

Accountable Discipleship in the Global Methodist Church

Report of the WCA Accountable Discipleship Task Force

The Goal of Accountable Discipleship

The goal of accountable discipleship ministry in the Global Methodist Church is to make, develop, and nurture disciples of Jesus Christ through small groups where each person is invited, challenged, supported, and held accountable in living sanctified lives that reflect the practices, character, and mission of Christ.

The Definition of a Disciple:

A disciple is a person whose life reflects the character of Christ and extends the mission of Christ in holy love of God and neighbor. The disciple's character and practice are informed by the Scriptures, nurtured by the community of faith, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The disciple's mission is to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus through work of teaching, service, and multiplication, making more obedient disciples who will reflect the character and mission of Christ and expanding the boundaries of Christ's Kingdom further out into the world.

The Character of a Disciple:

All persons are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) but that image has been distorted by human sinfulness. The image of God in humanity, thus distorted, must be renewed and God accomplishes this renewal through the person and work of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is the image of God to which all humanity has been called to conform (Colossians 1:15; Romans 8:29) and it is through his atoning death and resurrection, his teaching and example, and through the work of the Spirit, that the image of God is renewed and restored. This restoration, renewal, and reflection of the image of God in Christ is the foundation for the character of a disciple. As John Wesley put it in his sermon *The One Thing Needful*:

Now this great work, this one thing needful, is the renewal of our fallen nature...To recover our first estate from which we are thus fallen is the one thing now needful—to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freedom, sickness for health. Our one great business is to raze out of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be born again, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator. It is our one concern to shake off this servile yoke and regain our native freedom; to throw off every chain, every passion and desire that does not suit an angelic nature. The one work we have to do is to return from the gates of death to perfect soundness; to have our diseases cured, our wounds healed, and our uncleanness done away.

Renewal in the image of God, the image of Christ, culminates in what Wesley called "Christian perfection" or "entire sanctification," in which the disciple of Jesus reflects the holy love of Christ in the love of God and neighbor. The love and character of a disciple becomes more Christ-like through holy habits and practices and lived out individually and corporately in the crucible of daily life.

The Practices of a Disciple:

Disciples nurture the character and mission of Christ in their own lives and the lives of others through practices that Jesus himself used or instituted. Disciples nurture their holy love for God through practices described in the Wesleyan tradition as “works of piety or the “means of grace.” Among these practices are:

- Prayer
- Searching the Scriptures
- Public worship
- Receiving the Lord’s Supper
- Fasting
- Christian conferencing

Disciples nurture their love for neighbor in practices known in the Wesleyan tradition as “works of mercy.” Among these practices are:

- Doing good works
- Visiting the sick
- Visiting those in prison
- Feeding the hungry
- Giving generously to the needs of others
- Seeking justice for the poor, oppressed, and marginalized
- Stewardship of the earth
- Sharing one’s faith with others

These practices, along with others traditionally practiced by the Church, provide a rule of life for the disciple to follow under the direction and power of the Holy Spirit.

Our Historical Foundation

The method of accountable discipleship in the Global Methodist Church is grounded in the model of class and band meetings in the Methodist tradition. The class meeting in early Methodism was originally designed to hold people accountable to the General Rules: Do no harm, do good, and attend upon the ordinances of God. These mixed groups of 7-12 were divided primarily by geographical location and led by a class leader, and the content of the meetings focused on three things: 1) accountability to the General Rules, 2) encouragement to give weekly to the relief of the poor, and 3) to ask each member, “How is it with your soul?” The overall intent of the class meeting was to provide a means for the members of the movement to “watch over one another in love.” The class meeting was “the primary structure in early Methodism that was designed to keep every person connected to the rest of the movement, to make sure that people were doing all that they could to cooperate with the grace that God had given them and to ensure that no one was forgotten or left behind” (Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 27).

Participation in a class meeting was the basic requirement for membership in early Methodism. To be a Methodist, in other words, was to be someone who attended a weekly class meeting. Failure to attend or to submit to the class leader's inquiry of the state of their soul meant expulsion from not only the group but also the larger Methodist society. The early Methodists expected people to be growing in their discipleship using an intentional methodology.

While the class meeting was the basic structure of early Methodism aimed at accountability for the basics of Christian discipleship, the band meeting was more narrowly focused on the pursuit of holiness. The band meeting was a group of 5-7 members divided by gender and marital status. Prospective members were to have previously experienced justification by faith and an assurance of their adoption as children of God. Each member also had to be willing to have the rest of the group speak directly to their lives, to be told of their faults, to confess their sins, and to hear from the group "whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you" (Wesley, "Rules of the Bands," *Works* 9:77). In Wesley's conception, "the band meeting was the engine of holiness, the part of his method that was designed to help Methodists, by the grace of God, to grow increasingly into the image of Christ" (Watson, *Pursuing Social Holiness*, 5).

The class and band meetings combined to flesh out what Wesley meant by the term "social holiness," or the personal and corporate pursuit of "Christian perfection," sanctification, and renewal in the image of God. In recent years, the definition of "social holiness" has sometimes been altered to mean the same thing as "social justice," but Wesley's use of the term applies directly to the individual and corporate pursuit of holiness, recognizing that disciples of Jesus need one another to grow in grace, to pursue both the individual and corporate disciplines of discipleship, and to hold one another accountable. The model of early Methodism provides a pathway for the revival of the pursuit of holiness in the new Methodist movement. The development of an intentional path to discipleship brings individuals who are new to the Christian faith under the guidance and direction of seasoned disciples and a small group of peers who are spurring one another on to perfection. As Wesley put it: "'Holy solitaries' is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than Holy Adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection" (Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, viii).

