

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

Our Vision – A Courageous Church:
Loving like Jesus
Acting for justice
United in hope.

God has called us to be courageous. The Desert Southwest Conference is a connection of lay and clergy leaders extending Christ's presence of love, justice, and hope in a fearful and broken world. Grounded in our Wesleyan heritage, the traditions of the church's past wisdom, and the values that guide the way we live, we are empowered to create a reality of growth and vitality within our ministry settings and surrounding communities.

Through our collective sharing and work together, we have come to understand that each ministry setting is unique and requires a plan for transformation that is authentic to its identity and context. However, we believe there are universal objectives that will help each ministry setting achieve growth and vitality. God calls us with courage to:

1. Love like Jesus.

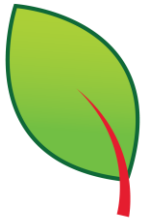
"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." -John 13:34 (NRSV) We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ and create environments where others may experience and be changed by him. We are called to become proactive, visible disciples by building relationships with all of God's people, especially with those underrepresented in our faith communities, so that together we become vital forces of goodness, inspiration, and hope.

2. Act for Justice.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free." -Luke 4:18 (NRSV) We are called to be in relationship with "the least of these," to recognize places of injustice in our communities, to enter into those places when invited, and to be a presence for justice, so that every part of God's creation receives the fullness of our Creator's love.

3. Unite in Hope.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling..." -Ephesians 4:4 (NRSV) We are called to serve in collaboration and partnership with one another by living out our shared hope for God's realm on earth. In this calling, God gives us hope through Jesus Christ. Although we may differ at times, we act together in faith and trust to become beacons of that hope to all the world.

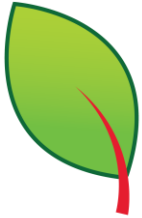


The Initiative for Growth and Vitality
in the churches of the
Desert Southwest Conference

Our Values - God is Calling Us Towards:

Living into the vision of being a courageous church, we believe the following values are necessary for growth and vitality.

- **Trust**
We believe in God's love and work among us, confidently relying on God and one another.
- **Compassion**
We see the image of God in all of creation, expressing the depth of love Jesus shared with the world.
- **Relationship**
We build grace-filled relationships with our neighbors--becoming involved, serving with, and creating new ministry partnerships--acknowledging we exist for more than just ourselves.
- **Authenticity**
We live into our identity as followers of Jesus while upholding the diverse expression of God's calling in each ministry setting.
- **Boldness**
We take risks to follow where Christ leads us.
- **Collaboration**
We share learning together and beyond ourselves, relying on one another's strength, abilities, resources, and courage.



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

Anchoring Scriptures:

A courageous church is deeply rooted in the words and message of Scripture. All of Scripture moves us toward life in all of its fullness, toward growth and strength in Jesus Christ. Scripture calls us to grow in our faith so that we can bring a clear message of hope to a hurting world. As we remember the stories of Scripture and those who rooted us in God's love and power, we can love like Jesus, act for justice and unite in hope.

The passages chosen are a beginning point for your thinking about grounding our Growth and Vitality Initiative in Scripture. In your church or ministry setting, you might:

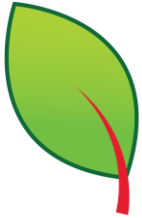
- Print a passage each week in your bulletin or newsletter, with the Vision statement of **A Courageous Church: Loving like Jesus, Acting for justice, United in hope.**
- Use these passages to guide a sermon series on growth and vitality in our own lives or in the church.
- Focus your own prayer or a pastoral prayer in worship on these passages, praying for God to help us grow.

John 15: 1-17 (NKJV)

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away," and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you, abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."

Ephesians 1:7-8a (NRSV)

"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us."



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

Ephesians 2:11-12 (NRSV)

“In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.”

I Peter 1:3 - 5 (NRSV)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Romans 5: 1 - 2 (NRSV)

“Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.”

John 13:34 (NRSV)

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Luke 4:18 (NRSV)

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me, bring good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.”

Ephesians 4:4 (NRSV)

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling...”

Jeremiah 29:11 (NRSV)

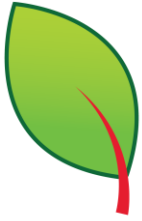
“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.”

