



BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

We seek to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012.

HOPE FOR THE CITY Adventure Pathways towards Transformation A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MINISTRY IN BALTIMORE

Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the framework for a comprehensive strategy for stimulating transformational ministry within the United Methodist churches in the City of Baltimore, Maryland. The sixty-one (61) United Methodist congregations in Baltimore share in the vision/mission of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of seeking to *become like Christ in calling, equipping, sending and supporting spiritual leadership to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to grow Acts 2 congregations*. The strategy outlined in this report offers an impetus for coordinating ministry within communities through implementing a comprehensive plan for urban leadership development for clergy and lay church leadership, providing ongoing support in the areas of contextualized worship, discipleship development, program development, stewardship and resource development, mission/outreach and evangelization, organizing local church, community-level, regional and national support, as well as developing information technologies which will facilitate enhanced networking among the various institutions with which the churches engage.

Baltimore Strategy Core Team

The Baltimore Strategy Core Team was formed from a recommendation made in November 2006 by the Baltimore-Washington Conference Connectional Table, which asked that a comprehensive strategy be developed for ministry in Baltimore. The Core Team is comprised of nine (9) persons selected from across the Baltimore region, and representative of

the demographics of Baltimore city and the churches. It has had the primary responsibility for developing the plan herewith. The Core Team has been supported and resourced in its work by a number of persons from the staff of the Baltimore-Washington Conference, including members of the Baltimore Region program and administrative staff, along with communications and stewardship staff, as well as a number of outside resource persons and consultants.

The Baltimore Strategy Core Team has been committed to:

- Meeting and praying for each other, the people of Baltimore, and the churches that minister in the city
- Listening to one another and all persons who have a stake in the future of United Methodist ministry in Baltimore
- Learning through the analysis of all available data and information that could help in gaining clarity about the past, present and future as it pertains to United Methodist ministry in Baltimore
- Developing Strategic Directions, Objectives and Goals, as well as an Action Plan that is SMART (specific, measurable, affordable, realistic and timely).

The specific task of the Baltimore Strategy Core Team has been to analyze the present state of the United Methodist churches in the City of Baltimore, and to look at the future direction of the churches. The Core Team has focused on formulating strategic recommendation(s) and action steps within the context of (1) the current realities incumbent in the United Methodist churches and communities across the city, and (2) the stated mission, vision, values and beliefs of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. The overarching question for the Core Team has been, “How might churches best go about maximizing discipleship in Baltimore in the short and long-term?”

Ultimately, the issue is how best to seize opportunities for ministry in Baltimore and thus facilitate the transformation of people and communities from our spiritual foundation as United Methodists. The Core Team has worked from the core belief that as United Methodists the foundation for our ministry is found in the notion of John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, that it is our mission to “*reform the nation and spread scriptural holiness.*”

In essence, the Baltimore Strategy Core Team has been challenged to address the matter of how a comprehensive strategy for urban ministry in Baltimore could be devised within the

context of the Baltimore-Washington Conference commitment to *the Discipleship Adventure* and our shared vision/mission *to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples to grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012*. The Core Team affirms this vision as being compatible with God's vision for Baltimore, and leads us to a deeper exploration of how our shared values and beliefs might be appropriated in ways that bring forth transformation of the people and communities of Baltimore.

God's Vision for the City and United Methodist Ministry in Baltimore

“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Jeremiah 29:7, 11(NRSV)

The prophet Jeremiah's words remind us that we are to “seek the welfare of the city,” and that the city is a place where God's hope for the future resides. Cities have existed for over 10,000 years as a form of social organization. Cities, as God's sacred places have historically been where the earliest civilized cultures gathered and developed, and are where the earliest codified laws have been found. It was in these first cities where agrarian economies, governments and administration, and science began to develop. The roots of Judeo-Christian thought and culture are also found in these lands. Because many of God's people have historically resided in urban areas, cities are places where God's activity and saving grace has often been manifest in some of its most profound and powerful ways.

