



## **LOCAL CHURCH LAY LEADER MANUAL**

**The Vital Connection Between the Clergy and the Laity**

**The Board of Laity  
Western North Carolina Conference**

**Content Revised January 2010**

## INTRODUCTION

**The office of Local Church Lay Leader is one of the most important positions in the church.** This booklet was created to help the Local Church Lay Leader learn the duties of the position in the United Methodist Church quicker and easier. The booklet points out the important part he or she plays in the connectional system of our church. It lays out in simple language the tremendous responsibility he or she has in keeping the local church ministries and the congregation working together. This booklet is most valuable in listing the many ways the Local Church Lay Leader should be cooperating with the District Lay Leader, the Associate District Lay Leader, and the District Superintendent.

**The Local Church Lay Leader is generally chosen because he or she has already served in many important positions. However, the position is not just an honor – it is the workhorse job in the Local Church.** If the person fails, the network of concern for the world and the people around us who give of themselves, their time, their money and service, cannot reach their goals in the Church and in the extended Church in 90 nations. **It is your job to keep the Laity involved, trained, and responsible to their Church, their Pastor, and the great connectional Church, which seeks to serve the world for God through Jesus Christ, Our Savior.**

God's Church needs your understanding and commitment to all the responsibilities as explained herein, and whatever fruit grows from the harvest of your dedication to the basic tasks will be to His Glory!

## A MESSAGE FROM BISHOP LARRY M. GOODPASTER

Dear Local Church Lay Leader:

First let me commend you for your willingness to accept the responsibilities that go with the office of Lay Leader in the life of the church and congratulate you on your election. Your election signals a great deal of trust and confidence that the other members of your church have in you. As a baptized, professing member of The United Methodist Church, I know that your first commitment and loyalty is to Jesus Christ. As Lay Leader one of your primary goals should be not only to maintain a vital relationship with God through Christ Jesus, but also to strengthen it as you move through each day.

*The Book of Discipline* of our United Methodist Church spells out the duties and responsibilities of the lay leader in Paragraph 251.1 and I hope you will take seriously each one of those items. This manual will assist you in interpreting and applying what is listed in that brief section.

In partnership with the pastor you have the task of leading the church toward the fulfillment of its mission in your community and in our world. From my vantage point as your bishop, I believe this is an essential task that must be worked on regularly. The mission of The United Methodist Church (*to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world*) is best achieved in and through healthy, dynamic churches. The Western North Carolina Conference has phrased that mission in a three-fold way: *To follow Jesus, to make disciples, and to transform the world*. In addition, we have determined that the way we will live out that mission is through our work on *The Power of 3* goals. (You can find information about these at the Conference web site, [www.wnccumc.org](http://www.wnccumc.org))

As Lay Leader your task is to inspire, guide, motivate, and lead the other members of your church toward achieving these goals and fulfilling this mission. You do not do this alone. With your pastor, other lay leaders, your district superintendent and district lay leader, and the assistance of my office and the conference, you have a team of people committed to this mission.

I look forward to meeting each lay leader in our conference through the many opportunities that you will be made aware of in the coming months and years. Be assured of my prayers for you and for our churches as we work together for the glory of God in this place and time.

Larry M. Goodpaster  
Resident Bishop  
Western North Carolina Conference

## **A MESSAGE FROM THE CONFERENCE LAY LEADER**

Dear Friend:

The role of local church lay leader is a very important one as we work to *follow Jesus, make disciples, and transform the world*. The lay leader in the local church has a significant responsibility to work with the clergy and to lead the laity of the church in serving the professing members of the congregation and in reaching out to the numerous persons outside the church.

The lay leader is responsible for communications with the laity of the church and to serve as a liaison between the clergy and the members of the congregation. The lay leader is a major figure in the identification of potential leaders within the congregation and in the development and training of those future leaders.

Bishop Goodpaster has set the vision for our annual conference. There are five goals which we all should be working to achieve. These five goals are collected under the term *The Power of 3*. As we work to increase the membership and participation in our churches, to send forth thousands of mission teams, start new churches, and revitalize many of our existing churches, local church lay leaders will play a substantial role.

As the conference lay leader, it is a pleasure for me to join with you in this vital work.

Robert D. Upchurch  
Conference Lay Leader  
Western North Carolina Conference

## ENTHUSIASM

To be a good Lay Leader you must be enthusiastic about Jesus Christ, God, and your Church. You must be enthusiastic about God's people whom you will be working with in your new position as Lay Leader. There are few values in life that are more important than **ENTHUSIASM**.

