

# **The Initiative for Growth and Vitality** in the churches of the Desert Southwest Conference

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## **17 Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. How do you define “growth” and “vitality?”**

Growth is not exclusively measured in numbers but growth and vitality is about stretching and having the courage to rethink things. What are the demonstrated programs and missions reflective of a new way of thinking? Growing congregations are inspiring, involving and are engaging more and more members and attendees. Growth may also reflect more study groups, more mission activities, more worshippers, more believers, more programs and a stronger sense of community and a deeper commitment to Christ.

### **2. Is every church required to participate? Will compliance be enforced?**

Every church is invited to participate and our hope is that every church will. It is an exciting new venture and so all congregations are encouraged to participate and stretch. Yes. Compliance will be more than encouraged. Congregations are encouraged to “rethink church.” Church leadership will be tasked with breathing excitement within their respective congregations as each congregation defines their growth and vitality efforts.

### **3. If the path forward for each church will be unique to its setting, is it a do whatever you want option?**

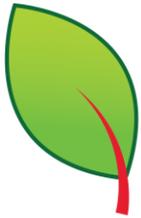
There is no cookie cutter approach that results in growth and vitality. Every setting is unique, the path forward will reflect this uniqueness. All churches will be working for the same common growth. To effect a more successful effort, congregations will be encouraged to collaborate with other congregations. This is simply a suggestion. Congregations may develop their plans within their individual settings. Congregations may elevate their programs and missions to reflect God’s presence and God’s power.

### **4. What changes will Conference Leadership be making?**

Conference leadership is already making changes in how time and energy is focused on growth and vitality and the values of the Conference.

### **5. We’ve tried to grow the churches with other approaches, but nothing has worked. Why would this attempt be any better? Is there proof that it will work?**

This initiative has been crafted from the roots up by the input and feedback of our lay people and clergy. It is “our vision” drawn together by the people of the Desert Southwest Conference, and so speaks to where we are and where we are longing to go. Our success and therefore our proof rests with each of us and our willingness to work together, risk together, support one another in failure, learn together, as we grow together.



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### **6. What happens if we take risks and fail? Are there consequences?**

Our willingness to take risks and fail will be one of the measures of living into our value of boldness as we follow where Christ leads us. We hope to support courageous efforts to experiment for growth, so that each failure will provide an opportunity for learning and finding new ways of doing our work together in collaboration and partnership.

### **7. Will there be measurements? If so, how will results be reported? Will there be measurement expectations for the Conference as a whole?**

How we measure growth and vitality may be very different from measurements in the past. Measurements will be set in collaboration between churches and their missional strategist (District Superintendent) based on what we learn from our work together in our first year and what is appropriate for each ministry context. Yes there will be a measurement expectation for the Conference as a whole and it will be set in collaboration with each of our churches.

### **8. Where can my church go for advice and support? Will there be help in determining strategic needs? Goals? Plans?**

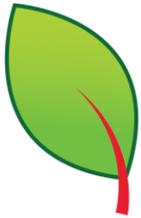
For advice and support you can contact your DS, Director of Connectional Ministries Office, Director of New & Vital Faith Communities and/or the Bishop's office. If you have questions, suggestions, or examples to share, please send them to [initiative@dscumc.org](mailto:initiative@dscumc.org).

### **9. My staff has been reduced and church leadership is stretched. How are we supposed to find the time and resources to participate in the Initiative?**

The Initiative is not designed to add more work to the church, but it is a tool that can help us evaluate current church practices and ministries. For example, when looking at our ministries, ask the questions, "Does this show that we are being a courageous church; loving like Jesus, acting for justice and/or united in hope?" "What are we not doing that a courageous church in our context should be doing?" As a pastor or staff member, what do I need to let go of? How do I need to change what I do? What new ministry do I need to begin? We may need to stop doing some things in order to make way for what is new.

### **10. Most of my church members are older and resistant to change. They may leave if we try to embrace new ways of doing things. Is the Conference prepared to lose church members?**

Most people resist change because they fear they will lose something they cherish. So, intentional change should be a process rather than a battle. Praying, listening, sharing, studying and praying some more should be what happens when moving into a significantly new direction. It doesn't mean a church cannot make a change unless everyone agrees. But it also doesn't mean those "in power" can act independently when it affects others. We also need to remember that decisions should be made because it



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fits in with Christ's purpose for the church. Not because of it's our preference. So, yes, the Conference is willing to lose members when we're making changes that will help us be a more faithful and vital church.

### **11. What would it look like if the Vision were fully realized? How would we know?**

New relationships will be formed. Connections will be made between the church and its neighbors. Hope and joy will increase in our churches and in the communities we serve. The message of God's love in Jesus will be proclaimed in new ways among new people.

### **12. How should my church get started? What is the first step?**

Review the packet, pray over it and introduce it to your leadership team so that you and your leadership team can discern how it can influence the ministry of your church. If you don't currently have a Mission or Vision, the Vision could guide your church in exciting new ways. If you already have a Mission and/or Vision, we suggest that your church be guided by both your own Mission/Vision and the new Conference Vision. How might the new Vision further inspire your church and its ministries? You might challenge your leadership team to name one new idea or initiative for their ministry team or sphere of influence that would have their team courageously loving like Jesus, acting for justice, or united in hope. You may also wish to discuss "next steps" with your District Superintendent.

### **13. Is there an agenda? Will something else be following this?**

The agenda is for each church to experience growth and vitality. The hope is that churches will experience renewed hope in being places of worship and ministry. The packet will continue to evolve with additional resources as each church contributes their ideas for implementing the vision in their church.

### **14. Will we have opportunity to learn what other churches did to change as we did with Ignite grants?**

Yes. One of the important aspects of the Initiative is the sharing of ideas. The Implementation team will be working on new ways in which churches can share ideas and learn from each other.

### **15. Will we need to report what we did at an Annual Conference like in the past by using pictures and possibly poster boards?**

Reporting is not required but is appreciated as ideas for collaboration.

### **16. Does it count if my church didn't initiate anything but changed through a new partnership with another church or organization?**

We value being in relationship and collaboration. Being the initiator is not the main objective.



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**17. How does the Compelling Vision relate to the mission of The United Methodist Church and to my church's own vision statement?**

It is our hope that you will find the compelling vision inspiring as you do the ministry of "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." In the same way, your own church's vision statement may be very much in sync with this compelling vision, so together, these become partners together leading to positive, new ventures that lead to growth, vitality and fruitfulness.