The practice of the class and band meeting faded as Methodism transitioned from a movement into an institution. At least two significant shifts took place in the 19th century that caused this move away from these intentional methods of discipleship. First, most of the early Methodists came from the poorer classes of society, but as Methodism grew and became more affluent and respectable, people began to be less interested in sharing the details of their personal lives in small groups, particularly their struggles. Second, the rise of the Sunday School movement in the late 18th century led to an approach to small groups on learning information from an expert teacher, author, or a curriculum than on personal and corporate transformation. Study of the Bible and knowledge of its contents became the substitute for accountable discipleship (Watson, *The Class Meeting*, 54).

Our Current Situation

Methodism, and particularly United Methodism, has struggled to maintain a connection to its methodological roots. The situation that emerged in the 19th century is still largely with us: busy, affluent people have been trained by the culture to be consumers of information and to avoid the kind of intimate sharing and mutual accountability that allows information to provoke transformation. Most United Methodist Churches have Sunday School classes that focus on information *about* the Bible and *about* God, but few have anything resembling the kind of accountable discipleship groups that were the engine of the early Methodist movement.

It's not that information is unimportant. We confess that Scripture contains all that is needful for Christian faith and practice. Therefore, we must continue to promote a deep and pervasive knowledge of the contents of Scripture as the basis for our vision for authentically Christian practice and our discernment of where we are falling short.

The Greek word for "disciple" is *mathetes*—a learner—but discipleship formation takes place in a variety of modes beyond the classroom, as Jesus himself demonstrated. He taught his disciples in a kind of classroom setting at times, as in his instruction in Kingdom living in the Sermon on the Mount, but he also demonstrated the life of the Kingdom in such a way that his disciples would *imitate* his actions, putting into practice what they had learned. The disciples were thus not merely classroom learners, but apprentices to Jesus, having been immersed in his way of life. And after several years of apprenticeship, and after Jesus' ascension, these disciples were then able to *innovate* in their approach to mission and in making disciples in their context through the power of the Holy Spirit, as the book of Acts reveals. The disciples of Jesus became more like him and acted more like him because his life had been poured into theirs through the Spirit.

Information to imitation to incarnation to innovation—this is the pathway for making disciples. The Methodist movement once invested in cultivating disciples in this way and it must do so again if we are to move beyond the mainline malaise, institutional myopathy, and apathetic approach toward intentional disciple-making that has characterized the United Methodist Church.

Moving from where we have been to where we want to be as a new Methodist movement will require some remedial training. Our churches and clergy have been trained to default to more information and quite often information that, while helpful, has not led to lasting discipleship formation and life change. Many of our laity, and indeed many of our clergy, have not been exposed to the Methodist distinctives of scriptural holiness, entire sanctification, or accountable discipleship. Methodist churches tend to take a shotgun approach to biblical study from a wide variety of Christian perspectives rather than focusing on a distinctive and intentional approach to making disciples in the Wesleyan way. People have often not received instruction or immersion in the means of grace and struggle to practice them regularly. The question, "How is it with your soul?" is sometimes seen as more of an intrusive inquiry into one's personal life than a question designed to spark reflection and transformation.

Establishing a denomination-wide focus on accountable discipleship will require some basic catechesis in Wesleyan theology and Methodist practice as a baseline. We will need to teach people how to be disciples through information, imitation, and innovation while also supplying encouragement, support, and accountability through small discipleship groups. In the early Methodist movement, classes and bands weren't the places where discipleship happened, but rather the places where they *ensured that it happened*. Accountable discipleship in the _____ Church will thus require us to provide clear, intentional, scalable, and translatable training in the Wesleyan way of discipleship as well as the small group structures necessary to ensure that both personal and social holiness remain the focus of each local church.

The Content of Discipleship Formation

The method of accountable discipleship is informed by the content of disciple formation; in other words, to hold someone accountable to the way of being a disciple and growth in grace he or she must first be instructed and immersed in the way of discipleship. Early Methodism followed this pattern as the society and class meetings were undergirded with instruction from Wesley via the General Rules but also through the 44 Standard Sermons and his *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*. The sermons provided translatable and practical content concerning how to become a Christian (sermons on the order of salvation), how to grow and live as a Christian (sermons on the Sermon on the Mount), and how to address some of the challenges to maintaining life as a Christian (sermons like "Satan's Devices" and "The Cure of Evil Speaking" and the like).

Accountable discipleship in the Global Methodist Church will use a similar approach in providing basic discipleship content to learn and practice while holding one another accountable. That content covers three key areas of disciple formation:

1. **Becoming a Disciple (Catechesis)** – This initial focus of content provides a baseline Christian understanding of the gospel and salvation with an emphasis on the Wesleyan focus of growth in sanctification and holiness. Group members will also learn and practice the means of grace, formulate and articulate their own experience of repentance and faith in Christ, and be invited to make a formal confession of faith or prepare for baptism as needed.
2. **Growing as a Disciple (Immersion)** – This content focuses on the ethical and practical aspects of the Christian life, encouraging and forming people into Christ-like character and mission. Group members will dive deeply into the Sermon on the Mount and other Scriptures and do self-examination and practice in areas like the use of money, sexuality and marriage, dealing with anger, loving enemies, and other aspects of life in the Kingdom of God. Participants will be encouraged to share more deeply with one another in the confession of sin and support one another toward changing sinful patterns and living their new life in Christ.
3. **Disciples Making Disciples (Equipping)** – Disciples of Jesus are meant for mission, and this area focuses on equipping group members in multiplying their life of discipleship into the lives of others. Instruction and practice in this area will focus on personal evangelism, learning to speak winsomely with non-Christians, spiritual

gifting, apologetics, small group leadership, and discerning each person's call to general, specialized, or vocational ministry. Those group members whose gifts and graces are aligned may become new small group leaders or assume other ministry leadership positions.

The Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry will develop and recommend resources for these content areas that can be used by churches in developing their discipleship plans. These resources should be adaptable to different models of accountable discipleship, practical in focus, and applicable in a wide variety of global ministry contexts.

The content of accountable discipleship is but a means to an end, however. The end goal is the development of disciples who reflect the character and mission of Christ. Any content produced must incorporate opportunities for self-reflection, practical application, and accountability within the group, keeping the focus on the members and their development rather than simply completing a curriculum.

Four “Spaces” for Discipleship Formation

While the accountable discipleship small group is the basic unit for discipleship formation in the Global Methodist Church, such formation also takes place in other “spaces” that both feed into and emanate from the small group. Jesus’ intentional strategy for disciple formation focused on these various “spaces” as did the early Methodist movement. Using the language of Joseph Myers’ *The Search to Belong*, we see Jesus and the early Methodists employing these spaces to help people have a sense of belonging. Those spaces are Public Space, Social Space, Personal Space, and Intimate Space.

Public Space (unlimited number): The Gospels reveal that Jesus spent time teaching with crowds of people in public spaces. Crowds followed him to listen to his teaching, to be healed of diseases, to have demons cast out, and to consider the message of the good news of the Kingdom of God. The early Methodist movement followed a similar pattern in field preaching to large crowds and in large meetings designed to expose people to the gospel. In our own time, public worship is the primary social space where people encounter other disciples. Public space enables the message to broadcast widely and invites a response.

Social Space (20-100 people): We know that there were more than just 12 disciples around Jesus (though that was the basic unit). We read in Luke 10 that Jesus sent out “seventy others” to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, and in Acts 1 we see 120 people who were gathered together after Jesus’ resurrection. Social space is where people begin to form communities of spiritual friendship and belonging. The Society meeting was the social space in the early Methodist movement, and while one had to be a member of class meeting to attend the Society meeting, the larger group offered a more defined face of the movement. In the 21st century church, social space is the equivalent of a mid-sized community within the larger church where people begin to

develop meaningful relationships—a community such as an affinity group, Sunday school class, or mission group.

Personal Space (8-15 people): While Jesus spent time cultivating both public and social spaces, he spent the bulk of his time investing in a group of 12 disciples who became the basic unit of his formational strategy. Personal space is where people begin to connect more deeply in private relationships. In the Methodist movement, that personal space gathering was the class meeting, where 12-15 people gathered for mutual support and accountability. As stated above, the class meeting was the basic unit of the movement and defined its identity. To be a Methodist, in other words, was to be in a class meeting. Participation in a personal space was essential for every member.

Intimate Space (3-5 people): While Jesus spent most of his time with the 12 disciples, he invested more in 3 of those 12: Peter, James, and John. They were present at the Transfiguration, as well as at other specific times when Jesus wanted to share more intimate experiences, thoughts, and feelings. The band meeting functioned in a similar way in the early Methodist movement—a space in which the truth about each person might be intimately revealed without being shamed.

Disciple formation in the Global Methodist Church focuses on each of these spaces with entry into personal and intimate space as the primary goal for local churches in developing an accountable discipleship plan. Local churches will develop opportunities for people to receive instruction, build relationships, and practice the life of a disciple in each space with increasing levels of expectation, intimacy, and accountability. Those opportunities include:

Public Space: Worship is the most visible public space in the local church. Through preaching, liturgy, and sacrament, pastors and lay leaders proclaim the gospel and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, call for a response. Public worship offers the preacher the opportunity to communicate the content of Christian doctrine as revealed in Scripture and codified in the traditions of the Church, to invite people to make a confession of faith, and to challenge them to go deeper in their commitment to Christ and the life of a disciple. The use of the Church's liturgy and the regular practice of the means of grace, including Holy Communion, helps people to begin building the habits needed for disciple formation. Pastors and lay leaders should plan public worship in ways that offer both invitation and challenge to the life of discipleship.

Social Space: Local churches naturally offer a variety of social spaces where people gather in larger groups for learning, shared mission, or task completion. Bible studies and Sunday School classes are examples of social spaces designed specifically for learning, while a mission team or ministry group engages in shared mission. Committees and other task groups are social spaces where work gets done but where people also relate to one another. Discipleship formation leverages the relationship-building potential of each of these kinds of groups by intentionally structuring some of these

groups for deeper levels of engagement. Social spaces allow us to live lives of social holiness and to be known as Jesus' disciples by our love for one another (John 13:35).

A key social space for each local church is a group focused on the catechesis of potential new members. A catechism class provides the next step for those who have been awakened to the Christian faith through prevenient grace, those who have responded to the gospel and want to make a profession of faith, those who have wandered from the faith and are now returning, and those who may be transferring into the local church from other Christian traditions. In this setting, people learn the basics of how to become a Christian, the distinctives of the Wesleyan tradition and Methodist practice, the means of grace, and the methodology and practice of accountable discipleship. At the conclusion of the catechism class, people are invited to make a public profession of faith, prepare for baptism, and join an accountable discipleship small group.

Personal Space: The accountable discipleship small group is the primary space for disciple development in the Global Methodist Church. The Accountable Discipleship Task Force recommends participation in an accountable discipleship small group as a basic expectation for members of local churches. This group of 5-12 people is the locus of instruction, immersion, care, and accountability for each church member. Led by a trained and experienced leader, each accountable discipleship group meets weekly. These groups reflect the Methodist class meeting in size and intention and may include instructional and immersive components that enable the groups to deepen their individual and corporate practice of discipleship.