While Jesus of Nazareth spent much of his ministry in rural areas and small towns with the people of the land, the culminating fulfillment of his mission as recorded in the Gospel of Luke was the city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem, literally the city of peace, was the location of God's saving act for all humanity which was to be on a cross erected outside the city walls. As Jesus came near the city, he wept over it saying ‘if you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that made for peace!’ (Luke 19:41-42) Jesus is referring to the potential cities have for good and for evil, for peace and for violence, for hope and despair.

It is important to note that at the founding of the church, the Good News was spread from city to city as Paul preached and the message spread throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. Many of Paul's epistles are addressed to cities - including Rome, Corinth, Thessalonica, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippi, and Colossi. Paul wrote these letters to persons in cities within the context of the real theological, spiritual, ethical and communal issues they were facing in trying to live out their new faith in Christ. In his letters to the Christians in these cities, Paul addressed issues such as marriage, divorce, poverty, wealth, sharing of resources, unemployment, economic development, health concerns, the need to work cooperatively, and many other issues similar to those faced by persons and churches in cities today.

To understand the role of the city in God's plan, we also have the biblical vision of the New Jerusalem – the renewed city – in the Book of Revelation. (Rev. 21:2). This vision seems to indicate the direction in which the progressive activation of God's plan of salvation and transformation moves and points out the stages needed for its development. In light of this, the reality of the contemporary city takes on another perspective, opening itself to new prospects of salvation and transformation. The New City as depicted in the Book of Revelation is presented as the definitive context for the reconciliation of humanity with God.

It is essential that a strategic plan for United Methodist ministry in Baltimore not be a vision that merely seeks to sustain the church, but one that discerns God's will for the people of God in the city. The Core Team affirms that as has been the historical role of the church in the city, the transformation of people's lives and of communities is the critical consideration and should be the focus of a plan for ministry in the city. This vision should not be directed solely at the present, but toward our future. In Deuteronomy 6, people of faith acted on behalf of "their children's children's children." The Core Teams sees this as critical to all that the church will set out to accomplish.

The State of the United Methodist Churches in Baltimore City

United Methodists have a long history of faithful ministry within communities in the name of Jesus Christ in the City of Baltimore. As the birthplace of American Methodism, the ministry of making and nurturing disciples, serving those in need, and offering church buildings for community use has been consistent and strong. Over the past 223 years The United Methodist Church has engaged in ministries that promote the strengthening and transformation of congregations and communities in Baltimore. Today, the United Methodist Church continues to work to empower local congregations and communities through its various ministries. The Church is committed to participating in reclaiming urban communities through vital, visible and available ministries that seek to prophetically address the needs of the disenfranchised, disinherited, and dispossessed.

The latest statistical data indicates that Baltimore is the 8th largest metropolitan area in the United States. Statistical data also projects that the population in Baltimore will increase by over 25 percent over the next ten years.

While the city of Baltimore currently has 635,815 residents, it is a part of the larger Baltimore-Washington region (or Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area) which is comprised of over 5 million people and continues to grow. The current racial composition of Baltimore is 65% African American, 21% white, 2% Latino and 2% Asian.

In Baltimore, 22.3% of the population was at the poverty level in 1999, while 30.6% of the children lived in poverty (Baltimore City Data Collaborative 2004). In 2004, over one-third of Baltimore high school students, 34.6 percent, failed to get diplomas, ranking as the nation's worst (reported in Education Week). In 2006, one-third of students who began ninth grade in Baltimore graduated from high school. Recent statistics indicate that Baltimore is considered to be the 12th most violent city, and has the second highest murder rate in the nation, along with being near the top in the rates of the incidence of HIV/AIDS and heroine addiction.

Statistics of 61 Baltimore City United Methodist congregations indicate the following has occurred from 1996-2006:

- Membership has decreased from 17,311 to 15,140 (14.3% decline)
- Professions of faith have decreased from 495 to 436 (13.5% decline)

- Worship Attendance has decreased from 6516 to 5956 (8.8% decline)
- Average worship attendance per church/building has increased from 89 to 97 (8.9% increase)
- The number of churches paying 100% apportionments has increased from 35 to 43 (22% increase)
- 40 congregations reported a decrease in average worship attendance in 2006 when compared with 1996.
- 28 congregations reported an increase in professions of faith in 2006 when compared with 1996.

