

NEW & VITAL FAITH COMMUNITIES

Rev. David McPherson, Director

Pastor Wendy Swanson, Chair of Vital Faith Communities Team

The Vital Faith Communities Team's purpose is to help strengthen churches and equip leaders who must learn to adapt to the rapidly changing cultures that Christ has called us to serve. Currently, we have about 20% of churches that are growing, 20% have plateaued, and 60% are in decline. This is also the national average for The United Methodist Church, as well as for other mainline denominations. We must learn to adapt and change!

As the national population becomes less "white" The United Methodist Church in the U.S. has actually become "whiter." In order to help the Desert Southwest Conference shift away from this trend and toward being more representative of the communities we serve, Rev. Javier Olivares came on staff in the office of New & Vital Faith Communities. He is the chair of our Ethnic Local Church Concerns team and has been partnering with Rev. Beth Rambikur, Billie Fidler and Rev. Khalif Smith (chair of Commission on Religion & Race). It is our goal to have a system in place that will help churches learn how to be open to all people. One small step forward for the Conference has been Vital Faith's attempt to have all "important" documents translated into all languages of our Conference.

This year, Vital Faith gave the Courageous Church Award to Haven UMC for their unwavering commitment to the town of Jerome, Arizona through their feeding program that is building significant relationships.

Vital Faith continues to offer support in the six areas traditional churches must have in order to make disciples for the transformation of the world: Purpose, Worship, Hospitality, Community Relationships, and Generosity.

The New Faith Communities Team has also been hard at work. They offer resources for churches who want to reach new people in new places. They continue their partnership with four of our churches that became "one church in many locations:" Dayspring UMC, Desert Spring UMC, St. Mark's UMC, and Desert Skies UMC. Much gratitude for the courage of the clergy and lay leadership to take on this new ministry.

Because of COVID 19, New Faith approved \$500,000 of emergency money from the endowment to help churches get through these difficult days of being homebound. Churches can apply for a loan of \$10,000 that can turn into a grant if their apportionments are paid 100% for 2020. You can get the application here: <https://dscumc.org/new-and-vital-faith/covid-19-church-loan-grant/>

These are just a few of the many resources offered by New & Vital Faith Communities Teams.

We want to say a special "Thank you" to Patsy Soto, Administrative Assistant. Soto has served this Conference as a true representative of Christ by her team spirit and dedication. Because of the decline in apportionment receipts, Soto needed to find a new job that gave her more job security. Her position will not be filled in order to help decrease the Conference budget. She is missed!