The structure of accountable discipleship groups may vary according to the model a local church uses. While the Wesleyan class meeting is the basic model for these small groups, the Accountable Discipleship Task Force has also provided a basic list of resources for helping annual conferences, local churches, and pastors to discern and develop accountable discipleship groups that work best in their local context. Some of those resources are listed in the Appendix to this report. Any small group structure a church develops, however, should contain at least three common elements that maintain consistency with the foundational model of the class meeting:

- **Personal Reflection:** In the historic class meeting model, the key question was “How doth your soul prosper?” or “How it is with your soul?” Each member of the group will have an opportunity to reflect on their personal experience of God and respond to what God is doing in their lives.
- **Invitation and Challenge:** In response to the instruction given or accountability requested, each member of the group will be invited and/or challenged to change, discard, or pick up a new habit, attitude, or ministry that mirrors the character and mission of Christ. The group will support one another in making this change in habit stick through regular (i.e. weekly) check-in.
- **Accountability:** Group members will be held accountable to attend each meeting, to hear and honor the counsel of the group in light of the Scriptures, to engage in

learning and immersion in the life of discipleship, and to provide honest feedback to one another while speaking the truth in love.

Intimate Space: The smaller band meeting is “the engine of holiness” for those who are also part of an accountable discipleship small group. This group of 3-5 people gathers for deeper engagement around personal accountability, confession of sin, the affirmation of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus’ death and resurrection, and life change. The band meeting offers intimate space for the kind of accountability, mentoring, and equipping that develops and strengthens healthy lay and clergy leaders for the local church. Band meetings can be developed concurrently with accountable discipleship small groups and, indeed, provide a deeper level of intimacy and discipleship development for all who participate.

The integration of these spaces in the life of the local church connects disciple-making to the patterns of Jesus and the early Methodists. Intentionally creating and maintaining each of these spaces creates a clear pathway for discipleship development in local churches. Special emphasis is placed on the personal space of the accountable discipleship small group as the key strategy for the Global Methodist Church that puts disciple-making at the forefront of our life and ministry.

Effective leadership is key to the development of small groups like class and band meetings. Leaders, both lay and clergy, should have experience in participating in such groups and demonstrate a Christ-like life of discipleship that members of the group can imitate as they grow in grace. Annual conferences and local churches must provide training for leaders in group dynamics, Wesleyan theology and practice, and the purpose of accountable discipleship small groups, as well as instruction in the content of discipleship.

The WCA Accountable Discipleship Task Force urges the WCA and the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry of the Global Methodist Church to develop resources specifically designed for each space, including resources for a standardized catechism class that can be used in a variety of social spaces and ministry contexts and resources for training leaders of groups in each space.

Implementing Accountable Discipleship Groups in the Global Methodist Church

As mentioned above, the Accountable Discipleship Task Force recommends that the Global Methodist Church adopt participation in an accountable discipleship small group as a basic expectation of membership in the local church. This expectation is consistent with our Methodist roots and is the primary “method” that gave Methodism its name. An intentional, high expectation approach to disciple development is key to establishing a Church that is consistent in its theology, witness, and practice. Developing disciples who reflect the character and mission of Jesus requires the same kind of intentional approach that Jesus himself employed and reflects the “primitive” Christianity to which Wesley called the Methodist movement to imitate.

To ensure that accountable discipleship is integrated into the life of the local church, seminaries approved by the Global Methodist Church should provide students working toward ordination with coursework, training, and experience in participating in, leading, and developing accountable discipleship groups, including both class meeting groups (personal space) and band meeting groups (intimate space). Every ordinand in the Global Methodist Church should demonstrate proficiency in and evidence of the ability to lead and administer accountable discipleship small groups before approval for ordination.

Implementing a plan for accountable discipleship will take some time for existing local churches joining the Global Methodist Church from the United Methodist Church. Each annual conference will assist its clergy and existing local churches in developing accountable discipleship groups. Bishops, presiding elders, and pastors will work together to develop expectations and benchmarks for accountable discipleship, and monitor the progress of each local church in the annual conference.

Since accountable discipleship will be a denomination-wide emphasis and expectation, creating an environment for experimentation and sharing best practices will be important. The Accountable Discipleship Task Force thus recommends that the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry develop an online network where annual conferences and local churches can share best practices as well as designating “teaching churches” around the denomination that are effective in accountable discipleship as models from which local churches might learn and be equipped in developing their accountable discipleship groups.

As the Global Methodist Church plants new congregations, the Accountable Discipleship Task Force recommends that these new churches begin with accountable discipleship groups as an essential expectation for new and charter members. New congregations have a unique opportunity to embed accountable discipleship as part of the DNA of the local church and denomination moving forward.

Summary

The Accountable Discipleship Task Force recommends the intentional development of accountable discipleship groups as an essential and foundational practice for each local congregation in the Global Methodist Church. As accountable discipleship once provided the engine for the early Methodist movement, the Task Force believes that a renewed emphasis and expectation of discipleship growth will be the engine that drives the Global Methodist Church and sets the direction for a denomination that will be focused on the Wesleyan emphasis of sanctification and holiness of heart and life in its members and in its local churches. Accountable discipleship cannot be an optional “extra” or simply another church program among many but must be integrated fully into the life of the Global Methodist Church at every level from the episcopacy, to annual conferences, to pastors, to local churches, and to individual lay members. Placing a high priority on the development of accountable discipleship groups will enable the new Church to galvanize against theological and moral drift, create an expectation of multiplication, develop a people known for their Christ-like character, and fulfill the Great Commission.