() 5 merged, one new, and one congregation that did not report 1996 worship attendance are not included in the above comparisons. These congregations are factored out of the statistics.*

Demographic analysis indicates that as Baltimore continues to become increasingly diverse racially, economically, and socially. In light of this, many congregations, some of which have historically served as sources of institutional and communal strength, now face challenges as to how to best engage in mission and ministry that will address the needs of communities experiencing transition. Particular challenges exist relative to identifying, coordinating and deploying the appropriate resources (financial, personal and spiritual) to address the expanding needs incumbent in this transition.

The development of strategic processes and approaches to congregational development and revitalization is essential to facilitating effective Christian witness, given these needs. This requires that churches provide a balance of spirituality, compassion and service that address the real needs of persons. It also requires that congregations develop the capacity for a vital and relevant community presence, and maintain ongoing relationships and dialogue with other institutions throughout the community.

The Process

In commencing its work, and throughout the course of its investigation, the Baltimore Strategy Core Team has sought to address several strategic questions pertaining to the future of United Methodist ministry in Baltimore. These strategic questions have included:

1. What is the best way to organize the Baltimore districts to achieve our vision/mission, galvanize resources, relate to the city, and develop partnerships with other

denominations, faith groups, businesses and organizations? Is it appropriate to pilot two smaller districts outside of Baltimore?

2. What is the best staffing pattern for Baltimore and how will that affect the region? How will guides and superintendents be organized to support pastors and congregations to carry out a strategic plan?
3. How will we organize congregations and church leadership to implement a strategic plan?
4. What partners (businesses, denominations, agencies and individuals) will we collaborate with to implement the plan?
5. Are there churches to be closed or merged? Are there new churches to be started?
6. What will we do to generate resources (income) for ministry through our buildings, grants, or through new initiatives?
7. Does/will the urban strategy have the buy-in and support of the majority of laity and clergy in Baltimore?
8. Who will be responsible and accountable for the plan's implementation?
9. What is the timeline for implementing the plan?
10. What transformative message do we have to offer that is attractive to people in the city of Baltimore?

The processes for discernment and analysis in which the Baltimore Strategy Core Team engaged to address these questions included the following:

- SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)
- Demographic study
- Review/Analysis of Prior Investigation
- Benchmarking
- Focus Groups
- Regional Survey
- Identification of Strategic Partnerships

Each of these processes is discussed in detail below.

SWOT Analysis

The Core Team engaged in SWOT analysis as a means of developing a picture of the present state (strengths and weaknesses) and future prospects (opportunities and threats) for churches in Baltimore. The following is a summary/composite of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats identified by the Core Strategy Team.

Strengths:

- Location – we have strategically situated churches
- Service-orientation
- Community relations through the use of buildings
- Wisdom of elders
- Diversity of worship styles
- Community outreach
- Tenacity – ability to “hold on,” resilience, and persistence

Weaknesses:

- The image of the United Methodist Church and a perceived lack of flexibility/vitality in worship
- Meager financial resources and small numbers of people in most of our congregations
- Decreasing generational diversity and churches that are “graying” and becoming older; youth ministries that don’t draw urban youth
- Many church members don’t live in the communities where their churches are
- Lack of awareness from the Conference of the severity of congregational/community challenges
- Lack of urban-focused leadership, and technical gaps between urban and suburban churches/communities
- Church members overwhelmed with issues related to crime, substance abuse, poor public education and high taxes

Opportunities:

- Deploy conference resources in focused and intentional ways to support local churches, and connect more effectively with neighborhoods
- Leverage our buildings and properties to support the development of new ministries, and better utilization of building space for creative ministry and community programs
- Call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders who are specifically gifted, trained and have a passion for city ministry
- Develop strategic partnerships and collaborations with churches of other denominations, and community organizations/leaders
- Focus on and invest in young people as a means of impacting future generations
- Address basic needs in communities
- Enlist new residents in ministry, especially young adults

Threats:

