the survey deals with the personal searching of new members. Once a person has made a decision to actually join a particular congregation of the United Methodist Church, how should the church

nurture them? Responses indicate new members want and need the chance to be a part of small prayer group, to have some mentoring as new members, and to become involved in missions. Their responses indicate the desire to move on to the nurturing and sending aspects of spiritual growth.



### Conclusions

Each United Methodist church must become an engaging church which commits to an environment of evangelism, discipleship, and member involvement. It must connect with the people within its congregation. Each church should form a leadership team that will keep a compelling vision before the church and enlist the involvement of the entire church

body. The leadership team must first ask the question, “What is preventing our church from growing?”

We need to ask, “What drives our church?” According to Rick Warren, churches are driven by tradition, personality, finances, programs, buildings, events, or seekers, (who he defines as people so focused on what unbelievers want that believers get nothing from the church). He says that the church must be driven by a purpose. Our purpose is defined in the Great Commission, and each church can improve the effectiveness of its ministry by determining where the church stands in light of its mission.

The deliberate plan for making disciples should include strategies for evangelism (welcoming), Bible based and engaging worship (worshiping) meeting individual needs for spiritual growth (nurturing), and providing leadership and mission training and opportunities (sending). Such a plan must be supported by the local church, which must make a long-term commitment to the plan.

People in church leadership should ensure that the activities of small groups will move the church toward becoming more focused on the mission of the United Methodist Church, which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. The leadership should pray for the church and focus on people, and on building relationship with God. To become an engaging church we must build small, receptive groups of members. We must dedicate ourselves to a long-term process of making discipleship. As per our motto of open hearts, open minds, open doors, we must practice receptivity.

### Specific Suggestions

The survey we conducted suggests that to get visitors to the church for a first visit, it is important to have church members engaging in personal evangelism by inviting people to visit. This is a necessary step if there are to be new members to assimilate into the congregation. Specifically planned community events that are open to nonmembers is a second means of reaching people to get them to the church for a first visit. People answering the survey indicated it was relationship they were looking for. Personal invitations from individual church members WILL get some visitors to attend the church.

Once people visit, the relational part of the church experience remains the motivator for return visits. The church that regularly practices reaching out to others in love is a church that encourages return visits. As Rick Warren states in The Purpose Driven Church, “Love draws people in like a powerful magnet. A lack of love drives people away.”

This book offers a definition of assimilation that makes it clear what is meant by the word: Assimilation is the task of moving people from an awareness of your church to attendance at your church to active membership in your church. The community talks about “*that* church”, the crowd talks about “*this* church”, but the congregation talks about “*our* church”. Our survey and readings indicate the following would support a church in the effort to assimilate new members.

### **Small Group Development**

The term “Small Group” can be misleading and can provide results that were not intended without the proper planning and execution. In the church, the purpose of small groups is to provide Relational Discipleship just as Jesus did in his interaction with the Apostles. John 13:15 tells us “... I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

The role of small groups within the church is to provide an opportunity for the church to touch each and every member on a regular basis. One of the biggest challenges facing large churches and those that are growing is the ability to meet each individual’s needs, to get to know them and care for each of them.

According to Life Changing Small Groups by Bill Donahue and the Willow Creek Church, no one has the time or energy to shepherd a flock of 80-200 or 500 people. They recommend a ratio of 1 – 10; believing every leader can reasonably shepherd groups of six to ten people. They also point out that a church’s ability to provide a personal touch is often lost as it grows. And, as the church grows, it becomes necessary for the care giving to be shared by many, rather than by a few. With no one caring for more than 10 people (including the pastor), each person will feel cared for.

Additionally, it is important for churches to realize how small groups will fit into their congregation. They will need to decide if they are going to be a

church with small groups or a church of small groups. If the church has small groups but does not want to organize its ministry around small groups, then “small groups” is a program or department of the church. It is optional.

The structure and make up of small groups is also important. There are 5 categories small groups fall into:

1. Community
2. Serving
3. Disciple making
4. International Ministries
5. Seeker Group

And, within each group there are 4 critical components:

- Love
- Learn
- Serve
- Reach

Small groups can provide a desperately needed personal touch from the church to the congregation if managed well. As a church body, we must remember what Peter said in 1 Peter 5:2-3, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.”