Summary of Recommendations of the Accountable Discipleship Task Force

1. We recommend that the Global Methodist Church adopt a clear definition of discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition with an emphasis on the goal of entire sanctification. We recommend this definition be codified in *The Book of Doctrines and Discipline*. We have provided a working definition at the beginning of this report for review by the WCA Council, the Transitional Leadership Team, and the convening conference of the Global Methodist Church.
2. We recommend that the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry develop an official catechism and catechetical resources to be used by new member classes in local churches, confirmation classes, and in other settings in order to provide people with the theological and practical groundwork for participation in accountable discipleship groups. We recommend that churches entering into the Global Methodist Church also use these catechetical resources in classes and groups with existing members so that all new and existing members of the denomination begin with a common theological grounding.
3. We recommend that the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry develop and endorse resources for accountable discipleship groups that provide instruction and immersion in the content of the life of discipleship as well as resources for training and equipping leaders of accountable discipleship small groups.
4. We recommend that local churches provide opportunities for disciple development in each space of church life (public, social, private, intimate) with an emphasis on moving people toward personal and intimate space in accountable discipleship small groups. Each church is to be held to such a requirement by its Presiding Elder at the annual charge conference.
5. We recommend that the Global Methodist Church adopt participation in an accountable discipleship small group as a basic expectation for membership in the local church and that local churches deploy a phased implementation process as the means of integrating church membership and accountable discipleship, ultimately requiring participation in an accountable discipleship group for new members and as a prerequisite to serving as a leader in the local church with appropriate accommodation for those who are physically or mentally unable to participate in accountable discipleship groups.
6. We recommend that seminaries approved by the Global Methodist Church, and Courses of Study offered under the auspices of the Global Methodist Church, provide students working toward ordination with coursework, training, and experience in participating in, leading, and developing accountable discipleship groups, including both class meeting groups (personal space) and band meeting groups (intimate space). We also recommend that clergy entering into the Global Methodist Church from the United Methodist Church and other denominations be trained and participate in accountable discipleship groups within the first year of clergy membership in the new denomination.
7. We recommend that the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry develop an online network where annual conferences and local churches can share best practices

as well as designating “teaching churches” around the denomination that are effective in accountable discipleship as models from which local churches might learn and be equipped in developing their own accountable discipleship groups.

8. We recommend that new church starts in the Global Methodist Church begin with accountable discipleship groups as an essential requirement for new and charter members.

Respectfully Submitted by the Members of the WCA Accountable Discipleship Task Force:

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Appendix
Resources for Launching Accountable Discipleship Initiatives
Prepared by Pat Roddy

Summary

This document is a companion to the *Report of the WCA Accountable Discipleship Task Force*. That paper defines what we mean with the word “disciple,” provides the theological and historical foundation for the value of Accountable Discipleship in a new Wesleyan movement, and emphasizes the urgency to find a new approach for a new movement.

This document is offered as a next step for those churches and pastors interested in learning more about how to implement Accountable Discipleship in your local context. It does not prescribe any one method, but instead offers a bibliography of resources. This includes references to Wesleyan churches who have experienced revival fueled by small groups (one expression of Accountable Discipleship but not the only one), books on the topic, and resource repositories.

The Holy Spirit is moving in so many ways across the world right now, and we encourage you to learn more as you ask Him to lead you on your next steps for implementing Accountable Discipleship.

Getting Started

Around the world today “Small Groups” are the most common expression of John Wesley’s “Class Meeting” concept. The goal of the small group is life transformation or “entire sanctification.”

Joel Comiskey has led churches and small groups in the United States and Central America, and has been coaching churches worldwide for twenty years. He advises these Three Steps in Starting a Small Group:

1. The church’s key leaders must be involved – senior pastor and key lay leaders. There must be commitment to being involved in a small group themselves and to promote the ministry.
2. Focus on the details – count the cost. People and resources must be dedicated for training and coaching leaders. Many churches find it helpful learn about small groups and engage an outside coach to help them think through their approach. Most churches begin by using an equipping series developed by another church or outside publisher, and eventually adapt the material to their own unique context.
3. Launch a pilot group – this is best catalyzed by the senior pastor hand-picking group members who may be other staff members and influential lay persons. One key requirement of each person in this pilot group is that they should be ready and willing to

eventually start their own small group. As the pilot group births, the pastor must enthusiastically support those new groups being formed.

The following lists of resources are certainly not exhaustive, and we welcome additional input.

Books related to Accountable Discipleship

This section references several of many very helpful books that provide strong introductions to the “why” for small groups, as well as practical advice for getting started.

The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience by Dr. Kevin Watson. Dr. Kevin Watson has written a fresh new guide to the theory and practice of the Wesley class meeting, an essential element of truly Wesleyan spirituality. This book is for clergy and congregations who are looking for ways to develop deeper discipleship. The class meeting is made workable without losing its essential dynamic as a gospel-based accountable community. Watson has resurrected the class meeting and given it new meaning, showing its relevance for the church today and how it may be a perfect means for church renewal.

The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community by Dr. Kevin Watson. The stunning success of early Methodism as a disciple-making movement was made possible because of John Wesley’s genius in organizing believers into band meetings. This book powerfully demonstrates that the band meeting is not merely another church program, but is ultimately the basic transformational community that enables us to be “saved to the uttermost.” In our age of digital disconnection, we need Christian practices of community more than ever, as well as a clear sense of what “social holiness” actually is and why it matters. In *The Band Meeting*, two of the best theological minds have collaborated to help recover true social holiness through the band meeting. This volume is clear and readable, historically informed, and theologically rich.