- Economic, social, spiritual, and moral decline threatens to overwhelm some areas of the city
- The magnitude of the issues and decline facing many churches
- Hesitance of pastors, churches and the Conference to take risks and make the critical decisions necessary to move forward
- Burn-out of urban pastors (particularly in smaller churches)
- Exorbitant building maintenance costs that divert diminished ministry resources
- Lack of permission-giving and resources from the Baltimore-Washington Conference
- Lack of a specific focus – as we try to be generalists in ministry and attempt to do too much

Demographic Study

A demographic study of Baltimore was undertaken utilizing 2006 Percept data. The data indicates that 45 of the 50 potential life style segments are located within the city. It also indicates that the racial makeup of particular neighborhoods continues to change with greater ethnic diversity appearing in many locations. Median age levels are also significantly lower than the median age of most United Methodist congregations. Percept also plots the geographic locations of United Methodist churches which is a helpful tool for helping to assess strategic alignments and future initiatives.

Review of Prior Investigation on Baltimore Area Ministry and District

Alignment

A part of the Baltimore Strategy Core Team’s work involved reviewing prior investigation on the future of United Methodist ministry in Baltimore. The team reviewed several reports produced between April 7, 2003 and April 1, 2004. At that time, the bishop and district superintendents serving on the Baltimore Harford, Baltimore North and Baltimore West Districts worked with Conference staff and other ministry stakeholders in Baltimore, and focused their work on exploring the feasibility of creating a Baltimore Central District. The task involved recommending a timeline for implementation, defining District boundaries and District names. Several Pros and Cons were listed for the creation of a Baltimore Central District comprised of churches inside the Baltimore Beltway (Interstate 695). These included:

Pros:

- Administrative Order

- Interface with Political, Ecumenical, and Community Development Leaders
- Development of a strategy for maximizing the utilization of present resources in Baltimore: people, buildings, land, capital funds
- Specialization in the unique aspects of urban ministry
- Development of unity among pastors and churches

Cons:

- Isolation of urban churches from suburban partner churches
- Creating a “poverty zone”
- New bishop should decide
- Administrative solution does not address the spiritual issues that are related to our declining ministries.

The Task Force report from that investigation, dated April 13, 2003, indicates that:

...some of the pastors and laity in churches in the Baltimore region raised questions about the value of the proposed change and whether redistricting would address the underlying problems of lack of unity among churches and the need for greater spiritual commitment among pastors and congregations. While there were a few expressions of support for redistricting from laity and one clergy, the predominant response, especially by the silence of the clergy during the session, and later as they exited, was lukewarm at best and predominantly against the plan to redistrict.

The report stated further that:

... if the plan to redistrict proceeds, the clergy’s lack of commitment to redistrict is an obstacle that would need to be addressed by the new superintendent and would take some time to overcome in order for the new district to be successful in extending the ministry of Jesus Christ through the United Methodist churches in the City of Baltimore.

Notwithstanding these concerns, the report concluded by stating that “the opposition is not insurmountable, but must be recognized and overcome.” The recommendation at that time was to move toward implementing a plan for realigning the districts in the Baltimore region and establishing a Baltimore Central District by moving a total of 70 churches and 61 charges from the three existing Baltimore area districts into the new district, and then combining the Baltimore North and Baltimore Harford Districts. The recommendation was that the plan for realignment, with the establishment of new districts, was to be completed by July 1, 2005.

Benchmarking and Analysis of Best Practices in Urban Ministry

The Baltimore Strategy Core Team engaged in benchmarking with several church and community-based organizations that are currently involved in ministry and other efforts to bring about transformation in Baltimore and other major cities in the Northeast. Organizations from which the Core Team was able to gain information and glean insight include:

- BURP – Baltimore Urban Regional Plan (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
- Baltimore Presbytery, Presbyterian Church, USA (John Janka, Consultant)
- Roman Catholic Charities of Baltimore
- Rochester Community Ministries (New York)
- Frankford Group Ministries (Philadelphia)
- Eastern Pennsylvania Office of Urban Ministries
- Methodist Action Program (Wilmington, DE)
- City Society of New York
- Report of the Northeastern Jurisdiction Urban Strategy Committee (2004)
- National Urban Strategy Council (General Board of Global Ministries)