Emerson once said, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

Charles Schwab said, "A person can succeed at almost anything for which they have unlimited enthusiasm."

There is a magazine called "Catholic Layman" which recently carried the following statement: "Every person is enthusiastic at times. One person may have enthusiasm for thirty minutes, another may have it for thirty days, but it is the person who has enthusiasm for thirty years who makes a success in life!"

Henry Thoreau, a wise American, said, "None are so old who outlive enthusiasm."

Norman Vincent Peale said, "To have enthusiasm, you must act enthusiastic, and think enthusiastic - **KEEP YOUR MIND RENEWED** – and you will keep enthusiasm going!" He has said that, "If you would practice the following eleven powerful principals, you will have enthusiasm going for you as long as you live: Pray big, Think big, Believe big, Dream big, Act big, Work big, Give big, Forgive big, Love big, Live big, Laugh big."

I have been fortunate to have been a Local Church Lay Leader, Associate District Lay Leader, District Lay Leader, and Conference Lay Leader. If there were one thing I would pass on to you it would be enthusiasm! With it, you can put new spirit and new creative skills into your job. You can do better in all aspects of your life. Enthusiasm brings you a new interest, new excitement and aliveness, if you want it. Remember Jesus loves you and John Wesley stated, "The best of all is God is with us!"

Jack Young  
Former WNC Conference Lay Leader

## THE LOCAL CHURCH

The local Church is a community of true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called, and the Sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers, and the redemption of the world. (2008 *Discipline*, ¶ 201)

The Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world. It is primarily at the level of the local Church that the Church encounters the world. The local Church is a strategic base from which Christians move out to the structures of society. It is the function of the local Church to minister to the needs of persons in the community where the church is located, to provide appropriate training and nurture to all, to cooperate in the ministry with other local churches, ... and to participate in the worldwide mission of the Church, as minimal expectations of an authentic Church. (2008 *Discipline*, ¶ 202)

The local Church is a connectional society of persons who have been baptized, have professed their faith in Christ, and have assumed the vows of membership in the United Methodist Church. They gather in fellowship to hear the Word of God, receive the sacraments, praise and worship the triune God, and carry forward the work that Christ has committed to his Church. Such a society of believers, being within the United Methodist Church and subject to its *Discipline*, is also an inherent part of the Church universal, which is composed of all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and in which in the Apostles' creed we declare to be the holy catholic Church. (2008 *Discipline*, ¶ 203)

## THE MINISTRY OF THE LAITY

All of God's people, in all places, and at all times, are called to love and serve.

We rejoice in God's call to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Claimed by baptism and nurtured by God's redeeming love and grace, we are compelled to live under direction of the Holy Spirit. We are called to an every-moment ministry.

Ministry of the laity is:

- ⌚ Living faithfully as disciples of Jesus Christ in our everyday life
- ⌚ Responding to God's gifts of grace/call to serve
- ⌚ Using our gifts and resources to serve others
- ⌚ Loving our neighbors
- ⌚ Living out the Gospel in all our relationships – at home, at school, at play, at work, in our communities, and in our world
- ⌚ All of the above... and more!

In our congregations, we act to:

- ⌚ Empower one another to be in ministry where we live, work, and play
- ⌚ Equip each other with knowledge, skills, and opportunities
- ⌚ Help each other with knowledge, skills, and opportunities
- ⌚ Support each other in the mission to which God sends us

(Reprinted from "Notes for Lay Leaders" Developed by the Staff of the Section of Ministry of the Laity, 1987)

## LOCAL CHURCH LAY LEADER

### *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*

**Paragraph 251:** Out of the professing membership of each local Church (§ 127), there shall be elected by the charge conference a **lay leader** who shall function as the primary lay representative of the laity in that local Church and shall have the following responsibilities:

¶ **251a:** fostering awareness of the role of laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home, workplace, community, and world, and finding ways within the community of faith to recognize all these ministries;

¶ **251b:** meeting regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the church and the needs for ministry;

¶ **251c:** membership in the charge conference and the church council, the committee on finance, the committee on lay leadership, and the committee on pastor-parish relations or staff-parish relations, where, along with the pastor, the lay leader shall serve as an interpreter of the actions of the annual conference and the general Church (to be better equipped to comply with this responsibility, it is recommended that a lay leader also serve as lay member of annual conference);

¶ **251d:** continuing involvement in study and training opportunities to develop a growing understanding of the Church's reason for existence and the types of ministries that will most effectively fulfill the Church's mission;

¶ **251e:** assisting in advising the church council of opportunities available and the needs expressed for a

more effective ministry of the church through its laity in the community;

¶ **251f:** informing the laity of training opportunities provided by the annual conference. Where possible, the lay leader shall attend training opportunities in order to strengthen his or her work. The lay leader is urged to become a certified lay speaker.