The small sampling of new members surveyed support the literature related to the need for small groups. Specifically, new members want to be a part of a small group that prays and studies together. The sooner a visitor is engaged in relationship with small group members, the more likely she or he is to make the decision to become a member of the church.

### Missions

During our interview process it became clear that many new members were looking for mission opportunities within their new church families. we support the General Board of Global Ministries of North Georgia program “Church of Excellence in Outreach” as a standard of excellence that each church in our conference should strive as much as possible to obtain. The

section below lists the things that should be established to achieve this goal. The objective of this will be to transform our churches and provide the world with tangible proof of our Lords love.

#### DOES MY CHURCH DO THE FOLLOWING?

- Have an active Missions Committee?
- Pay in full its Conference Apportionments?
- Use a bulletin board to celebrate the mission activities of the church in a creative way?
- Have a collection of mission books, videos, DVDs, and materials available for groups?
- Celebrate mission projects in church bulletins, newsletters, and from the pulpit?
- Offer prayers for persons in mission and projects as part of weekly worship?
- Conduct an annual Mission Fair and/or Mission Study?
- Educate members on the biblical basis for Mission?
- Periodically invite speakers to interpret the mission activities of the connectional church?
- Emphasize mission in Vacation Bible School?
- Emphasize the importance of mission and mission opportunities in New Member classes?
- Have members subscribe to mission periodicals (e.g. New World Outlook)?
- Have a goal of giving as much to others as it spends on itself?
- Support mission through "second mile giving" to Advance Specials?
- Participate in special offerings (e.g. Golden Cross, Children's Home)?
- Develop opportunities for members to do hands-on mission work?
- Encourage youth to participate in mission projects and/or give to the Youth Service Fund?
- Encourage children to give to the United Methodist Children's Fund for Mission?
- Encourage individuals who respond to a call to ministry in mission?
- Support mission personnel who serve both inside and outside the U.S.?

The United Methodist Church offers opportunities for members of all ages to participate in both foreign and domestic missions. Churches are encouraged to allow youth groups to participate in a variety of mission experiences. The survey conducted, even with a small sampling of new

members, indicates people are interested in becoming permanent members of churches who are active in missions. Youth group members and adults of all ages should have opportunities to serve in mission projects as often as possible.

### **Membership Classes**

Many new church members come church with personal agendas and preconceptions about the church. The membership class should serve, then, not only to educate new members about the church, but deal with personal agendas and preconceptions up front in a forthright manner.

Rick Warren believes the most important way to assimilate new people into a church is to have a new member class that is required before joining the church. This can be a 4-hour session that answers these questions:

- What is a church?
- What are the purposes of a church?
- What are the benefits of being a member?
- What are the requirements for membership?
- What are the responsibilities of membership?
- What is the vision and strategy of this church?
- How is the church organized?
- How can I get involved in ministry?
- What do I do now that I am a member?

He feels the membership class should always explain that trusting Christ is the first requirement for membership and salvation should be clearly explained. These classes should be offered to various age groups. Church sacraments, traditions, and programs should be explained. Keeping the class interesting and moving at a good pace is essential to its success. Helping people understand exactly what the expectations of members will be makes the resulting congregation stronger and people are less likely to become inactive members.

In follow-up to the class, opportunities to celebrate new members and a mentoring system to help new members find a place to contribute, is essential. Making sure each new member finds a small group to belong to

allows each of them to make friends so that they experience the relationship aspect of the church early on so they feel part of the church. Saddleback also has people designated as “CARE callers” who follow up to ask how it’s going, if the person has any needs, and if they have questions/concerns to pass along to church staff. These people also make sure new members are contacted about upcoming events or news items so they stay “in the loop”.

In local United Methodist churches, the Saddleback plan may not address all the needs of a membership class, but having a specifically planned training opportunity for new members is helpful. Whether it is held before a person becomes a new member or just after they take that step, it is important to provide the new member with information and to answer any questions they may have. The new membership class is most helpful if it includes information about the local church, the connectional church, small group opportunities, schedules and calendar information, what kind of mentoring/shepherding program is available, a tour of the facility, and connection to resources to guide spiritual growth and discipleship. The new member class is a time for newcomers to become fully connected to the church and to move from talking about *this* church to talking about *our* church.