Focus Groups and Regional Survey

Members of the Core Team met with several focus groups representative of persons from across the Annual Conference. Persons in these groups included local church pastors and laity, Baltimore region leadership, including District lay leaders, discipleship council chairs, and the Conference Lay Leader. Also, the Core Team conducted a Focus Group (and did one-on-one interviews) with former District Superintendents and Council on Ministry staff who had been assigned to work on issues of district alignment and resourcing Baltimore city churches in the past. Additionally, members of the Core Team met with a number of other United Methodists in small and larger groups, and other persons from across the Baltimore region to share information and hear of interests and concerns.

In the focus groups, persons were invited to reflect on the following four questions, based on the overall theme: ***Where We Are – Where We're Going:***

- 1) **What has the United Methodist Church done well in Baltimore?**
- 2) **Where are we currently missing the boat?**
- 3) **If the United Methodist church could take one significant action in Baltimore, what would you suggest it be?**
- 4) **What are your dreams for ministry in the city of Baltimore?**

Regional Survey

Beginning in August 2007, the Baltimore Strategy Core Team developed and distributed an on-line survey which encouraged church lay leadership and pastors from across the Greater Baltimore region to provide input as to thoughts about the present and future state of United Methodist ministry in Baltimore. Over one hundred surveys were completed.

A Summary of Key Findings from Focus Groups and Regional Survey

- An ongoing appreciation of the history and heritage of the presence of the United Methodist Church in Baltimore
- A hope and willingness to continue the vital presence among United Methodist churches in the city
- A desire to address the challenges incumbent with many older buildings and dwindling financial resources in many churches
- A desire to partner with the Annual Conference in substantial and creative ways toward strategic development of existing and new ministries in Baltimore
- A desire to address critical needs of persons of the city including violence, drugs, unemployment, public health, housing, schools, and safety
- A desire to develop meaningful partnerships with other United Methodist congregations across the Baltimore region and throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference
- A willingness to develop creative partnerships with churches of other denominations and other public and private institutions
- A desire to engage in creative approaches to ministering with children, youth and younger adults
- A desire for a unified voice and message for the churches in Baltimore, especially on critical and strategic issues
- A willingness to explore models of community ministry among churches.

Identification of Strategic Partnerships

The following entities have been identified as ongoing and potential partners in the ministries of Baltimore:

- The 61 United Methodist Congregations in Baltimore
- Over 240 United Methodist Congregations in the Greater Baltimore Region
- Over 690 Congregations and Connectional resources of the Baltimore-Washington Conference
- Baltimore City Government Agencies and Elected Officials
- Private Sector Agencies/Foundations (e.g. Patterson Memorial Foundation, Abel Foundation, etc.)
- Financial Institutions including Banks and Credit Unions
- The General Agencies of the United Methodist Church, including the General Board of Global Ministries, and General Board of Discipleship
- Wesley Theological Seminary, Howard University School of Divinity and other theological schools and higher education institutions in the Baltimore-Washington region (e.g. Johns Hopkins University, Morgan State University, Coppin State University, University of Maryland)
- Ecumenical and Interfaith partners (e.g. Central Maryland Ecumenical Council (CMEC), Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), Churches United for the Renewal of East Baltimore (CURE))

Revisiting the Question of District Realignment

One of the critical tasks of the Baltimore Strategy Core Team was to revisit and address the question of how United Methodist congregations and leadership in Baltimore might best be organized to maximize discipleship and transform lives in the communities in the short and long-term. A critical matter addressed was what would be the compelling reasons for recommending district realignment with the creation of a Baltimore Central District as was recommended in April 2004. In light of feedback from focus groups and others with vested interests in United Methodist ministry in Baltimore, including meetings with Conference leadership (former district superintendents and staff) involved in crafting that the 2004 recommendation to realign, the Baltimore Strategy Core Team affirms that the present pros and

cons of realignment are similar to those listed in 2004 (please see above). One prevailing concern that the Core Team does point to is that given the current racial-ethnic and socio-economic composition of Baltimore, with much of the city and the Greater Baltimore region currently racially and economically gentrified, and with the majority of churches in Baltimore city currently existing in communities that face significant socio-economic challenges, the creation of a Baltimore Central District at this time has the potential of creating a predominantly “black’ and “poor” district.

