Background Reading: None

Handouts:
What Are We Doing Here?
PowerPoint slides
Two Great Commandments
Wesley’s Means of Grace
“Finding the Means” Discussion Questions
Leadership Interaction Styles
Deep Dive Discussion Questions
Team Worksheet

You will also need:
Leadership Interaction Styles Introduction, Characteristics of LIS, Stress Paths, and Harmonizing the Leadership Interaction Styles available as a separate free downloadable from
The optional Lord’s Prayer Video clip is available from Lumicon for a fee
http://lumicon.org/products_detail.asp?ID=113&searchinput=prayer&TopicID=0.

Supplies/Equipment Needed:
Name Tags
LCD Projector
Screen
Laptop Computer
PowerPoint Presentation
Newsprint
Easel
Paper
Pens
Crayons
Markers
Masking Tape
Hymnals
Bibles (3 or 4 per center)
Tables (1 per center)
Opening Ourselves to Grace
“The Deep Dive” DVD available from the ABC News Store(or other media about teams)

Note: GBOD has granted permission to use the Leadership Interaction Styles instrument. The group leader/facilitator may choose a different instrument that measures leadership styles. The group leader/facilitator assumes responsibility for researching legal use of an alternate instrument and liability for any unlawful use.
Chapter 1, Covenantal Living

Goals:

By the end of Module 1, participants will have:

1. Examined the purpose of the Vital Congregations Incubators
2. Identified key aspects of our role as spiritual leaders in our congregation/district
3. Reflected on the role of congregational teams in developing and implementing SMART goals for the Vital Congregations Planning Guide
4. Developed a covenant for this learning community (pastors, or pastors and local church leaders)

[9:00 am]

Introductions

Welcome to our first gathering as a Vital Congregations Incubator. I’m looking forward to our time together over the next several months, as well as to seeing the fruit that our work will bear. To be sure that everyone knows each other, let’s go around the circle and share our names and the congregations we serve.

Invite participants to share their name and the name of their congregation(s).

A Word about Adult Learning

Each of our meetings is designed as a six-hour module. The schedule includes breaks and lunch. (You can find a copy of the schedule in your hand-outs.) However, your bodies may not always match the schedule. You are an adult learner—take responsibility for your own learning and your own self-care. If you need to stand up, stretch, get a cup of coffee, or go to the bathroom, do it. You do not need to wait until we signal time for a break. We want you to participate fully, and that means you need to be comfortable and attentive. Do what you need to do to enable your participation and attention.

Adults learn in different ways. Some adults need visuals (pictures, charts, etc.) to help them process content; others are more word-oriented (talking, writing, and listening). Some adults need to process what they’re learning by talking with other people; others need time alone for reflection. We have tried to take into consideration the many ways that adults learn as we designed these modules. You may not always respond positively to a particular learning activity, and that’s understandable. Not all learning activities will match your preferred style of learning. However, we are trying to model different ways of engaging content. Even if there is an activity that you don’t particularly enjoy, some of the participants you will have in your Incubator may really enjoy it. We encourage you to experience all the activities as fully as possible. It’s easier to facilitate an activity when you have already participated in it. Our modus operandi will be to experience the Incubator first. Then you will receive all the leader’s notes, PowerPoint presentations, and hand-outs needed to convene your group. As we go along, feel free to ask questions and/or make observations about the process, as well as the content.
We have identified goals for each module. Based on your experience and context, some of the goals may be more pertinent than others. As an adult learner, identify the goals most important for your context. As we work through each module, use your specific goals as a lens for reflecting on the content and process. As a facilitator of an Incubator beginning later this year, remember that the laity in your congregation will also have differing priorities for goals as they participate.

[9:15 am]

Introduction to Vital Congregations Incubator

*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).*

God has planned a future with hope for us. Our future entails joining God’s plan for transforming the world by increasing the number of disciples of Jesus Christ through vital United Methodist Congregations. Vital congregations recognize a clear calling from God and develop plans and ministries to achieve God’s purposes for their congregation.

The New York Annual Conference has chosen to support congregational vitality through an Incubator process designed to deepen participants’ relationships with God; to develop strategies related to each congregation’s SMART goals, as well as measures for evaluating successful achievement of goals; and to provide opportunities for reflection on what they are learning about congregational vitality, Christian discipleship, and spiritual leadership.

There are eight modules in the Vital Congregations Incubator:

- **Module 1:** Orientation and Covenantal Living
- **Module 2:** Worship
- **Module 3:** Evangelism
- **Module 4:** Small Groups (for adults), Children’s & Youth Ministry
- **Module 5:** Mission
- **Module 6:** Stewardship
- **Module 7:** Effective Lay Leadership
- **Module 8:** Effective Pastoral Leadership

Each module will follow a basic format. The format includes three components: *Loving, Learning,* and *Leading.* We will begin with worship or biblical reflection, followed by a time for reflection related to our spiritual growth and our leadership. During this *Loving* portion of the meeting, we will report on our homework assignments and we will respond to several Formation Questions. The Formation Questions are as follows:

1. Since we last met, how have you experienced the presence of God?
2. Who have you met with in your congregational setting to work on goals?
3. What are you learning about being a spiritual leader?

This time of reflection will lead into a time for learning related to the focus of the module (worship, evangelism, and so forth). We will consider how what we’re learning informs the strategies congregations need to develop in order to meet their SMART goals related to that aspect of congregational vitality. We will also analyze implications for our role as spiritual leaders as we explore each aspect of congregational vitality with leaders in our congregations. As time goes on, you will be able to share what’s happening with the participants in your Incubators “back home.”

You will use this same format with the participants in your congregation’s Incubator. You will have copies of all leader’s notes, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts. You will be able to make hand-outs for your Incubator participants. While each of us has a particular style of leading, please be sure that all areas of each module are covered. You may want to use a different activity or a different video clip, or you might rearrange the flow. You might add anecdotes from your experience to illustrate points. However, we want all our congregations covering the same material. Please do not skip any of the modules or concepts.