### **Shepherding - A Lay Ministry Outreach To The Congregation**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Shepherding Program is to provide an expanded level of pastoral care to the congregation by the utilization of lay persons as caring shepherds. The desired result of the program is that each member of the congregation feels that he/she is a valued and vital part of the church.

The Shepherding Program provides a communication link between new members of the congregation and lay and ordained leaders of the church. The Shepherding Program may also provide a vehicle for smaller groups of church members to offer and supply support to one another as they learn of sickness, bereavement and other needs.

The Shepherding Program is a team of volunteer church members who assist new and prospective members in becoming oriented to the church's organization, activities, and facilities. The goal of the program is to have new members achieve a more fulfilling church life experience by becoming aware of the variety of opportunities and connecting with those activities that match their interest. In doing so, they will become more involved and participating members of the church family.

The program may be expanded to provide on-going activities and communication for existing members, thereby providing cohesion and solace for groups of Christian friends. This is a good program for reaching out to long-term members of the church who are no longer able to attend, also. Those whose spiritual gifts include encouraging, ministering, showing hospitality, etc... are good candidates to serve in the shepherding role. This program allows active church members utilize their spiritual gifts to be the hands of Christ for others.

### **Role and Responsibilities of a Shepherd**

Since a church organization can appear complex, intimidating, and even impersonal to someone new, the key concept behind Shepherding is to establish, early on, a personal one-on-one contact relationship with a new member. The assigned Shepherd serves as a mentor to assist them with finding their way in the organization (but only to the extent the new member needs or wants this support). Initially, it's expected this assistance should only require a few contacts over the span of a few weeks after the member has joined the church, but may be expanded into a faith support group within the local church.

### **What Does a Shepherd Do?**

In many respects, the responsibilities of a Shepherd may be seen as a concierge of the local church. Depending upon the size of the congregation, the church should develop a plan so that shepherds know what they are expected to do. Smaller congregations may identify different needs than larger congregations, and the church should adapt the role to fit the local needs. The local congregation should prepare shepherds to serve in some or all of these supportive roles:

- Serving as hosts to new members, introducing them to the congregation.

- Answering questions
- Sharing the church calendar
- Providing a tour of the church
- Explaining where to find things and where to go for various church activities
- Arranging and facilitating contact between the new member and leaders for those activities the new member is interested in.
- Making sure they have a New Member Packet with information
- Asking if they have visited a Sunday school class.
- Providing his/her contact information so the new member can be in contact if needed.
- Answering questions.
- Determining what area of church activities the new member is most interested in.
- Learning about the skills or talents of the new member.
- Checking to see if the new member has joined a small group (choir, Sunday school class, bible study group, etc.).
- Seeking feedback about the church, classes, or the new member process?
- Notify the Shepherding Program Captain when new member follow up is completed.
- Following up with new members to see if they are assimilating into church life.
- Getting to know if assigned members of his/her group have personal or spiritual needs beyond information sharing. If situations warrant, Shepherds should refer the new member to the ministerial staff, so that they don't get in over their heads. (Shepherds should maintain confidentiality.)
- Contacting members of his/her group regularly by phone and at church.
- Relaying information to the minister so that he/she is informed and can be responsive.
- Checking to see if the new member wants to learn more about a particular program, as a practice Shepherds should not ask the new member to contact a program leader on their own. The Shepherd should contact the program leader and then ask the leader to get in touch with the member.
- Listening actively.
- Being a one-person welcoming committee to greet members of his/her group at worship and other church events.

- Praying for the members of his/her group regularly.
- Praying for the success of the Shepherding Program.