The Baltimore Strategy Core Team believes that realigning districts in the Baltimore Region at this time is not the only option for creating opportunities for strengthening the overall United Methodist presence in Baltimore, although the team believes that the matter of district realignment in the Baltimore should remain an option and be revisited if it is deemed necessary for the strategic revitalization of the churches and communities of the city and the Greater Baltimore region.

This conclusion is based on the following factors. First, the Conference staff assigned to work with the churches in the three Baltimore area districts – including superintendents, Adventure Guides, and administrative support staff - was organized into the Baltimore Regional Team in 2006, and has been strategically assigned to resource and support the unique ministry needs and opportunities across the Baltimore Region. Secondly, the Regional Team approach – within the context of the *Discipleship Adventure* - affords an opportunity for strategically aligning Baltimore city pastors and their congregations into community-based (some cross-district) Disciple Groups, thus creating six or seven Baltimore City Disciple Groups. Information provided by the Baltimore Metropolitan Council indicates that the City of Baltimore is comprised of twenty-six (26) distinct communities. Community-based alignment of Disciple Groups (pastors and churches) in Baltimore would provide opportunities for facilitating strategic, contextualized/focused resourcing and support of pastors and the churches in the groups. This affords the potential for pastors in specific communities to more effectively collaborate and synergize their efforts (e.g. work on shared community projects, develop community-based Shalom Zones, 501c3's, youth ministries, etc.).

Pathways towards the Transformation of Baltimore

How might we encourage, support, and develop “fruitful” churches in the City of Baltimore?

The Core Team believes that the *Seven Vision Pathways* developed by the United Methodist Council of Bishops in 2007 provides the strategic framework for a response. These *Vision Pathways* are:

- ❖ *New Church Development*
- ❖ *Transforming Existing Congregations*
- ❖ *Racial/Ethnic Ministries*
- ❖ *Leadership Development*
- ❖ *Reaching Children*
- ❖ *Eliminating Poverty*
- ❖ *Teaching the Wesleyan Way of Disciple-making*

Our Strategic Objectives

In light of these *Vision Pathways*, the Core Team affirms the following strategic objectives:

- We are called by Jesus Christ to participate in the transformation of the people and communities of Baltimore.
- This means reaching out into our neighborhoods to offer hope and help where people are in need - spiritually, physically, and socially.
- This also means engaging in ministry with all persons in our communities with acceptance and grace, partnering with persons to confront life’s challenges and exploring life’s questions.
- Ultimately, we are called to invite all persons into a life-transforming journey with Jesus Christ, making disciples and equipping leaders who will likewise offer Christ for the transformation of communities.

Our Guiding Principles

The *Vision Pathways* lead us to commit to the following principles:

- Making leadership development and multiplication priorities for all of our ministries in the city.
- Encouraging creative models for congregational revitalization and developing new faith communities wherever opportunities arise.
- Creating models of community ministry and community accountability as primary opportunities for transforming lives and communities.
- Encouraging new congregational alignments where strategically advantageous to the overall United Methodist presence and vision in Baltimore.

- Engaging the un-churched in our communities and intentionally inviting all persons into a life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Focusing on ministries that are bearing - or demonstrate the capacity and desire to bear - Acts 2 fruit.
- Sacrificially committing our resources of people, process and place to mission and ministry in Baltimore.
- Committing Annual Conference resources in ways that support pastors and churches, and maximize discipleship.
- Engaging in an ongoing intentional process of evaluating the effectiveness of the United Methodist presence in Baltimore, and committing to making necessary adjustments to the prioritization of resources in ways that will maximize discipleship for the transformation of communities.
- The Bishop of the Washington Episcopal Area will continue to serve as the unifying voice on critical issues as it relates to United Methodist ministry in Baltimore, but church leaders (pastors and laity) are the primary voices for sharing the church's vision and mission in their communities.