Since this is our first time to meet, today’s session will be slightly different from the basic format. We are doing some introductory work before moving into the Loving section. We will not use the Formation Questions today since this is our first meeting. And at the end of this session, we will draft our Covenant. After today all meetings will follow the format as I have described.

[9:25 AM]

**Introduction to Module 1**

This first module is designed to set the context for our learning. We have all attended meetings and read documents related to the Call to Action. (If you need a reminder about the Call to Action, see the 2012 UMC Vital Congregations Planning Guide in the Supplemental Resources.) By this point, we have developed SMART goals for our congregations and have begun inputting information in the Conference’s “dashboard.” Our time today will be spent orienting ourselves to the work we will do through the Incubator, clarifying expectations, and preparing ourselves to lead Incubators in our congregations. We will be engaging in “worshipful work.” Together we want to operate as a covenant community and to grow as spiritual leaders. One of the purposes of this first module is to position our work within the context of spiritual leadership, teamwork, and living in covenant with one another.

The goals for this first Module, Covenantal Living, are as follows:

By the end of today (Module 1), we will have:

- Examined the purpose of the Vital Congregations Incubators
• Identified key aspects of our role as spiritual leader in our congregations/district
• Reflected on the role of congregational teams in developing and implementing SMART goals used in the Vital Congregations Planning Guide http://www.umc.org/atf/cf/%7Bdb6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741%7D/VCPLANNINGGUIDEBOOKLETONLINE.PDF
• Developed a covenant for this learning community (pastors, or pastors and local church leaders)

For Personal Reflection: (Questions are also on the PowerPoint)

What expectations do you bring to this experience?

What hopes do you bring?

Which of the goals for this module are most important for you?

[Sharing as they are comfortable; list hopes and expectations on newsprint.]

[9:45 am]

Loving

Biblical Immersion

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4, 5)

[For the Biblical Immersion, you will need to set up four different “immersion areas” for reflection through writing, music, art or conversation. For this you will need four tables and resources from the supply list on page 1. On the writing table, provide paper and pens. On the art table use the crayons, markers, or any additional art supplies that are available to you. On the music table, provide hymnals, and, if available, music staff paper for participants to sing hymns or compose new music. The table for conversation about the John text should not be located near the others and you may find it helpful to ask the “talkers” to go to another room. Instruction sheets for each immersion area may be found in the handouts section.]

As we begin our reflection on the meaning of covenantal living, we turn to the Scripture. Remember, we are exploring the concept of covenant as the context for our work together. This text from the Gospel of John provides a rich image for being in relationship with God through Jesus Christ: a vine and its branches. You are invited to immerse yourself in this passage through four different centers: Writing, Music, Art, and Conversation. These centers are not designed as Bible study; they are designed to invite you to experience the passage. You can choose to try all four centers or you can choose to spend all your time in one or more of the centers. Directions are located in each center. You will have 18 minutes and 33 seconds to explore this passage.
Chapter 1, Covenantal Living

[Call the group back together. Invite participants to share as they are comfortable]

[10:15 am]

Break

[10:30 am]

Covenant

They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. (Jeremiah 32: 38, 40)

They shall come and join themselves to the Lord by an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten. (Jeremiah 50:5b)

In Scripture the word covenant can mean different things:

Promise
Pledge
Obligation
Contract

Covenant sometimes describes the relationships between two people, between two nations, and between God and human beings. The relationship of covenant includes mutual obligations and a description of the terms that maintain the relationship.

[Group names biblical examples of covenant]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Here are a few examples of biblical covenant:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 6: Noah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Samuel 7: David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis 17: Abraham</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah 32: A New Covenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exodus 20: Moses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke 22: Last Supper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Covenants between God and human beings are grounded in God’s steadfast love.

One of the Hebrew words describing God is khesed, which means “steadfast love.” God’s faithfulness, God’s grace, is always available, always present. In love God initiates a covenantal relationship with human beings.

God never breaks the covenant!

When human beings do not hold up their end of the bargain (the covenant), God reworks and renews the covenant, reestablishing relationship. Most biblical references to covenant are found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the writers assert that God has established a New Covenant through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ the entire world has access to God’s love and grace. After the Reformation many Protestants reclaimed the concept of covenant as a description of our relationship with God.

As United Methodists, our heritage includes an emphasis on covenant illustrated by Wesley’s Covenant Prayer and covenant services.

In 1755 John Wesley held his first formal covenant service in London. In his journal he wrote this about the service: “I mentioned to the congregation another means of increasing serious religion which had been frequently practiced by our forefathers, namely, the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul. I explained this for several mornings, and on Friday, many of us kept a fast to the Lord, beseeching him to give us wisdom and strength, to make a promise unto the Lord our God and keep it.”¹ Wesley also understood baptism as a sign of our initiation into God’s covenant. In his sermon “The Righteousness of Faith,” he spoke of God’s covenant of grace, forgiveness, and mercy as the basis of our relationship with God. This covenant calls for our total devotion to God, for faith in God’s steadfast love, and for our response through participation in God’s purposes for the world.

Today Covenant Discipleship groups provide one format for accountability and support as members in the group seek to love God and neighbor. Group members write a covenant as an expression of their commitment to practicing ways to deepen their relationship with God and serve those in need. This format, as well as others, offers participants an ongoing vehicle for participating in God’s continuous call to worship God in spirit and in truth and to work for justice in all our relationships.

For reflection:
How do the biblical examples of covenant and our Wesleyan heritage inform the covenant we will make together?

[Sharing as they are comfortable]

¹ Journals of John Wesley, entry for Wednesday, August 6, 1755
Learning

Spiritual Leadership

When you hear the phrase *spiritual leadership*, what comes to your mind?

*[Write responses on newsprint.]*

Our role as spiritual leaders is grounded in our baptism. Our baptism serves to remind us that we are beloved children of God, created in God’s image, and called to participate in God’s purposes in the world. Secondly, our leadership is shaped by our call from God.

The only adequate basis for Christian leadership is a vital spiritual life in which God is transforming us. Spiritual leaders nurture their connection to God and help others do the same. They want a deep, abiding relationship with God that fills them and keeps them centered and focused on what’s important. Spiritual leaders develop habits and practices that embody their commitment and express their identity.