In instances where more than one church is on a charge, the charge conference shall elect additional lay leaders so that there will be one lay leader in each church. Associate lay leaders may be elected to work with the lay leader in any local church.

## **DUTIES OF A LOCAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH LAY LEADER**

1. This is not an honorary position. It should be the most active job in the local church!
2. It encompasses keeping your finger on the pulse of the activities of the Church at all times by staying in constant touch with the Pastor and all the various committees to see how the program may be supported, improved, or promoted to the best advantage of all.
3. You are the primary Lay representative among the Laity of your Church congregation.
4. You are expected to serve as a member of the Council of Ministries or Administrative Board or Administrative Council, Charge Conference, Committee on Finance, Committee on Lay Leadership, and as Ex-Officio member of some other committees which your Pastor may mention.
5. Pray about and advise these groups of opportunities and needs for effective service and ministry in your church and community.
6. Encourage your members to improve skills and spiritual life by attending training sessions, especially the District training programs. Help to promote Bible studies, or find leaders for training in your area. Have a person or committee to help find rides to these programs and talk them up. Be sure you search out interested persons and help them to understand the importance of growing in faith and service.
7. Support your District Superintendent and District Lay Leader. Keep in touch with them, and support all District functions: rallies, training sessions, receptions, etc. Help to thank the people who promoted and participated in them.
8. Support all programs of the United Methodist Men, Women, Youth and Scouts. Be interested in scholarships for college students who are worthy or in need.
9. Find interesting ways to communicate information given by the District Lay Leader, the Associate Lay Leader and others; also information about projects and activities of the Council of Laity. Pass your information back through these same connections.
10. Find interested members for their Lay Speakers training programs, help arrange transportation, encourage them to receive Certification and make appointments with groups who need or call you for speakers.
11. Promote the Laity Service Award Program in your Church.
12. Support and help arrange for members to go to the Gathering of the Laity each August at Lake Junaluska. They may be members or friends of your Church. Try to attend yourself and bring your family and friends.

13. When approaching the end of your term in office, become aware of helping find an associate who may follow you. Keep some records and notes for that person and try to see that they have training opportunities.
14. When another person is moving into your Church, try to make sure the transition is pleasant and satisfactory for all concerned.
15. Make this a great spiritual adventure and a growing experience.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- ⌚ Primary representative of the laity in the local church
  - ⌚ Foster awareness of the role of the laity in all aspects of life in carrying out the mission of the United Methodist Church to make disciples of Jesus Christ.
  - ⌚ Recognize the ministries of the laity.
  - ⌚ Meet regularly with the Pastor.
  - ⌚ Be continually involved in study and training opportunities in order to better understand the Church's reason for existence and the types of ministries that will fulfill the mission of the Church.
  - ⌚ Advise church council of needs and opportunities for ministry within the community,
  - ⌚ Inform laity of training opportunities provided by the annual conference. Attend those training events.
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## **MEMBERSHIP:**

- ⌚ Charge Conference
- ⌚ Church Council
- ⌚ Committee on Finance
- ⌚ Committee on Lay Leadership
- ⌚ Lay member to Annual Conference (recommended, not required)
- ⌚ Pastor-Parish Relations Committee

## **JOHN WESLEY'S CHALLENGE**

Wesley described our mission as a means to “spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.” That is our mission, pure and simple.

### **WHAT IS EVANGELISM?**

Evangelism is misinterpreted and misunderstood by many United Methodists. We need to begin with a proper definition of evangelism. Fortunately, the concept of evangelism is grounded in some Biblical words. Actually, the word evangelism is drawn from two important words in the New Testament, one of which means “good news” or “gospel” and the other, “to share the good news of the gospel.” In both cases, the original Greek words begin with the prefix eu, which means “good,” and build on the root – “angel” which means messenger of good news. We are called by God through Christ to share the Good News of His wonderful love and forgiveness. How are we going to present good news? By the way we live. By showing personal faith and being a living witness by what we say – what we do at work and play.

To whom are we going to present it? We should start with our children, our families, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and etc. Then our friends, business and social contacts, the needy and non-Christians.