Our Guiding Goals

United Methodist congregations in Baltimore will seek to actively participate in the transformation of the communities of the city by engaging in the church's vision and mission *to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012*. We are committed to community-building and growing at least 55 Acts 2 congregations in Baltimore City by 2012 through developing ministries that show Christ at work in the world transforming lives, and empowering persons to live holistically in this urban context. After the example of Christ, and in light of the early church's experience as depicted in the Book of Acts (2:41-47), we will:

1. *Increase Worship Attendance through:*

- Strengthening congregational ministry/creating new faith communities
- Innovative contextual and relevant worship
- Creating a vision and passion for connecting persons with God through vital worship

2. *Increase Professions of Faith through:*

- Offering Christ to all persons
- Consistently striving to make our churches and ministries relevant to all people in our communities
- Ongoing contextualized leadership development
- A focus on capacity-building among laity and clergy
- Creative connections of the church and community
- Creatively using persons on extension ministries within our connectional structure

3. *Enhance the capacity for Mission and Ministry through:*

- A focus on asset-based resource development
- Creative stewardship/asset management for ministry

- Capitalizing on strategic partnerships
4. ***Observe and Share in Signs and Wonders through:***
- Public Witness of faith in Jesus Christ
 - Intentional community organizing
 - Sharing in advocacy and promoting social justice
 - Identifying and hearing the prophetic voices in our congregations and communities
 - Engendering and Celebrating Spiritual Renewal through ongoing theological reflection, ecumenical and interfaith engagement, cross-cultural engagement, and mission engagement

***Project Hope for the City
Adventure Pathways towards Transformation***

**A Ten Point Action Plan
for United Methodist Ministry in Baltimore**

Our vision is to become like Christ as we call, equip, send and support spiritual leaders to make disciples and grow at least 600 Acts 2 congregations by 2012.

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

In light of the above *Vision Pathways* from the Council of Bishops, and in order to realize the objectives and goals as set forth above, we will commit to the full implementation of the following Ten Point Plan over the next seven years:

1. ***Discipleship Academy (Urban Track)*** – As the urban component of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Discipleship Academy, the *Urban Track* will offer contextualized training sessions for laity/clergy teams from Baltimore city churches over the next seven years in each of the following five areas:
 - Vital Worship in Urban Settings
 - Connecting with Persons in Urban Communities
 - Faith Development and Discipling Persons in Urban Settings (including youth and young adults)
 - Engaging the Urban Church in Mission and Ministry
 - Evangelism and Faith Sharing in the City

We will commit to hosting an annual ***Hope for the City Urban Ministry Convocation and Institute*** in Baltimore, beginning in spring 2008 to celebrate urban ministry and train clergy and laity teams. The Convocation/Institute will be followed by once quarterly training sessions on the five items above.

2. ***Urban Discipler Groups*** – Organize *Urban Discipler Groups* (6-7) into community-based clusters of pastors, and assign 2 Discipleship Adventure Guides with experience, passion and gifts for urban ministry who will be dedicated to working with Baltimore city pastors and churches. These Discipler Groups will meet in clusters at least monthly in churches in the city beginning in 2008 through at least 2012. Partnerships of urban Discipler Groups/congregations with suburban Discipler Groups/ congregations will be proactively encouraged and developed across the Baltimore region.
3. ***Shalom Zones*** - Develop at least three Shalom Zones per year over the next 7 years in collaboration with the National Shalom Ministry Plan (General Board of Global Ministries) in order to develop asset-based community ministry for the strengthening of neighborhoods across Baltimore (Begin training and development in January 2008)
4. ***The Building Hope Initiative (Urban New Church Initiative)*** - Develop at least one new Acts 2 faith community per year in Baltimore over the next 7 years. This may include faith communities that emerge in existing congregations and buildings, or new faith communities that may emerge and be housed in new buildings in strategic locations in the city. (Beginning in 2008)
5. ***Hope Centers*** - Develop at least four comprehensive community ministry centers – one in each of the four quadrants of Baltimore city - over the next 4 years. These centers may be located in existing churches in strategic locations in the city, and will be collaborative efforts with the church, government and private sector organizations, and will serve to address the spiritual, social and physical needs of persons in the city. (In progress)
6. ***Project Hope*** - Enlist at least seven regional *Volunteer in Ministry* (VIM) Teams per year over the next seven years from the Baltimore Region and across the Baltimore-Washington Conference to work on improving the condition of existing church facilities and city communities. One of the priority sites for *Project Hope* will be Mt. Auburn Cemetery. (Beginning in 2008)
7. ***Hope for our Neighbors*** – Commit to working with every congregation over the next three years to resource each in adopting-a-school in the church’s community, and developing a plan for an ongoing community partnership with the school (its students, parents, teachers, and staff); also commit to working with every congregation to resource each in becoming actively involved in a neighborhood/civic/community association as a means of increasing community visibility, investment and engagement. (Beginning in 2008)
8. ***Hope Fellows*** - Work with Wesley Theological Seminary and city churches to place at least 3 urban graduate interns/fellows per year in Baltimore city congregations per year over the next seven years. Based upon qualification, we will commit to exploring opportunities for placing these fellows in urban pastoral