Spiritual leadership is holistic. It involves our thoughts, emotions, and experience. As we develop our spiritual lives, our thoughts, indeed our very worldview, is shaped and formed by the Gospel. We feel gratitude, sorrow, joy, and a multitude of other emotions as we consider God’s love and grace. We experience God’s presence in worship, in fellowship with other Christians, in nature, and throughout our daily lives.

Spiritual depth includes a growing ability to listen to God and to experience God in ways that transform us. It involves pursuing greater intimacy with God and becoming more attuned to the Spirit’s leading. As we deepen our experience of God, we reorder our lives in ways that more closely reflect God’s purposes for the world.

The result is that spiritual leaders demonstrate authenticity and integrity in their personal and professional lives. Their leadership flows out of their relationship with God. It is a result of what God is doing in and through their lives.

[11:10 am]

View Chapter 2 (Finding the Means) of “Opening Ourselves to Grace, Basic Christian Practices DVD.”

*Using Mutual Invitation, discuss reflection questions for “Finding the Means” found in the hand-outs. (Directions for Mutual Invitation are in the Supplemental Resources. You will also find the questions on the PowerPoint.)*
Leadership Interaction Styles

Spiritual leadership is also about leading. Spiritual leaders invite others into a life of faith that provides identity and purpose. Yet each leader is different. We all lead in different ways, and we have our own “style” of leadership. One of the tools that we have found helpful for considering our leadership style is the Leadership Interaction Styles instrument. You’ll find this instrument in your hand-outs on pages 9 & 10. I invite you to turn to that instrument and record your responses to each set of statements on the form.

[Allow 10-12 minutes for group to complete the LIS instrument.]

To score your responses, please add the number of checks made in column A, column B, column C, and column D. Then subtract B from A; subtract C from D. On the LIS Scoring Sheet (included in the handouts packet) the vertical axis is the A-B line; find your score on that axis. This axis indicates one’s orientation when leading: some people focus more on the task at hand; other people focus more on the relationships of the people involved in the task. Again, your score on that axis indicates your preference. On the LIS Scoring Sheet (in the hand-outs) the horizontal axis is the C-D line; find your score on that axis. The horizontal axis represents one’s preferred style of communication. Some people tend to ask questions; other people tend to make statements. Your score on that axis indicates your particular preference. Now identify the point at which the two scores meet. The quadrant in which you find the meeting point between the two scores identifies which leadership interaction style you generally prefer. You can find descriptions of these four leadership styles on a separate handout provided on the separate handout titled: “Leadership Interaction Styles Introduction.”2 Let’s look briefly at each style.

[Using the descriptions provided on page 2 of the handout downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf]

2 This handout is available, free of charge, from: http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf. This handout will contain the one page description of the characteristics of each style, the stress path for each style and additional information about how each style harmonizes with other styles. The author retains the copyright on each of these four pages but he has freely provided them on his website.
“Characteristics of the Leadership/Interaction Styles” Point out some of the primary characteristics of each leadership style.]

Just for fun, let’s see which styles are represented in our group. Raise your hand if you fall into the Director style . . . the Dreamer style . . . the Pleaser style . . . the Thinker style. How accurately does this style describe you? (Remember it’s an “indicator.” It won’t be 100% accurate.)

If you look at page 3 of the handout (downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf) you’ll find a diagram of what happens when leaders operate under stress. Research indicates that each style tends to follow a particular pattern of moving through all four leadership styles as stress increases.

[Go over each of the “stress paths” to be sure participants understand the progression for each style.]

Now look at page 4 of the handout (downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf). We aren’t going to go over this list; it is here for your review later. I want to point out that it includes tips for interacting with people of each leadership style. Hopefully, when people in your Incubator use this instrument to identify their style, you can work together more effectively by understanding the strengths of each style and by using ideas for communicating with people whose style differs from yours.

[Allow time for questions and comments if needed.]

[1:40 pm]

Leading Team

As we move ahead with our Incubators, we not only want to emphasize spiritual leadership, but also shared leadership. In order to successfully achieve the SMART goals set for your congregation, you will be working with a leadership team.

In effective teams the members trust each other. Some of the ways teams build trust is to be respectful of one another and to handle conflict appropriately. The Respectful Guidelines we shared at the beginning of this module can help with this aspect of team building.

Effective teams are focused on the results they want. Your SMART goals are one of the ways you have named your desired results. As a team, you will be working towards personal and congregational commitment to those goals and to the results you hope for. In your team meetings you will report on progress towards achieving goals.
Clear expectations related to what tasks are required, who is responsible, and when the work should be completed help team accountability for achieving desired results.

The team that will make up your Incubator will focus on your SMART goals. These goals will help your congregation achieve its vision for discipleship in your context. As a team you will work to create and sustain a congregational culture that supports your vision for mission and ministry. Together you will develop practices that help you love God and serve neighbor. These practices may include prayer, worship, and study. You may find other practices that address your context. As a team you will learn together as you implement plans and evaluate your progress.

Teams are also fun! The old adage “two heads are better than one” is true. Teamwork encourages creativity and innovation. In this time of transition related to effective ministry, we need to be as creative as possible. In order to see how innovative teams can function, let’s take a look at “The Deep Dive,” a clip about IDEO, a design firm in Palo Alto, California.

[1:45 pm]
View “The Deep Dive.”

[2:05 pm]

Break

[2:20 pm]
Using Mutual Invitation, discuss reflection questions for “The Deep Dive” found in the hand-outs. (You will also find the questions on the PowerPoint. Directions for Mutual Invitation are in the Supplemental Resources.)

[3:00 pm]

Building Your Team

Often we start a task by determining who is available to help, rather than thinking about who it is we need in order for the task to be successfully completed. For the next few minutes we’re going to look at a tool for building a team. You can find a copy of the Team Worksheet in your hand-outs.

