

# Ministry Clusters are a key to vital congregations

The Imagine Indiana Design Team and the Indiana Area District Superintendents believe important elements in the success of a new Indiana Conference are Ministry Clusters. This document defines Ministry Clusters, outlines their purpose and function, and gives dates when Ministry Clusters will be introduced, discussed and organized across the state. We begin with the reason for Ministry Clusters from the 2008 Imagine Indiana Plan Report.

Creating a new Indiana Conference is about the **Five Practices of a Fruitful Annual Conference** (adapted from the book, *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* by Robert Schnase). Here is the first practice which considers Ministry Clusters.

## 1. Focus on Mission

The mission of The United Methodist Church is “making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” **This plan imagines congregations growing in vitality as they work as partners with other congregations in their shared communities.** This plan imagines clergy leading with confidence and excellence in shared support of one another. We imagine this being accomplished out of a passion to fulfill our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of individuals, congregations, communities, and the world. For this to happen, the new Indiana Conference will embrace accountability and support at all levels.

Every congregation will be a part of a ministry cluster of 4 to 9 congregations to cooperate, collaborate, and hold one another accountable. Every clergy under appointment will be a part of a covenant group for support and accountability. We want to create a vital future. We want to clearly focus on mission.

**The other four practices include:**

2. Resource Local Churches
3. Streamline Conference Structure
4. Care for Clergy
5. Make a Difference

## Ministry Clusters in the new Indiana Conference -- Expectations

**The ministry clusters are for ministry!**

1. Each district will organize ministry clusters in consultation with the district superintendent.
2. All congregations are expected to be in a ministry cluster (four to nine churches), with lay persons and pastors under appointment expected to participate. The number of lay persons from a congregation may vary, though two is considered a minimum. For example, if four churches were together in a ministry cluster, and each had their pastor and two lay persons participate, the leadership group would be 12 in number. If, on the other hand, nine churches were together in a ministry cluster, and each had their pastor and two lay persons participate, the group would be 27 in number.
3. Districts that have United Methodist-related community centers and other outreach ministries within their boundaries may include these ministries in the ministry clusters where they are located. The churches and the community-based ministries will explore how they can deepen their partnerships for ministry.

4. Ministry cluster leaders can be elders, deacons, local pastors or lay persons. They will be selected by the cluster during the organizing meeting with the district superintendent. (Leaders should have a good track record in leading groups and have a demonstrated commitment to working together with others in servant leadership.) See organizing meeting agenda on next page.
5. Ministry cluster leaders will be required to participate in ministry cluster training and continuing educational opportunities designed to equip them.
6. The district superintendent will meet with ministry cluster leaders to listen to concerns, offer encouragement, assist in vision casting, and help facilitate training and resources. However, the district superintendent is not a member participant of a ministry cluster.
7. Ministry clusters are expected to meet a minimum of three times per year, but may choose to meet more often.
8. Ministry clusters are to focus on answering two core questions: 1. “How are each of our congregations doing in accomplishing our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world?” and 2. “What can we do better and more effectively together to impact our area for Christ than we can do as individual congregations?”
9. The evaluation of ministry clusters will consist of giving a detailed explanation of how they have been faithful in answering these two core questions.

One benefit of the cluster ministry model is that individual leaders will no longer be working alone. They can work with others who share their responsibilities in other congregations. The strong can help the weak, and the wise and experienced can guide the newcomers. This is sometimes known as “bringing people along side” in ministry.

*-- Imagine Indiana Report to the 2008 North and South Indiana Annual Conferences*

**Member churches in a Ministry Cluster will fulfill this purpose through:**

- **Praying** for each other by name during worship prayer time.
- **Studying** and praying for their shared mission area using demographic tools.
- **Dreaming** of ways to make an impact on their shared mission area through witness and/or mission.
- **Supporting** each other, perhaps through sharing resources, expertise or best practices.
- **Encouraging** one another when faithfulness and fruitfulness are evident.
- **Holding** each other accountable when lack of faithfulness or fruitfulness is evident (for example, the “Five Practices,” “The Five-Fold Purpose of the Church,” etc.)
- **Possibly sharing** in joint programs for the sake of our shared mission.