Making Disciples in the Twenty-First Century Church: How the Cell-Based Church Shapes Followers of Jesus by Joel Comiskey. Christ's last command to his disciples was for them to repeat the process He led them through and to reproduce new disciples. But how were they supposed to do that? This book answers these questions. The early church followed Christ's pattern by making disciples through the house churches that periodically celebrated together in public worship. In 2 Timothy 2:1-2, Paul tells Timothy to continue the discipleship process by passing on the pure gospel message to faithful men and women. Even though the term "disciple" is later replaced by words such as "brothers," "sisters," "Christians," and "saints," the concept remains the same.

The Church in Many Houses: Reaching Your Community through Cell-Based Ministry by Rev. Dr. Steve Cordle. Although the largest churches in the world are cell-based, many have questioned whether the model will work in North America. *The Church in Many Houses: Reaching Your Community Through Cell-Based Ministry* makes the case that the cell model will work --- if key assumptions about spiritual growth and the nature of the church are re-examined and

renewed. By drawing on scripture, research and insights gained through personal experience as the pastor of a growing cell church, Steve Cordle identifies five pivotal philosophical shifts necessary for the cell approach to work. These are: * from programs to relationships * from member to disciple-maker * from educating to equipping * from "come and see" to "go and show" * from church with cells to church is cell Imposing a cell structure upon a congregation that has not yet made these philosophical shifts will likely lead to failure. But when people adopt these biblical mindset changes, the cell approach seems natural and will result in great unity and effectiveness.

How to Lead a Great Cell Group Meeting So People Want to Come Back - Joel Comiskey. Do people expectantly return to your group meetings every week? Do you have fun and experience joy during your meetings? Is everyone participating in discussion and ministry? You can lead a great cell group meeting, one that is life changing and dynamic. Most people don't realize that they can create a God-filled atmosphere because they don't know how. Now the secret is out. This guide will show you how.

Where Do We Go From Here? A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church by Ralph W. Neighbour Jr. With updated data on new cell church models, new information on equipping and harvest events and practical teaching on how to begin a transition, this book will continue to stir hearts to dream about what the church can be. You will find hope for the church in North America and discover the new things that Dr. Neighbour has learned over the last 10 years.

The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21st Century by William A. Beckham. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed ninety-five Theses on the Wittenberg Church door as an invitation to debate the foundational beliefs of the established church. 480 years later, The Second Reformation slovenly, yet firmly, challenges us to evaluate the church today. This book deals with hard questions that many of us have wrestled with for years: * Why is the church so ineffective at confronting the desperate needs of our society? * Why are so many church leaders experiencing burnout? * How do we shift from just making converts to making disciples? * Can we really experience the church. We read about in the book of acts? Not satisfied with simply pointing to problems in the church, Beckham also suggests biblical and practical solutions to these problems. After assessing the current state of the church, he lays a firm theological foundation before outlining it practical to sign for the twenty-first century church. With years of experience as a pastor, missionary, church planter and teacher, he challenges the church to evaluate her beliefs and design.

Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches by Wolfgang Simson. Millions of Christians around the world are becoming aware of an imminent reformation of global proportions within the church. God is changing this revered institution and is making a new collective awareness of an age-old revelation, a corporate spiritual echo that reflects God's desire for the church. In this book, Simson brings to light what God is saying to Christians everywhere. Researched across the globe, he presents the case for the reformation of the church's existence. In a world where the church is being ignored, it is time to bring the church to the people and not the people to the church. Whether it is what we know as church from the

last five years or the last five hundred years, no one has truly been able to break free from the structures of the past. Many may see this book as radical, many may see it as a reforming of old ideals but all who read it will be challenged and their priorities refocused in a life-changing way.

The House Church: A New Testament Church in the 21st Century by Young Chai. Why do we need yet another book on the topic of house churches? ... There are several purposes for this book that may not be addressed by other books on house churches. First, it may serve as a guide for minority churches, especially those in challenging environments. This book tells the story of our church, Seoul Baptist Church of Houston ... Our story may show minority churches how they can become successful in environments where there are fundamental differences in race and culture between the churches and the areas they are in, such as mission churches in foreign lands. Another goal of this book is to show how traditional churches can be converted to house churches ... This book shares my experiences in converting a 14-year-old traditional Baptist church to a house church system and discusses how other traditional churches might do the same ... Growth should be the byproduct of a church's effort to be a true New Testament church rather than the goal ... This book is not a house church manual. Rather, it's a testimony of one person who longed to recreate the New Testament church and has, in a small way, been successful.

Examples of Wesleyan Churches Who Gave Implemented Accountable Discipleship

Laurel Hill United Methodist Church, Richmond VA. Pastor Yunho Eo. This church has implemented a three-pronged approach to a healthy church: Worship, Accountable Discipleship Groups, and Disciple Training.

Crossroads Church near Pittsburgh, PA is a multi-campus church with two wings: Cell (small groups) and Celebration (weekly worship gatherings). A small group is a great place to know people at Crossroads, grow in Christ, and share the love of Christ with others. The focus of the small group meeting is to apply the weekend message (whatever the pastor spoke about) to our lives.