First you must be clear about the boundaries related to team responsibilities. This means you need to be clear about what the team is supposed to do and what it should not do. For example, if you’re working with a team to design a new worship experience, you will not be working on any of the processes related to current worship experiences. Other boundaries may include time, space, and/or location.
Next be clear about the team’s purpose. Why does this team exist? Be as clear as possible. For example, the New Horizons team is responsible for planning weekly worship experiences for families with children. This statement is specific, whereas a purpose statement that reads “the New Horizons team is responsible for enhancing the worship life of Anyplace UMC” is too general to help your team focus. This purpose also infers another boundary: the team’s purpose is to plan weekly worship for families with children. That does not mean that the team is responsible for leading weekly worship. Some of the team members may be involved in the worship leadership, but team membership does not make worship leadership a requirement.

After clarifying your team’s boundaries and purposes, jot down ideas about the “big chunks” of work that need to be included. Using the New Horizons team as an example, some of the “big chunks” might be Multi-media, Music, Liturgy, and Hospitality.

Then you begin to identify the gifts needed for each “big chunk.” For example, under the Multi-media category, you might need someone with gifts in technology, in visualization of ideas, in drama, or in design of banners and/or the altar. Let’s identify some gifts needed in the other categories.

[Ask participants to name gifts needed for Music, then Liturgy, and then Hospitality.]

After identifying the gifts needed, brainstorm names of people who have those gifts. Use the worksheet to keep track of your ideas. Once you decide who you should ask, give them a call or set up an appointment to discuss the possibility of their serving on the team.

[If there is time, you can ask the participants to practice using the Team Worksheet by thinking of a team that they need in their congregation, identifying boundaries, stating the purpose, naming the “big chunks” involved in the task, listing the gifts needed, and writing possible people to contact.]

[3:20 pm]

**Writing the Covenant**

Before we leave for the day, we are going to think about the covenant that will guide our Incubator experience. Once we all agree on the covenant it cannot be changed except by consent of the whole group. At the next session it will be printed out so that each person may sign it. Any changes among the individuals on the team will be agreed upon by all participants. If someone drops out it must be acknowledged by the group. The team will review the covenant at each meeting to check how the team is functioning. We will use the covenant as an opportunity for accountability and support through this process.
So, what do you want to include in our covenant to grow as spiritual leaders, accomplish our goals, and lead others? We might want to include categories such as participation, practices, confidentiality, and accountability.

At this point we are not debating anyone’s ideas. I will write down everything that is suggested. If you have a question about what something means, please ask it. Later we will indicate which ideas we think need to be included in the covenant.

[Write responses on newsprint. Post the newsprint on the wall. Then ask each participant to mark the ideas that they think need to be included in the covenant.]

Thank you for your input. Before our next session I will take your suggestions and draft a covenant. At the next meeting there will be time for review, revision, and adoption.

[3:45 pm]

Evaluation and Closing

Before our next meeting please read The Worship Architect by Constance Cherry. (Be sure everyone has a copy of the book. If not, let them know how to get a copy.)

Before we leave for the day, I’d like to get feedback from you about how today went. I have three short questions:

What went well?
What did you learn?
What needs improvement?

[Make notes of participant responses for your use in planning the next session.]

Thank you for your feedback. Now I invite you to get comfortable. Take a few deep breaths.

[The following ideas are included for a closing time of prayer and meditation. Feel free to substitute a closing that reflects the lectionary, the season of the church year, or some aspect of your context that may be more appropriate.]

After a few moments of silence, show “The Lord’s Prayer” or another suitable video clip. See the Supplemental Resources for obtaining “The Lord’s Prayer” video clip. Then invite participants to offer prayers for those in need, for their congregations, for The United Methodist Church, and for our world. Close with the litany on the PowerPoint.
Adjourn

Suggested Reading:


Handouts: Module 1, Covenantal Living
2012 New York AC Call to Action Incubators
What Are We Doing Here?

Desired Result:

- Clergy and lay leadership effectively leading and equipping their congregations for intentional disciple-making related to the Call to Action
- Congregations developing and achieving SMART goals related to the Call to Action
- Individuals of all ages experiencing God’s love and grace and committing their lives to following Jesus Christ
- Our world is transformed as it experiences the mercy, justice, compassion, and peace of God

Strategy:

Participants in the Call to Action Incubators grow and learn together as they:

- Deepen their relationship with God (Love)
- Increase knowledge and skills related to faith development (Learn)
- Practice spiritual leadership in their congregations (Lead)

Tactics:

- Preparation for and participation in each session
- Formation Questions
- Community Covenant
- SMART Goals

Characteristics:

- Attentive
- Exploratory
- Risk-taking
- Innovative
- Reflective
- Trustworthy
- Respectful
Read John 15:4, 5. Consider what God is saying to you through this passage.

Respond to the passage through writing. You might write:

- A devotional
- A prayer
- A letter to God
- A poem
- A paraphrase of the passage
- A newsletter/website article
- A journal entry
Music

Read John 15:4, 5. Consider what God is saying to you through this passage.

Respond to the passage through music. You might:

- Write a song to an existing tune
- Write an original song and tune
- Find hymns that relate to the passage and read or sing them
- Create movement to a song or hymn that illustrates an aspect of this passage
Read John 15:4, 5. Consider what God is saying to you through this passage.

Respond to the passage through art. You might:

- Draw a picture that illustrates some aspect of this passage.
- Use colors to depict feelings that arise as you read the passage.
- Illustrate your hopes for community through this Incubator.
Conversation

Read John 15:4, 5. Consider what God is saying to you through this passage.