Acts 2:43-47 (NRSV)

“Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

Hebrews 11:1 (NRSV)

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”



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

John Wesley Quotes:

When we think of John Wesley today, we remember his emphasis on the growth of his faith and his passion for reaching out to the world. Wesley believed that our work in the world is an outgrowth of our commitment to Christ and all he has done for us. We grow in our faith so that we can bring the good news of Jesus' love, justice and hope to others. Our United Methodist Church is grounded in Wesley's courage to move beyond himself into a world that needed Jesus' love.

These words from John Wesley are meant to encourage you to study his other works and words, and use them as a basis for lifting up the vision that God is calling us to be **A Courageous Church: Loving like Jesus, Acting for justice, United in hope.**

"Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences."

"I continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day that moves forth in mission and creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions."

"I set myself on fire and people come to watch me burn."

"I want the whole Christ for my Savior, the whole Bible for my book, the whole Church for my fellowship and the whole world for my mission field."

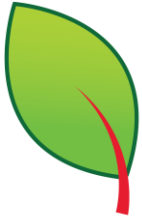
"The world is my parish."

"One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbor; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us."

"My fear is not that our great movement, known as the Methodists, will eventually cease to exist or one day die from the earth. My fear is that our people will become content to live without the fire, the power, the excitement, the supernatural element that makes us great."

"The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion."

"Lord, I am no longer my own, but Yours. Put me to what You will, rank me with whom You will. Let be employed by You or laid aside for You, exalted for You or brought low by You. Let me have all things, let me have nothing, I freely and heartily yield all things to Your pleasure and



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

disposal. And now, O glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You are mine and I am Yours. So be it. Amen."

"God grant that I may never live to be useless!"

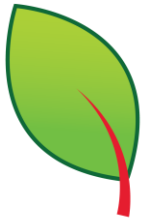
"I continue to dream and pray about a revival of holiness in our day that moves forth in mission and creates authentic community in which each person can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions."

"Untold millions are still untold."

"One great reason why the rich in general have so little sympathy for the poor is because they so seldom visit them. Hence it is that one part of the world does not know what the other suffers. Many of them do not know, because they do not care to know: they keep out of the way of knowing it – and then plead their voluntary ignorance as an excuse for their hardness of heart."

"I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions."

"We are always open to instruction, willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better."

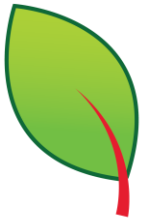


The Initiative for Growth and Vitality
in the churches of the
Desert Southwest Conference

Characteristics of Healthy, Vital Churches:

Our Desert Southwest Conference survey research, conducted in the Spring of 2016, indicates that healthy churches adapt to an ever-changing mission field and build relationships with other people and organizations in the community to the point that their community would miss the church if it ceased to exist. The following items identify characteristics of healthy, vital churches.

- Prayerfully discern a mission and vision that gives purpose and direction for all ministry decisions.
- Understand and respond to community demographics and culture.
- Engage with civic leaders, schools, and community organizations.
- Actively care about the needs of the world as evidenced by local and international missions.
- Learn from one another through collaboration, partnership, and sharing with each other.
- Sometimes fail but have the courage to take risks with new ministries in order to do what God asks of them.
- Intentionally develop leaders with clear discipling and mentoring systems.
- Engage in small group ministry for support and accountability.
- View guests as gifts from God and have a clear hospitality system.
- Teach and demonstrate generosity.
- Desire to multiply their church and its ministries.



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

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?

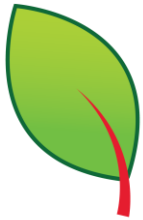
There is no cookie cutter approach that results in growth and vitality. Every setting is unique, the path forward will reflect this uniqueness. All churches will be working for the same common growth. To effect a more successful effort, congregations will be encouraged to collaborate with other congregations. 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.



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

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?

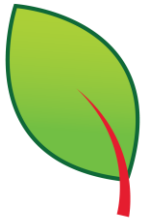
For advice and support you can contact your DS, Director of Connectional Ministries Office, Director of New & Vital Faith Communities and/or the Bishop's office. If you have questions, suggestions, or examples to share, please send them to initiative@dscumc.org.

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



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

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?

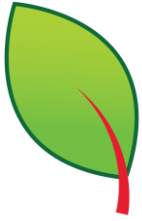
Yes. One of the important aspects of the Initiative is the sharing of ideas. The Implementation team will be working on new ways in which churches can share ideas and learn from each other.

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.



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

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.