## Forming Ministry Clusters

### CONFERENCE TIP-OFF MEETINGS FOR FORMING MINISTRY CLUSTERS

Bishop Mike Coyner and District Superintendents will meet in each of the ten new districts for a Tip-Off meeting about the formation of ministry clusters in each district. Each church is to be represented by a pastor and one or two key lay leaders. The pastors have been mailed maps which outline the approximate district boundaries. This map can be found online at [www.inareaumc.org/NewConference/documents/New\\_Districts.pdf](http://www.inareaumc.org/NewConference/documents/New_Districts.pdf).

- District 2 – Sunday, Feb. 15, 3 p.m. at Fort Wayne Aldersgate UMC
- District 5 – Sunday, Feb. 15, 7 p.m. at Noblesville 1st UMC
- District 9 – Sunday, Feb. 22, 3 p.m. at Santa Claus UMC
- District 10 – Sunday, Feb 22, 7 p.m. at Edwardsville UMC
- District 1 – Sunday, March 1, 3 p.m. at South Bend Grace UMC
- District 3 – Sunday, March 1, 7 p.m. at Monticello UMC
- District 6 – Sunday, March 8, 3 p.m. at Castleton UMC
- District 4 – Sunday, March 8, 7 p.m. at Terre Haute Mt. Pleasant UMC
- District 7 – Sunday, March 15, 3 p.m. at Muncie High Street UMC
- District 8 – Sunday March 15, 7 p.m. at Seymour First UMC

**A framework will be provided** by the Bishop and Superintendents for Ministry Clusters, with the actual decision of who shall be in a cluster developed by the pastor and lay leader/s of the churches.

- **These are the guidelines for organizing Ministry Clusters.**

1. Geographic Ministry Clusters are preferred.
2. Along with the Geographic Ministry Clusters a church also may choose to participate in an Affinity Cluster or group for some issues or purposes.
3. A church that wishes to forgo a Geographic Ministry Cluster and participate only in an Affinity Cluster must present a compelling rationale and secure the approval of the DS.

- **Tasks to be completed at the end of the organizing meeting:**

1. Find a group of other church leaders who might form a Cluster with you. The size might range from four to nine churches.
2. Set a date for the first gathering of the clergy team of your Cluster sometime in the next two months.
3. Set a date for the first gathering of clergy and laity/leaders from your Cluster sometime in the next month or two following clergy gathering.
4. Keep your District Superintendent informed of these dates.
5. Each person may nominate a cluster leader on 3 x 5 card; hand those to the District Superintendent who will then select a leader. Ministry Cluster leaders may be clergy or laity and are expected to attend a training event.

As the clusters are organized, the Cabinet will use cluster organizing lines to draw the “fine lines” between districts.

### **Ministry Clusters are meant to:**

- Meet a minimum of three times a year.
- Develop their own spirit or culture over time.
- Help each church develop a ministry development plan, a way to move from the dream to the mission to the reality.
- Help participating churches be successful; to raise expectations.
- Help participants to stay connected and acknowledge they need each other.
- Be led by both clergy and laity; leadership training will be important.
- Study new demographic information for their ministry area together.
- Share stories without tooting their own horn.
- Ask each other: “Are we doing the same things over and over, hoping for different results? How different are we willing to be?”
- Be a breeding ground for positive infection with good DNA.
- Help participants get a fresh perspective from others outside their own congregation.
- Be fluid.
- Lift each other up, not drag each other down.
- Name their cluster as a part of establishing their identity.

### **Ministry Clusters are NOT meant to:**

- Be a clergy covenant group.
- Be clergy centered but rather church centered; laity are an integral part of leadership and meetings.
- Be a part of the appointment process. Information about a pastor’s performance or information affecting an appointment will not be shared with the superintendent.
- Be a top down conduit for conference program promotion.
- Carry out mandated programming. Participating in shared programs, if any, is voluntary. For example, two or three but not all of the churches could participate in a “Christmas VBS.”
- Be a cooperative parish or other organizational entity.
- Be a prelude to closing or merging small churches.
- Be an extension of the District Superintendent. Elders will not be expected to supervise Local Pastors, chair Charge Conferences or do conflict intervention in a church. Clusters will probably do mutual problem solving that would make the DS job easier – we hope.
- Diminish the large church or overwhelm the small church.

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