Respond to the passage through conversation. Find a partner and talk about what this passage means to you. You might talk about:

- Abiding in Christ
- Bearing fruit
- The image of a vine and branches
- Something of your choosing
Two Great Commandments

When asked what was the greatest commandment (Mark 12:30-31, NRSV), Jesus summarized his teachings in two commandments:

*The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.*

In the Wesleyan tradition, these two great commandments are applied through a General Rule of Discipleship:

**The General Rule of Discipleship**

To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
Wesley’s Means of Grace

Prayer
• Key to maintaining a relationship with God
• Creates a rhythm of encounter and response
• Involves both speaking and listening

Study of the Word
• Intentional/consistent
• Focused on knowing God’s will
• Applicable to daily life--put into practice what you are learning

The Lord’s Supper
• Serves as a sign of our central Story
• Invites us into the presence of Christ
• Reminds us of the heavenly banquet in which we can expect to participate

Fasting
• Keeps the material and spiritual in balance
• Related to prayer as tool for spiritual discipline and discernment
• Emphasizes self-denial in order to focus on God

Christian Conferencing
• Groups provide nurture, encouragement, support, practice in witnessing, stewardship, study
• Setting for spiritual discernment

Acts of Mercy
• Holiness of heart and life--both essential for vital spirituality
• Doing good; doing no harm; participating in “ordinances of God”
• Compassion and justice
“Finding the Means”
*Opening Ourselves to Grace*
Reflection Questions for Use in Small Groups

1. The presentation defines the means of grace as “those basic practices given to us by God as the ways we live out our relationship with God and those whom God loves.” How could you put this definition into your own words? What are some other ways of saying this?

2. How do you seek to connect with God throughout your day?

3. What helps you connect with God?

4. What hinders you from connecting with God?

5. How does your relationship with God inform your leadership?
### Leadership Interaction Styles

| Statement                                                                 | 
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|
| I tend to take my time before making a decision                        |   |
| I tend to make decisions quickly                                        |   |
| At a meeting, I like to get right to work                              |   |
| At a meeting, I like to spend time socializing first                    |   |
| When I speak, I generally use very few gestures                        |   |
| When I speak, I generally use many gestures                            |   |
| I am most comfortable when groups stay focused on the task             |   |
| I am most comfortable when groups take unexpected turns                |   |
| In a group setting, I generally allow others to speak first            |   |
| In a group setting, I am generally one of the first people to speak    |   |
| The best part of working in groups is the sharing of responsibility     |   |
| The best part of working in groups is the sharing of ideas              |   |
| I like to gather as much information as possible before making decisions|   |
| I like to have just the most pertinent information before making decisions|   |
| I am most comfortable sticking closely to a plan, agenda, or schedule  |   |
| I am most comfortable allowing a plan, agenda, or schedule to emerge naturally|   |
| I tend to have strong opinions that I will share when asked            |   |
| I tend to have strong opinions that I share freely with others         |   |
| For the most part, interruptions, distractions, and losing focus are highly annoying |   |
| For the most part, interruptions, distractions, and losing focus are not a problem |   |
| I believe it is very important that everyone speaks and is heard        |   |
| I believe it is very important that those with relevant input speak and are heard |   |
| I think it is most important for groups to get results quickly and efficiently |   |
| I think it is most important for groups that members work well together |   |
| I tend to review decisions and make changes when necessary             |   |
| I tend to stand behind decisions and move on                           |   |
| I prefer making decisions based on facts, figures, and solid information|   |
| I prefer making decisions based on experience, intuition, and consensus|   |
| I work best in a quiet, peaceful environment, free of noise, tension and conflict |   |
| I work best in an energetic, creative environment, with lots of discussion and debate |   |
| I tend to get focused on end results and meeting deadlines when working in groups |   |
| I tend to get focused on relationships and interpersonal dynamics when working in groups |   |
| I would rather err on the side of caution than risk failure            |   |
| I would rather take risks and learn from mistakes                      |   |
| I judge success based mostly on how well a group completes its task    |   |
| I judge success based mostly on how effectively a group of people work together |   |
Handouts: Module 1, Covenantal Living

When upset, I tend to hide my feelings  
When upset, I tend to let others know exactly how I feel  

In a group, I prefer making decisions by voting  
In a group, I prefer making decisions by coming to consensus  

When I'm in charge of a project, I tend to ask for volunteers  
When I'm in charge of a project, I tend to make assignments  

I believe that effective and successful work makes people happy  
I believe that happy people produce effective and successful work  

In a group setting, silence makes me wonder what people are thinking  
In a group setting, I assume silence indicates agreement or consensus  

I think people should adjust their efforts to fit a plan or schedule and to meet deadlines  
I think plans, schedules, and deadlines should be flexible to meet the needs of people  

I prefer allowing problems to work themselves out without interference  
I prefer addressing problems as soon as they arise  

When I give someone a task, I assume they will do it  
When I give someone a task, I like to check in for a progress report  

I believe everyone on a team should have access to all information  
I believe information should only be given to team members when necessary  

Following a disagreement, I tend to put it behind me quickly and move forward  
Following a disagreement, I tend to have a hard time letting it go and moving forward  

I believe it is best to move forward on critical decisions carefully and slowly  
I believe it is best to move forward on critical decisions quickly and decisively  

I believe a team can be effective even when team members don't like each other  
I believe a team can be effective when team members come to respect and like each other  

TOTALS

A   B   C   D

Name ____________________________________________

Predominant/Preferred Style ____________________________________________
Leadership Interaction Styles Scoring Sheet

Scoring Instructions:
Find “Plot Point 1” on vertical axis (top to bottom)  \( A-B \) = vertical score
Find “Plot Point 2” on horizontal axis (left to right) \( D-C \) = horizontal score
Put a dot where the two points meet

The point of intersection for the two scores identifies your Leadership Interaction Style preference.
Deep Dive
Discussion Questions for Small Groups

1. What important insights into working as a team did you glean from “Deep Dive?”

2. In the teams in which you work, how are members selected?

3. How are “wild ideas” received and what happens to them (and/or to the persons who offer them)?

4. What behaviors and processes are encouraged or discouraged by the team you lead? By the teams of which you are a member?

5. For what and how are team members rewarded or recognized?

6. How does working with a team connect with your understanding of spiritual leadership?
Team Name: ______________________________________________

Team Mission: _____________________________________________

Handouts: Module 1, Covenantal Living
New York Annual Conference
Vital Congregations Incubator
Module 1: Covenantal Living
God has planned a future with hope for us. Our future entails joining God’s plan for transforming the world by increasing the number of disciples of Jesus Christ through vital United Methodist Congregations. Vital congregations recognize a clear calling from God and develop plans and ministries to achieve God’s purposes for their congregation.