### **Suggested Shepherding Activities**

1. A letter will be sent from the pastor to the congregation and "friends of the church" explaining the purpose and function of the Shepherding Program and/or there could be an article in the church newsletter explaining the Shepherding Program.
2. The shepherd is present when the new member joins the church if the shepherd has established a relationship with the person prior to joining the church.
3. The shepherd assists the new member by helping him/her learn more about the congregation, opportunities for growth and service, and assisting the new member in meeting others in the congregation.
4. Shepherds contact the members of their group by personal visit, letter or phone establishing the first contact about the Shepherding Program.
5. Shepherds speak with each member of their group at least once a month, establishing a rapport so that they will feel at ease and be able to talk freely about any concerns that they may have. (Shepherds will have to adjust their approach according to the needs and interests of the new member.)
6. Shepherds learn about anniversaries, birth dates, etc. and send them a card and, as appropriate, have their birthdays, anniversaries, etc. published in the church calendar
7. Shepherds make sure the new member has been added to the church mailing list or email list if they desire to receive the newsletter or other communications.
8. Shepherds call assigned members when they aren't seen in church for a few Sundays, checking to see if they are ill, troubled about something, or have concerns about aspects of worship and/or congregation.
9. Shepherds greet assigned members each Sunday at church, sitting with them at worship until they establish friends to sit with.
10. Shepherds may volunteer to provide transportation if a member of their group does not drive.
11. Shepherds might volunteer to baby sit one evening so that couples with young children in his/her group may have a relaxing dinner date
12. Shepherds might provide a ride if a member of their group doesn't drive.

13. Shepherds send a card to any in their group who may be ill or bereaved.
14. Shepherds are in prayer for those who are ill or bereaved and contact the minister or other church members, if appropriate, to offer support for the new member.
15. Shepherds help new members find an appropriate small group to become part of.
16. Shepherds might visit a member of their group, take them to dinner, or have them to dinner at the Shepherd's house. The Shepherd shows hospitality to the new member as they become familiar with the church.
17. Shepherds pray for the success of this Shepherding Program.

The church office will forward a list of names and phone numbers for new members who joined each Sunday are provided to the assigned Shepherd. The church office or Shepherding Captain will maintain a contact roster of volunteers and assign them by rotation to Shepherding Team members.

The assigned Shepherd should make first contact with the new member within one week to offer assistance. If the Shepherd is not available to take the assignment, it will go to the next Shepherd in rotation. The unavailable Shepherd will be put next in the rotation.

### **Shepherding Program Quality Assurance**

The Shepherds also have an opportunity to gather and assess feedback from new members about their church experience, so this can be shared with program leaders to improve how we serve church members and visitors.

On a quarterly basis, the Shepherding Team should meet to debrief their experiences. Such a meeting might include the following activities:

1. Assessing the progress made with new members
2. Assessing the overall functionality of the program
3. Assessing how well the program is working
4. Identifying what methods to keep, change, stop doing, etc.
5. Sharing new member feedback can be shared to improve service

## **Appendix**

## New Member Survey

**Thank you, for being willing to take just a minute or two to complete this simple survey. Your answers and input will help make the United Methodist Church's of the North Georgia Conference better places to grow spiritually and ultimately help win more people to Christ.**

What brought you to your church the first time?

- A.  I found it by myself.
  - B.  I have a child who is engaged in a church sponsored activity.
  - C.  I was invited by a friend
  - D.  Other please explain below
- 

What brought you back to the church for your second visit?

- A.  The warm inviting nature of the congregation
  - B.  The sermon was Bible based and fed my spiritual needs
  - C.  The church had programs that met my needs
  - D.  The church had music that inspired me
  - E.  Other please explain below
- 

*What would you expect from your Church Family to help you integrate better into your new church? Please grade in importance 1 to 5 with one being little assistance and five being very helpful. Please mark the number*

New Member Class	1	2	3	4	5
A church member assigned to you to help introduce you to the church, both facilities and other members .	1	2	3	4	5
Child Care i.e. Sunday School Classes Kindergarten	1	2	3	4	5
Active Small Groups for Adults	1	2	3	4	5
Music i.e. Choir, Hand bells, orchestra	1	2	3	4	5
Missions i.e. local, regional, national, international	1	2	3	4	5
Prayer groups / Bible Study i.e. Disciple Classes	1	2	3	4	5
Providing Transportation i.e. bus service	1	2	3	4	5

# North Georgia UMC Churches included in the Survey

Gordon's Chapel UMC

Jones Chapel UMC

Tuckston UMC

Concord UMC

Bethany UMC

Hartwell First UMC

Watkinsville First UMC

Colbert UMC

Danielsville UMC

Dacula First UMC

Grayson UMC

Sugar Hill UMC

Hamilton Mill UMC

Lawrenceville First UMC

White Plains UMC

## Resources:

The Holy Bible

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church—2004,  
Copyright © 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House.

The Purpose Driven Church – Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission  
by Rick Warren  
Copyright 1995  
Published by Zondervan Publishing House