

# Vital Signs – Category Definitions

## Introduction:

The Vital Congregation initiative focuses on helping every congregation develop an intentional process for growth, not just numeric growth, but growth in every vital component of a healthy congregation.<sup>1</sup> This happens by congregations setting goals, measuring progress on the goals, and celebrating the success of intentional ministry designed to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

## The Steps:

1. *Set Goals* The Church Development Team has produced a training video to use to lead your church in the goal setting process.
2. *Dedicate your goals as a gift to God* Each church reported their goals at the annual Charge Conference in 2011. Those goals will be collected from across the conference and presented to the General Conference session in 2012 as a love offering to God of our intentional efforts to make disciples and transform the world for Jesus Christ!
3. *Measure, Report, and Evaluate* Each week you will add to your local church report the activity in each area where you have set goals. There will also be a space to tell the story of ministry that developed the numbers. Ministry is about people, the numbers only tell part of the story of the people touched by your ministry.

## What to Report:

1. Disciples in worship (worship attendance)  
Number of participants in weekly worship services. The method used should be consistent with how the number was recorded previously for the Check Day reports. The goal is consistency in process to be helpful to the local church in measuring growth.
2. Disciples making new disciples (number of professions of faith)  
Definition: In The United Methodist Church, a member received by Profession of Faith is an individual who, as a part of joining a local United Methodist Church, makes a public expression of faith in Jesus Christ and has not previously been a member of another United Methodist Church or a church of another Christian denomination.

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<sup>1</sup> The Vital Congregation report includes the research of Towers Watson to determine the key activities for healthy, growing congregations across the denomination, regardless of size, location, or ethnic makeup. This report generated 16 indicators of Vital Congregations. Find the full report at: [http://www.umc.org/atf/cf/{db6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741}/16\\_MINISTRY\\_STRATEGIES.PDF](http://www.umc.org/atf/cf/{db6a45e4-c446-4248-82c8-e131b6424741}/16_MINISTRY_STRATEGIES.PDF)

Members who are received by Transfer of Membership from other United Methodist congregations or by Transfer of Membership from congregations of other Christian denominations are *not* referred to as having been received by Profession of Faith.

3. Disciples growing in their faith (number of small groups)  
Guidelines: Number of small groups, Sunday School classes and Bible studies, as well as other groups or events lead by your church for the purpose of shaping discipleship growth.
  
4. Disciples engaged in mission (number of disciples doing outreach in the community and the world)  
Guidelines: This is the number of persons in your church that participate in at least one form of outreach. For example: if Susie Queue works on the Habitat House in October and also serves in the Soup Kitchen in December, she counts once as one person, not twice because she did two things. The metric is number of *persons* serving in hands-on mission, not the numbers of services persons perform. So, if you have a 100-member congregation and 40 *persons* are involved in hands-on mission, counting as suggested above, and the next year we grow that *involvement* to 55 *persons*, you've learned something very important about this metric in my congregation. But, if you count the Susie Queues and the John Does each *time* they do something, the resulting numbers don't tell you much. Increasing numbers could merely mean that Susie and Bill are doing more, not that a higher percentage of the membership is "getting it."  
*Note: It is understandable that pastors and congregations want to brag about the number and variety of mission opportunities that they have and offer. You should report that in the narrative portion of the report.*
  
5. Disciples sharing their resources for mission (amount of money given for mission)  
Definition: The total amount given by local church to other organizations for support of benevolent or charitable ministries. This amount includes the Tithing offering to the conference and giving to the district, as well as giving for all United Methodist ministry<sup>2</sup> and giving to non-United Methodist Organizations active in work such as advocacy, education, health, justice, mercy, outreach, and welfare anywhere in the world.

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<sup>2</sup> Giving to ministries beyond the local church, including amounts given for general church, conference, and district Advance Specials.