The New York Annual Conference has chosen to support congregational vitality through an Incubator process designed to deepen participants’ relationships with God; to develop strategies related to each congregation’s SMART goals, as well as measures for evaluating successful achievement of goals; and to provide opportunities for reflection on what they are learning about congregational vitality, Christian discipleship, and spiritual leadership.
There are eight modules in the Vital Congregations Incubator:

Module 1: Orientation and Covenantal Living
Module 2: Worship
Module 3: Evangelism
Module 4: Small Groups (for adults), Children’s & Youth Ministry
Module 5: Mission
Module 6: Stewardship
Module 7: Effective Lay Leadership
Module 8: Effective Pastoral Leadership
Each module will follow a basic format. The format includes three components: Loving, Learning, and Leading. We will begin with worship or biblical reflection, followed by a time for reflection related to our spiritual growth and our leadership.
During this Loving portion of the meeting, we will report on our homework assignments and we will respond to several Formation Questions. The Formation Questions are as follows:

1. Since we last met, how have you experienced the presence of God?
2. Who have you met with in your congregational setting to work on goals?
3. What are you learning about being a spiritual leader?
This time of reflection will lead into a time for learning related to the focus of the module (worship, evangelism, and so forth). We will consider how what we’re learning informs the strategies congregations need to develop in order to meet their SMART goals related to that aspect of congregational vitality. We will also analyze implications for our role as spiritual leaders as we explore each aspect of congregational vitality with leaders in our congregations. As time goes on, you will be able to share what’s happening with the participants in your Incubators “back home.”

You will use this same format with the participants in your congregation’s Incubator. You will have copies of all leader’s notes, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts. You will be able to make hand-outs for your Incubator participants. While each of us has a particular style of leading, please be sure that all areas of each module are covered. You may want to use a different activity or a different video clip, or you might rearrange the flow. You might add anecdotes from your experience to illustrate points. However, we want all our congregations covering the same material. Please do not skip any of the modules or concepts.

Since this is our first time to meet, today’s session will be slightly different from the basic format. We are doing some introductory work before moving into the Loving section. We will not use the Formation Questions today since this is our first meeting. And at the end of this session, we will draft our Covenant. After today all meetings will follow the format as I have described.
This first module is designed to set the context for our learning. We have all attended meetings and read documents related to the Call to Action. (If you need a reminder about the Call to Action, see the 2012 UMC Vital Congregations Planning Guide in the Supplemental Resources.) By this point, we have developed SMART goals for our congregations and have begun inputting information in the Conference’s “dashboard.” Our time today will be spent orienting ourselves to the work we will do through the Incubator, clarifying expectations, and preparing ourselves to lead Incubators in our congregations. We will be engaging in “worshipful work.” Together we want to operate as a covenant community and to grow as spiritual leaders. One of the purposes of this first module is to position our work within the context of spiritual leadership, teamwork, and living in covenant with one another.

The goals for this first Module, Covenantal Living, are as follows:

By the end of today (Module 1), we will have:

Examined the purpose of the Vital Congregations Incubators
Identified key aspects of our role as spiritual leader in our congregations/district
Reflected on the role of congregational teams in developing and implementing SMART goals used in the Vital Congregations Planning Guide
Developed a covenant for this learning community (pastors, or pastors and local church leaders)
For Personal Reflection: (Questions are also on the PowerPoint)
What expectations do you bring to this experience?
What hopes do you bring?
Which of the goals for this module are most important for you?

[Sharing as they are comfortable; list hopes and expectations on newsprint.]
Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4, 5)

As we begin our reflection on the meaning of covenantal living, we turn to the Scripture. Remember, we are exploring the concept of covenant as the context for our work together. This text from the Gospel of John provides a rich image for being in relationship with God through Jesus Christ: a vine and its branches. You are invited to immerse yourself in this passage through four different centers: Writing, Music, Art, and Conversation. These centers are not designed as Bible study; they are designed to invite you to experience the passage. You can choose to try all four centers or you can choose to spend all your time in one or more of the centers. Directions are located in each center. You will have 18 minutes and 33 seconds to explore this passage.

[Call the group back together. Invite participants to share as they are comfortable]
Instructions for Biblical Immersion:

[For the Biblical Immersion, you will need to set up four different “immersion areas” for reflection through writing, music, art or conversation. For this you will need four tables and resources from the supply list on page 1. On the writing table, provide paper and pens. On the art table use the crayons, markers, or any additional art supplies that are available to you. On the music table, provide hymnals, and, if available, music staff paper for participants to sing hymns or compose new music. The table for conversation about the John text should not be located near the others and you may find it helpful to ask the “talkers” to go to another room. Instruction sheets for each immersion area may be found in the handouts section.]

As we begin our reflection on the meaning of covenantal living, we turn to the Scripture. Remember, we are exploring the concept of covenant as the context for our work together. This text from the Gospel of John provides a rich image for being in relationship with God through Jesus Christ: a vine and its branches. You are invited to immerse yourself in this passage through four different centers: Writing, Music, Art, and Conversation. These centers are not designed as Bible study; they are designed to invite you to experience the passage. You can choose to try all four centers or you can choose to spend all your time in one or more of the centers. Directions are located in each center. You will have 18 minutes and 33 seconds to explore this passage.

[Call the group back together. Invite participants to share as they are comfortable]
Covenant

They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will make an everlasting covenant with them, never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me. (Jeremiah 32: 38, 40)

They shall come and join themselves to the Lord by an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten. (Jeremiah 50:5b)
In Scripture the word *covenant* can mean different things:

- Promise
- Pledge
- Obligation
- Contract

Covenant sometimes describes the relationships between two people, between two nations, and between God and human beings. The relationship of covenant includes mutual obligations and a description of the terms that maintain the relationship.
For Reflection

1. What are some of the biblical examples of covenant?

2. How do the biblical examples of covenant and our Wesleyan heritage inform the covenant we will make together?

[Group names biblical examples of covenant]

Here are a few ideas:

- Genesis 6: Noah
- Genesis 17: Abraham
- Exodus 20: Moses
- 2 Samuel 7: David
- Jeremiah 32: A New Covenant
- Luke 22: Last Supper

Covenants between God and human beings are grounded in God’s steadfast love.