Therefore, evangelism means to present faithfully the good news of Christ in Word and deed! God will take our feeble efforts and do the rest. Our job is not growing the crop, but sowing the seed and harvesting it when ripe. We do not convert. God converts.

### **WHY SOME CHOOSE NOT TO BECOME INVOLVED IN EVANGELISM**

Here are ten typical reasons why some choose not to become involved in evangelism:

1. “I don’t want to turn my friends off because I’m religious!” (Fear of rejection)
2. “Other persons are more gifted in personal witness than I.” (Not gifted)
3. “I lack the depth of experience of the Holy Spirit who could enable me to witness effectively.” (Lack experience)
4. “I’d rather not introduce emotionalism into the life of the church. It causes confusion and division” (Fear emotionalism)
5. “We mainline Christians are too sophisticated to engage in evangelism.” (Too sophisticated)
6. “I don’t think I understand the gospel well enough to convince someone else.” (Uncertain of gospel)
7. “Even if I wanted to evangelize my neighbor, I wouldn’t know where to start.” (Lack skills)
8. “I’ve always felt that a person’s faith was private, and I don’t want to intrude. Besides, it’s not polite to talk about religion in public.” (A private affair)
9. “I think we hire the preacher to do the evangelizing.” (Minister’s job)
10. “Most evangelism I know about discounts persons by manipulating them to make decisions they later regret.” (Fear manipulation)

We Lay Leaders must overcome these barriers in order to stimulate evangelism in our churches.

## PLANNING - DISCOVERING THE WAY

Planning is an important function of the church. It is sanctioned by Scripture and experience and is essential if we are to be a creative influence in our communities and world.

Unless we plan – deliberately and intentionally – we are likely to find ourselves reacting to events that swirl around us rather than influencing those events.

But how do we plan? Here are some suggestions for discovering the way.

Listening for the “still small voice of God”, leaders in the congregation seek to know what God is calling us to be and do. The four steps that follow encourage the use of a simple, focused, and faithful approach based on discerning God’s will.

### **Step I. Markers on the Horizon**

*Principal 1: We seek first to know and do the will of God.*

*Principal 2: We cannot discover our way if we don’t know where we are going.*

Our aim is not simply to have a set of plans. It is to listen to the “still small voice of God” as we make choices for faithful action. It helps to think of the planning group as pilgrims on a journey, remembering that “in God we live and move and have our being.”

We start by focusing our image of the church. This image becomes the end toward which we move in our journey. Our image (vision) is never our final destination, for God is always with us and in front of us.

Invite the planning group to pray, focusing on the image that best describes what God wants for the congregation a year ahead of time. Provide time for the group to think about God’s will for the people of faith as they live in their communities (using these Scripture passages):

- ☉ The Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-27)
- ☉ The People of God (Acts 13:17; Galatians 6:16; Isaiah 58:6-12)
- ☉ Living Stones (I Peter 2:4-8)
- ☉ God’s Building (I Corinthians 3:9-11)
- ☉ Salt of the Earth (Matthew 5:13)
- ☉ Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)

Pairs can study several passages and discuss their ideas about God’s call for the congregation. The group could address this question: What image (or combination of images) serves as the vision or marker on the horizon toward which God is calling us?

To answer the question, the group will need to discern God’s call – to seek to know God’s will and to trust that God is willing and able to guide us.

After a time of silence, the group can consider: What do we sense is the image or combination of images that should guide our planning and what image has the greatest pull on our hearts and minds?

The group can talk about the images, ask questions for clarification, and talk together for consensus around the image, or images, that they will use in planning.

## **Step II: Where Are We Now?**

*Principal 3: In order to move forward, we need to know our starting point and our choices.*

The group can share ideas around the questions: How do you describe our church to others and what do people who are not members of our congregation say about our ministry?

Participants need to provide an accurate description of the church as it is in the present. If many negative descriptions emerge, remind the group that the New Testament churches had many weaknesses, yet Paul called the early people saints!

The description of the church will not be as perfect as the image that was chosen. The difference between what is and what God intends should not defeat us. It provides a basis for making faithful choices.

## **Step III: Drawing Our Map**

*Principle 4: We must determine the most essential actions we can take.*

Keeping in mind the image toward which you are moving, the group can work in pairs to list actions that could be taken over the next year. Each action should have steps that can be observed as accomplished.

An action such as “receive more members” is too broad. A more helpful listing would be “each member of family will invite at least one visitor to participate in a small group, service project, or worship service in the next twelve months.”