Munger Place UMC in Dallas has had a stunning rebirth in the past dozen years. From their website:

The Power of a Simple Question. Small Groups are structured around a simple question: "How is your life with God?" The very act of asking that simple question on a weekly basis causes you to pay more attention to your spiritual formation. Asking that one question at any particular group meeting might not seem significant, but asking that question in the presence of like-minded friends on an ongoing, weekly basis, is a practice that the Holy Spirit can use to drastically change your life. In the same way, doing a few pushups on any particular day won't do much at all, but doing a few pushups every day for years will make a great deal of difference. (If you'd like to know more about how our small groups are structured, check out Kevin Watson's book, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming the Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience.*)

Small Groups in Hispanic UMC in Texas – partnership with Joel Comiskey.

- Dr. Joel Comiskey has worked with churches around the world. He was highly recommended to us by Rev. Patricia Peña, a Hispanic Pastor in our denomination, who was coached by Dr. Comiskey as she grew a new church plant from zero to three hundred in two-and-a-half years. Patricia attributes much of her church's growth to her small group network strategy; a strategy she put together with Comiskey's coaching. The Comiskey method is very successful.
- We want to grow our Hispanic communities through small group ministry. The Methodist church in countries like Cuba and Brazil are growing and multiplying in significant ways through networks of "mission groups" and "house churches." Why can't we do the same here?

Grace Church, Fort Myers, FL. Led by Jorge Acevedo, the vision statement is "*To partner with God in transforming people from unbelievers to fully devoted disciples of Jesus to the glory of God.*" Sma Examples of Wesleyan churches who have implemented Accountable Discipleship

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Small groups are the primary vehicle for life transformation.

This is how we seek to fulfill our vision of helping people grow into fully devoted disciples of Jesus, guided by our values. We draw inspiration from John Wesley's strategy for making disciples in 18th century England: "For each wave of grace, there was a corresponding formative element to connect people to that grace...this conscious alignment is one of Wesley's finest legacies to the Christian tradition." *The Way to Heaven by Steve Harper, pg. 121.*

See also Pastor Jorge's book *Vital: Churches Changing Communities and the World*

Resources for Small Groups and Accountable Discipleship

Everyday Disciples: John Wesley's 22 Questions. These are 22 questions the members of John Wesley's Holy Club asked themselves every day in their private devotions over 200 years ago. Discipleship Ministries, an agency of the United Methodist Church, connects leaders with needed resourcing, training, consulting, and networking that support spiritual formation, new church development, revitalization of local churches, and materials for use in Central

Conferences. The agency has embarked upon an integrated, strategic direction that serves the church with continuity, based upon basic values and mission.

Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth by Chris Wilterdink, resources pastors, youth leaders, and youth groups with information and planning materials related to Covenant Discipleship and accountability practices. Covenant Discipleship encourages youth to connect with Christ and one another through mutual accountability. It also encourages a networked support structure for living in the world as Christ followers.

Discipleship Bands: A Practical Field Guide (Seedbed). A discipleship band is a group of 3-5 people who read together, pray together and meet together to become the love of God for one another and the world. This booklet is designed to guide you in practical ways to commence and pursue this pathway of banding together in micro-community discipleship—both through the free app available at discipleshipbands.com/app or in an offline capacity with your group.

3DMovements - We are made up of men and women around the world who are following Jesus together, multiplying disciples who make disciples, and empowering spiritual families to live on mission for the sake of the lost. We are a richly diverse movement of people from different walks of life, socio-economic contexts, ethnic backgrounds, and spiritual traditions. What unites us is our love for God, our desire to live the life Jesus modeled for us, and our passion to see the good news of his kingdom come to all people.

Our vision is to equip the church to live out the Way of Jesus more fully and so help to ignite a Great Awakening. To this end, we invest in leaders of established churches, church plants, megachurches, house churches, parachurch organizations, denominations, businesses, and families to build a discipling culture that produces a missional movement with the power to change the world. Simply put, *3DM exists to put Jesus-Shaped discipleship and mission back into the hands of everyday people!*

Pursuegod.org - Pursuegod.org is a library of Bible-based conversation starters designed to help Christians make disciples. These resources can be used as small group curriculum in a local church and can also be shared by individuals with their friends, families and neighbors to facilitate transformational conversations.

ministrypass.com Offers more than 500 complete sermon series, including appropriate small group questions.

Crossroads Church – as described in Dr. Steve Cordle’s book The Church In Many Houses, Crossroads is a cell-based United Methodist Church. Their small group resources page includes resources such as small group covenants, coaching reports, and job descriptions for coaches. They also provide weekly Group Guides which are used by leaders to facilitate small group sessions. At Crossroads the weekly small group discussions are based on the weekend message under the premise that most of us can only change one thing about ourselves at a time; if

transformation is the goal let's talk about how we apply the weekend message to our lives in the context of accountable discipleship.

thinkorange.com We want to help you create a better experience this week for kids and teenagers. Among other resources Orange provides small group-based curriculum.

WCA Accountable Discipleship Task Force
Appendix A
Transition for Existing Churches

Transitioning existing churches into a denomination where membership in the local church is tied to participation in an accountable discipleship small group requires an informed, gracious, and timely process. As stated in the Task Force Report:

Implementing a plan for accountable discipleship will take some time for existing local churches joining the Global Methodist Church from the United Methodist Church. Each annual conference will assist its clergy and existing local churches in developing accountable discipleship groups. Bishops, presiding elders, and pastors will work together to develop expectations and benchmarks for accountable discipleship, and monitor the progress of each local church in the annual conference (p. 10).

Existing United Methodist churches who join the new denomination will have challenges in transitioning membership from a low expectation model to a high expectation model for church membership. To provide a road map for that transition, the Task Force proposed a phased implementation process for existing churches.