One of the Hebrew words describing God is *khesed*, which means “steadfast love.” God’s faithfulness, God’s grace, is always available, always present. In love God initiates a covenantal relationship with human beings.

God never breaks the covenant!

When human beings do not hold up their end of the bargain (the covenant), God reworks and renews the covenant, reestablishing relationship. Most biblical references to covenant are found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the writers assert that God has established a New Covenant through Jesus Christ. Through Jesus Christ the entire world has access to God’s love and grace. After the Reformation many Protestants reclaimed the concept of covenant as a description of our relationship with God.

As United Methodists, our heritage includes an emphasis on covenant illustrated by Wesley’s Covenant Prayer and covenant services.

In 1755 John Wesley held his first formal covenant service in London. In his journal he wrote this about the service: “I mentioned to the congregation another means of increasing serious religion which had been frequently practiced by our forefathers, namely, the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul. I explained this for several mornings, and on Friday, many of us kept a fast to the Lord, beseeching him to give us wisdom and strength, to make a promise unto the Lord our God and keep it.” Wesley also understood baptism as a sign of our initiation into God’s covenant. In his sermon “The Righteousness of Faith,” he spoke of God’s covenant of grace, forgiveness, and mercy as the basis of our relationship with God. This covenant calls for our total devotion to God, for faith in God’s steadfast love, and for our response through participation in God’s purposes for the world.

Today Covenant Discipleship groups provide one format for accountability and support as members in the group seek to love God and neighbor. Group members write a covenant as an expression of their commitment to practicing ways to deepen their relationship with God and serve those in need. This format, as well as others, offers participants an ongoing vehicle for participating in God’s continuous call to worship God in spirit and in truth and to work for justice in all our relationships.

For reflection:

How do the biblical examples of covenant and our Wesleyan heritage inform the covenant we will make together?
Spiritual Leadership
When you hear the phrase *spiritual leadership*, what comes to your mind?

*Write responses on newsprint.*
Our role as spiritual leaders is grounded in our baptism. Our baptism serves to remind us that we are beloved children of God, created in God’s image, and called to participate in God’s purposes in the world. Secondly, our leadership is shaped by our call from God.

The only adequate basis for Christian leadership is a vital spiritual life in which God is transforming us. Spiritual leaders nurture their connection to God and help others do the same. They want a deep, abiding relationship with God that fills them and keeps them centered and focused on what’s important. Spiritual leaders develop habits and practices that embody their commitment and express their identity.

Spiritual leadership is holistic. It involves our thoughts, emotions, and experience. As we develop our spiritual lives, our thoughts, indeed our very worldview, is shaped and formed by the Gospel. We feel gratitude, sorrow, joy, and a multitude of other emotions as we consider God’s love and grace. We experience God’s presence in worship, in fellowship with other Christians, in nature, and throughout our daily lives.

Spiritual depth includes a growing ability to listen to God and to experience God in ways that transform us. It involves pursuing greater intimacy with God and becoming more attuned to the Spirit’s leading. As we deepen our experience of God, we reorder our lives in ways that more closely reflect God’s purposes for the world.

The result is that spiritual leaders demonstrate authenticity and integrity in their personal and professional lives. Their leadership flows out of their relationship with God. It is a result of what God is doing in and through their lives.
FIRST! View Chapter 2 (Finding the Means) of “Opening Ourselves to Grace, Basic Christian Practices.”

Using Mutual Invitation, discuss reflection questions for “Finding the Means” found in the hand-outs. (Directions for Mutual Invitation are in the Supplemental Resources. Two additional handouts: Wesley’s Means of Grace and Two Great Commandments are provided for your use as needed.)
Leadership Interaction Styles
Spiritual leadership is also about leading. Spiritual leaders invite others into a life of faith that provides identity and purpose. Yet each leader is different. We all lead in different ways, and we have our own “style” of leadership. One of the tools that we have found helpful for considering our leadership style is the Leadership Interaction Styles instrument. You’ll find this instrument in your hand-outs on pages 9 & 10. I invite you to turn to that instrument and record your responses to each set of statements on the form.

[Allow 10-12 minutes for group to complete the LIS instrument.]

To score your responses, please add the number of checks made in column A, column B, column C, and column D. Then subtract B from A; subtract C from D. On the LIS Scoring Sheet (included in the handouts packet) the vertical axis is the A-B line; find your score on that axis. This axis indicates one’s orientation when leading: some people focus more on the task at hand; other people focus more on the relationships of the people involved in the task. Again, your score on that axis indicates your preference. On the LIS Scoring Sheet (in the hand-outs) the horizontal axis is the C-D line; find your score on that axis. The horizontal axis represents one’s preferred style of communication. Some people tend to ask questions; other people tend to make statements. Your score on that axis indicates your particular preference. Now identify the point at which the two scores meet. The quadrant in which you find the meeting point between the two scores identifies which leadership interaction style you generally prefer. You can find descriptions of these four leadership styles on page XX of the hand-outs. Let’s look briefly at each style.

[Using the descriptions provided on page 2 of the handout downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf “Characteristics of the Leadership/Interaction Styles” Point out some of the primary characteristics of each leadership style.]

Just for fun, let’s see which styles are represented in our group. Raise your hand if you fall into the Director style . . . the Dreamer style . . . the Pleaser style . . . the Thinker style. How accurately does this style describe you? (Remember it’s an “indicator.” It won’t be 100% accurate.)

If you look at page 3 of the handout (downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf) you’ll find a diagram of what happens when leaders operate under stress. Research indicates that each style tends to follow a particular pattern of moving through all four leadership styles as stress increases.

[Go over each of the “stress paths” to be sure participants understand the progression for each style.]