appointments upon Seminary graduation and appropriate ordination/licensing. (Beginning in 2008)

9. ***Hope for the City Fund*** – Provide an impetus for investment/re-investment in Baltimore city congregations and communities by developing an investment fund with a goal of at least \$15 million to fund future transformational ministry in Baltimore city. Funding will support emerging urban ministry, building, capital improvements, and emergency infrastructure needs. Emphasis will be placed on capitalizing on strategic ministry opportunities and equipping and supporting higher potential churches, as well as others that are currently, or are moving toward becoming Acts 2 congregations. (Beginning in 2008)

10. ***The Hope Council*** – Organize a Conference supported team of up to 12 persons who will meet on a quarterly basis and will serve as an advisory body to work with congregations and staff during the implementation of the Ten Point Action Plan (*Project Hope for the City*). The Council will work with congregations and Conference staff in ongoing strategic development as to emerging needs and opportunities towards maximizing discipleship in Baltimore, and will also work with churches and staff in facilitating/coordinating the development of strong, ongoing working strategic partnerships with churches, Baltimore City government agencies, and private and non-profit entities with a common interest in the transformation of Baltimore.

Timeline

It is expected that planning, development and implementation of the Ten Point Action Plan will commence in December 2007. The following is an outline of the proposed timeline:

December 2007 (***Planning and Development***)

- Work with Baltimore area churches and Conference leadership to develop a substantive Contextual Framework for Implementation
- Affirm specific goals with expectations of outcomes and results
- Identify strategic resources to be incorporated into *Project Hope for the City*
- Identify persons who will serve on the *Hope Council*

January 2008-December 2008 (***Implementation, Follow-up and Evaluation***)

- Conduct contextual Asset-based Analysis/Needs Analysis of all Congregations in Baltimore (Development of a community ministry instrument that is to be completed by each church)
- Engage in ongoing resource identification and development
- Conduct Ongoing Mission/Vision Analysis
- Organize Community–based Urban Discipler Groups
- Plan and Conduct the first Hope for the City Urban Ministry Convocation and Institute

Follow-up and Evaluation

The general effectiveness of the Ten-Point Action Plan will be measured by using the following criteria:

- (1) The full implementation of the Ten Point Action Plan by the end of calendar year 2008
- (2) Increased congregational vitality as indicated by Acts 2 fruit.
- (3) Development of best practices among participating churches which will serve as an impetus for ongoing urban congregational vitality and capacity-building in other churches and communities.
- (4) The level of collaboration, community-building and partnerships among churches and throughout communities
- (5) Ongoing compilation of data and information on the state of churches and communities in Baltimore, which can be utilized in future congregational research, analysis and development.
- (6) Development of a means of information and resource sharing among urban congregations through new technologies.
- (7) Development of an environment that is sensitive to the needs of urban congregations, and the need for the ongoing commitment to the development of resources (financial, human, and spiritual) necessary to comprehensively address these needs.

Baltimore Strategy Core Team

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