A Phased Implementation of Accountable Discipleship in Existing Local Churches

A three-year transition plan may be configured as follows:

Year 1: Teaching and Training on Accountable Discipleship – The local church engages in a year of study and preparation on the purpose and practice of accountable discipleship using resources prepared by the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry. Annual Conferences can provide leadership and resourcing for this training as well. Such training and resourcing may take place within existing social space groups within the church, such as Bible study groups or Sunday School classes, and encourage them to experiment with accountable discipleship within those established group relationships.

Year 2: Pilot Groups for Potential Group Leaders – During the second year, the local church launches pilot accountable discipleship groups primarily consisting of persons whom the church leadership identifies as potential group leaders. The pilot groups spend a year experiencing the accountable discipleship process and learn how to lead them.

Year 3: First Accountable Discipleship Groups Launched – The leaders who were trained and who gained experience in Year 2 begin leading their own accountable discipleship small groups. These initial groups should especially include current church leaders and those may be coming into leadership in the near future. Additional groups should be added as leadership becomes available.

A phased process allows time for people to adjust to new expectations and also for those who discover the power of these groups to share their experiences and testify to their own transformation.

Another consideration within this option is to simply “grandfather” existing members who cannot or will not participate in accountable discipleship groups while working with leaders and new members on implementation of accountable discipleship groups. This avoids different categories of membership but does place the emphasis on those who are pursuing accountable discipleship when receiving new members and choosing church leaders for the future.

What about those who may have difficulty participating in an accountable discipleship small group?

Some may want to participate in accountable discipleship small groups but may be unable because of physical or mental limitations, or limited availability of transportation, or lack of access to communication technology. For others, participation may also be conditioned by a particular season in life. Families with young children, for example, need significant support and accommodation in order to fully participate in ways that work for their busy schedules. Those struggling with chronic illness, or who are homebound, or who may be responsible for caring for aging parents may need similar accommodation. The local church should ensure that all persons who want to participate in a group have the means to do so, whether that involves accessibility provisions, altering locations or schedules, providing childcare, helping with technology, arranging transportation, etc.

Those who are differently abled may require special consideration and, if they are not able to fully participate in an accountable discipleship small group, a group should consider engaging in a caring relationship with that person, providing ongoing support, visitation, and prayer.

Accountable discipleship small groups tend to function more as family units where the dominant purpose is to “watch over one another in love.” Creative and caring approaches to developing small groups will not only allow for maximum participation but also provide opportunities for each group to demonstrate Christ-like love toward one another.

“Sunday School” and Transformational Bible Study

United Methodists have a fairly strong tradition of “Sunday School” and other adult Bible studies (e.g., weeknight studies led by pastors or laity). There was some discussion within the Accountable Discipleship Task Force concerning the value of such groups. Critics averred that Sunday School groups were more interested in acquiring new *information* about Scripture than in engaging Scripture formationally and one another personally around Scripture’s formational challenge. Questions were raised about the value of even continuing such groups in the new denomination. Advocates pointed out that “Sunday School” was not a monolithic entity and that groups could find themselves anywhere on the spectrum from a grossly imbalanced emphasis on information only (e.g., listening to a teacher lecture) to a well-balanced experience

of reading Scripture for information with a view to formation. Sunday School resources also display a wide variety along the same spectrum. And ultimately the problem in our congregations is not a glut of Scriptural literacy, but rather a failure both to acquire biblical literacy *and* to engage those texts transformationally.

It seems more constructive to embrace well-established structures that help parishioners engage Scripture and simply help them engage Scripture *better*, i.e., with a view to how each week's Scripture passage(s) call us to self-examination, repentance, and constructive change. At the same time, it is important to change the "culture" of many Sunday School groups, encouraging their members' willingness to become more transparent with – and support of – one another in regard to these very things. One of the tasks for the Commission on Discipleship and Just Ministry may be to identify and to create "adult Bible Study" resources that will achieve these goals within the structures for Bible Study already in place in local congregations. What follows is a sample plan that might help groups think first about the kind of "information" that will provide the groundwork for transformational engagement and then, of course, provide guidance for the latter.

A Sample Plan for Transformational Bible Study

David deSilva

a. You reading Scripture – informational engagement (25-30 minutes)

Understanding the Text:

- i. What does this passage *say*? (It's important to shed our familiarity and presuppositions and really look at the words and what they are communicating afresh.)
- ii. What does this passage *mean*?
- iii. What questions do we have about what the passage means? What information do we not have? What is confusing?
- iv. What objections do we have to what we think the text is saying? (These are worth examining, both in regard to the text and *ourselves*).

Exploring the Text (note: very few passages will actually speak to *all* of these):

- i. What does this passage show us regarding God's character and heart – particularly God's heart for human beings?
- ii. What does this passage show us regarding God's vision for our living in righteousness and holiness as part of a redeemed, covenant community?
- iii. What does this passage show us regarding the forces and impulses that get in the way of living in righteousness and holiness in community?
- iv. What does this passage tell us about God's provisions and possible strategies for our attaining God's vision for us and overcoming the obstacles to the same?

v. What does this passage tell us about the stakes involved?

b. Scripture reading *you* – formational engagement (25-30 minutes)

Questions to ask as you allow the Scriptures to read each of *you*:

- i. Where do I see attitudes I have had, words I have spoken, interactions I have had, and actions I have taken positively reflected in the things commended in this passage?
- ii. Where do I see attitudes I have had, words I have spoken, interactions I have had, and actions I have taken reflected in the things this passage warns or advises *against*?
- iii. What steps do I need to take, and do we need to take together, to move closer to the positive ideals commended here, and to leave behind further the negative traits and practices identified here?

Close with prayer for one another, that God would cause these specific insights to take root and bear fruit in each other's lives starting in the days ahead.