Now look at page 4 of the handout (downloaded from http://equippedforeverygoodwork.files.wordpress.com/2010/11/leadership_interaction_styles.pdf). We aren’t going to go over this list; it is here for your review later. I want to point out that it includes tips for interacting with people of each leadership style. Hopefully, when people in your Incubator use this instrument to identify their style, you can work together more effectively by understanding the strengths of each style and by using ideas for communicating with people whose style differs from yours.

[Allow time for questions and comments if needed.]
Team
As we move ahead with our Incubators, we not only want to emphasize spiritual leadership, but also shared leadership. In order to successfully achieve the SMART goals set for your congregation, you will be working with a leadership team.

In effective teams the members trust each other. Some of the ways teams build trust is to be respectful of one another and to handle conflict appropriately. The Respectful Guidelines we shared at the beginning of this module can help with this aspect of team building.

Effective teams are focused on the results they want. Your SMART goals are one of the ways you have named your desired results. As a team, you will be working towards personal and congregational commitment to those goals and to the results you hope for. In your team meetings you will report on progress towards achieving goals. Clear expectations related to what tasks are required, who is responsible, and when the work should be completed help team accountability for achieving desired results.
The team that will make up your Incubator will focus on your SMART goals. These goals will help your congregation achieve its vision for discipleship in your context. As a team you will work to create and sustain a congregational culture that supports your vision for mission and ministry. Together you will develop practices that help team members love God and neighbor. These practices may include prayer, worship, and study. You may find other practices that address your context. As a team you will learn together as you implement plans and evaluate your progress.

Teams are also fun! The old adage “two heads are better than one” is true. Teamwork encourages creativity and innovation. In this time of transition related to effective ministry, we need to be as creative as possible. In order to see how innovative teams can function, let’s take a look at “The Deep Dive,” a clip about IDEO, a design firm in Palo Alto, California.
FOR REFLECTION ON “THE DEEP DIVE”

1. What important insights into working as a team did you glean from “Deep Dive?”
2. In the teams in which you work, how are members selected?
3. How are “wild ideas” received and what happens to them (and/or to the persons who offer them)?
4. What behaviors and processes are encouraged or discouraged by the team you lead? By the teams of which you are a member?
5. For what and how are team members rewarded or recognized?
6. How does working with a team connect with your understanding of spiritual leadership?

FIRST! View the Deep Dive.

*Using Mutual Invitation, discuss reflection questions for “The Deep Dive” found in the handouts. (Directions for Mutual Invitation are in the Supplemental Resources.)*
Leading
Often we start a task by determining who is available to help, rather than thinking about who it is we need in order for the task to be successfully completed. For the next few minutes we’re going to look at a tool for building a team. You can find a copy of the Team Worksheet in your hand-outs.

First you must be clear about the boundaries related to team responsibilities. This means you need to be clear about what the team is supposed to do and what it should not do. For example, if you’re working with a team to design a new worship experience, you will not be working on any of the processes related to current worship experiences. Other boundaries may include time, space, and/or location.
Next be clear about the team’s purpose. Why does this team exist? Be as clear as possible. For example, the New Horizons team is responsible for planning weekly worship experiences for families with children. This statement is specific, whereas a purpose statement that reads “the New Horizons team is responsible for enhancing the worship life of Anyplace UMC” is too general to help your team focus. This purpose also infers another boundary: the team’s purpose is to plan weekly worship for families with children. That does not mean that the team is responsible for leading weekly worship. Some of the team members may be involved in the worship leadership, but team membership does not make worship leadership a requirement.

After clarifying your team’s boundaries and purposes, jot down ideas about the “big chunks” of work that need to be included. Using the New Horizons team as an example, some of the “big chunks” might be Multi-media, Music, Liturgy, and Hospitality.

Then you begin to identify the gifts needed for each “big chunk.” For example, under the Multi-media category, you might need someone with gifts in technology, in visualization of ideas, in drama, or in design of banners and/or the altar. Let’s identify some gifts needed in the other categories.

[Ask participants to name gifts needed for Music, then Liturgy, and then Hospitality.]

After identifying the gifts needed, brainstorm names of people who have those gifts. Use the worksheet to keep track of your ideas. Once you decide who you should ask, give them a call or set up an appointment to discuss the possibility of their serving on the team.

[If there is time, you can ask the participants to practice using the Team Worksheet by thinking of a team that they need in their congregation, identifying boundaries, stating the purpose, naming the “big chunks” involved in the task, listing the gifts needed, and writing possible people to contact.]
Before we leave for the day, we are going to think about the covenant that will guide our Incubator experience. Once we all agree on the covenant it cannot be changed except by consent of the whole group. At the next session it will be printed out so that each person may sign it. Any changes among the individuals on the team will be agreed upon by all participants. If someone drops out it must be acknowledged by the group. The team will review the covenant at each meeting to check how the team is functioning. We will use the covenant as an opportunity for accountability and support through this process.
So, what do you want to include in our covenant to grow as spiritual leaders, accomplish our goals, and lead others? We might want to include categories such as participation, practices, confidentiality, and accountability.

At this point we are not debating anyone’s ideas. I will write down everything that is suggested. If you have a question about what something means, please ask it. Later we will indicate which ideas we think need to be included in the covenant.

[Write responses on newsprint. Post the newsprint on the wall. Then ask each participant to mark the ideas that they think need to be included in the covenant.]

Thank you for your input. Before our next session I will take your suggestions and draft a covenant. At the next meeting there will be time for review, revision, and adoption.
Before our next meeting please read *The Worship Architect* by Constance Cherry. (Be sure everyone has a copy of the book. If not, let them know how to get a copy.)

Before we leave for the day, I’d like to get feedback from you about how today went. I have three short questions:
What went well
What did you learn?
What needs improvement?

*[Make notes of participant responses for your use in planning the next session.]*

Thank you for your feedback. Now I invite you to get comfortable. Take a few deep breaths.
Closing

Left: For all that has been, we give you thanks, Loving God.
Right: For all that will be, we give you thanks, Creating God.
Left: For focus and courage to pursue your purposes, help us, Ever-Present God.
Right: For the work that is before us, bless us and use us, Sustaining God.
All: We go in the peace and power of God.
Amen.
Notes