After participants have prepared their lists, encourage discussion. The group should restate the actions so that each action can become a step to be observed and accomplished. After a time of prayer, participants should discuss what they believe are the ten most essential actions.

## **Step IV: Stepping Forward**

*Principle 5: We cannot do everything; we must do something.*

Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20. The group should discuss the difficulty of making choices and the costs of making poor ones. The list of possible actions should be reviewed while asking:

- ⌚ Can we accomplish all we have listed?
- ⌚ Can some actions be taken by a few while others concentrate on actions requiring attention by most of us?
- ⌚ Is the church structure flexible enough to allow us to focus on the most essential actions?

Remember that the *Discipline* allows choices in determining the best structure.

The next step is crucial. Discernment means that we seek to know God’s will and trust that God is present. Ask the group *prayerfully* to review the list of actions and in silence ask, what are the most significant actions we could take in our journey? Ask participants to consider those actions that have the greatest pull on their heart and mind and discuss the understandings and actions they feel are most significant. A time of silence should precede the seeking of consensus.

When the group has agreed on the essential actions, it must then determine:

- ⌚ Who will be responsible for providing leadership
- ⌚ What will we look for to determine that action has been taken (that is, what can be observed?)
- ⌚ When will we know if we have accomplished our aims?

Budgets and other details should be considered and then handled later by subgroups or the Administrative Council or Board.

Group members need to covenant together to pray, upholding one another in faith. A time for overall evaluation should be scheduled; at that time, the four steps will be repeated in order to revise directions for the continuing journey.

The plans for each year are temporary. Our vision or image of what God wills for the church will change with time. Remembering that our objective is to know and serve the will of God, we can move forward in a spirit of experimentation and expectation.

When the church works together in “discovering our way,” we grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, for “in God we live and move and have our being.”

## **TO EVERYTHING THERE IS A SEASON**

### **The end of your term**

Everybody’s term of office comes to an end sometime. Just as the beginning of your role as lay leader meant some discernment and decision making on your part, so, too, the time of ending needs to be marked by good judgment and wisdom.

There is no set term of office for a local church’s lay leader. However, many churches ask lay leaders to consider serving for four years, just as the local church’s lay member to Annual Conference often is asked to serve for a full quadrennial. This term of offices allows enough time to get to know the job, decide some direction, and work toward having an impact within the congregation. To allow for continuity in the local church’s lay leadership, however, it might be wise to have the lay member’s term and that of the lay leader overlap, so that succeeding lay leaders are elected in second or third year of a quadrennial. Another way to provide continuity is for an associate lay leader, or co-lay leader, to work with the lay leader during the last year of his or her service.

When ending your service as lay leader, you can make the next person’s job more successful in a number of ways. First, as already mentioned, suggest to the Committee on Nominations and Personnel that an associate or co-lay leader work with you during your last year in office. During that time, you could help the next person “learn the ropes.” Frequent meetings together with the past lay leader and other lay people will enable the next lay leader to have a sense of the job and some working relationships with others.

Keep a file of useful information that can be turned over to the next person. Include resources that you’ve found meaningful, notes from meetings that would give some sense of history to various church programs and decisions, and a list of people within the district and conference who have been able to answer questions and give assistance.

Giving a sense of history enables the next person to begin the task without operating in a vacuum. At the same time, it’s important not to have past experience become a block. One should be cautious of this happening if the famous phrase “but we have always done it this way” is heard!

Once your time as lay leader is over, look for new ways to be of service in the congregation and beyond it. Be available to church leaders for support and counsel, and yet, be careful to let new leaders have room and time to develop their own style and role in the life of the church.

### **When the Pastor Leaves**

When the appointment of a different pastor is made, the lay leader can work to ensure a smooth transition. Providing continuity in leadership for the church, you may work with Staff-Parish Relations to be certain that the leave taking of the current pastor is marked with good graces and blessings of the congregation.

Encouraging the congregation to take appropriate time to lift up the ministry of this person and to celebrate the church's life during that pastorate is important. You can also work with program area people, planning time for various church groups to meet with the pastor to share their joy in her or his ministry as well as the sorrow of good-bye.

If you are continuing as lay leader as the next pastor begins an appointment, your role again can be vital in promoting a smooth transition. You may work with Staff-Parish Relations and program areas to plan an installation service and reception. Support the Board of Trustees or parsonage committee to ensure the parsonage is prepared for new residents. With the chairperson of the Administrative Council or Board, keep important programs and ministries functioning effectively while the new pastor is in the beginning months of service.

Welcome the new pastor and express anticipation for new and continued work together.