

# Intentional Faith Development

ESTABLISHING STANDARDS FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

*Through Christian education  
we invite people and communities to:*

- *Know and experience God through Jesus Christ,*
- *Claim and live God's promises, and*
- *Grow and serve as Christian disciples.*

The above purpose statement from *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education In Your Congregation* describes the theological underpinnings of intentional faith development in The United Methodist Church. This leaflet is designed to help your congregation as it develops standards as part of a comprehensive plan to fulfill this purpose in your unique context.

## A Few Definitions

We are using the term *standards*, but *metrics*, *measures*, and *dashboards* are related terms that are growing more prominent in our local church vocabulary. Various references explain them in many different ways, and sometimes *metrics* and *measures* are used interchangeably. For our purposes, measures are more concrete or objective attributes (“How do you know?”) and metrics (standards) are more abstract or interpretive. A dashboard is an “at-a-glance” means of tracking our measurements. You may be asked to provide data for your church on some of these metrics in your area of ministry. (For a more detailed explanation, go to [www.umvitalcongregations.com](http://www.umvitalcongregations.com) for an example of a dashboard.)

The information that you will find in this leaflet, generally, deals with metrics; that is, standards that describe spiritual growth. Measures would help us know how many people participate in how many groups or classes what percentage of the time. Measures might help us to know if specific information has been acquired (as in, you can name all the books of the Bible). Metrics gather the narratives, experiences, and other data to describe spiritual progress (as in, you are more loving, generous, and hospitable than you were a year ago).

## How Do Standards Help Your Ministry?

While we know generally what people can do and understand at various ages, there is great difficulty in building a “scope and sequence” plan for who will know what, be what, and do what by any given time. People attend Christian formation opportunities sporadically, begin (and stop) at different ages, enter through multiple means, experience things in different ways, and interpret experiences and beliefs in their own unique ways. In short, there is little consistency of participation and exposure across the Church or even within a local church.

This is not to say, however, that we should not have standards or developmental targets. The information in this leaflet provides a starting place to envision a process of faith development, Christian identity, spiritual discipline, and biblical literacy across the whole community of faith. Through these standards, you have opportunity to hear and understand the stories that your people tell about their lives and encounters with God that, over time, build their spiritual relationships and resources. Conversely, if there is little evidence for any of the standards you set, that signals where your disciple making system needs more attention.

## What About Measures?

If knowing your desired outcomes (standards) is a key to your planning, then establishing measures is the key to evaluating your activities.

Measures must be age-appropriate. For example, a measure to assess middle-schoolers related to the standard to “live in accordance with Scripture that may be at odds with cultural values” might be that 70% of students will be able to confront bullying or report cheating.

Measures (and strategies) should reflect your context and your current reality. Setting a goal for 100 new people in classes and groups at the end of a year may be a reasonable goal in a church with 800 members, but may be overly ambitious for a church with 150 members (though having all members in classes or groups that enhance Christian growth is a good thing to work for). Setting a goal for 100

new people in worship in a community that is growing is more realistic than in a community that is losing residents.

What you evaluate will be both quantitative (that is, what you can count) and qualitative (that is, what relates to character, quality, and feelings). It is worth knowing “how many” and “how much” related to information, participation, giving, and sending forth. It is even more worthwhile to be able to track what effect your ministries are having on the people who participate. Both the personal witness and the witness of the community concerning the blessings and benefits of your ministries tell a more complete story of Christian transformation.

One final word—take a long-term approach to standards and measures. While there is every reason to set short-term goals and challenges in your Christian formation ministry, remember that growth is a daily, life-long endeavor that occurs in sometimes very tiny increments. The faithful task is to set direction and standards, then work steadily toward them, correcting and improving as experience suggests.

## About the Charts

Becoming a faithful disciple is a lifelong process that includes **information** (what we know), **formation** (who we are and are becoming), and **transformation** (how the world is changed because of who we are and what we do). As you begin to develop your own standards you will want to make sure that all three aspects are considered. To assist in this process we have developed two charts to guide your planning.

Found on pages five through eight, these charts begin with the three bullets in the purpose statement from *Foundations* and then suggest standards or outcome statements that help you assess faith development in these three areas as you move along the inform, form, and transform continuum.

Though *inform*, *form*, and *transform* are displayed as distinct categories or sets of activities and experiences, the process of disciple making is not a tidy, straight line from one set to the next, and not every experience falls neatly into one category. The indicator statements provided for each aspect do not describe specifically what those experiences might be at any given age. Clearly they are descriptive, but not all-inclusive, so you may want to change or add something.

## Standards for Growth In Christian Faith

The chart “Standards for Growth in Christian Faith” has three main sections (reading down the page). Each section reflects one of the major aspects of Christian formation as described and in *Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education In Your Congregation*. As the foundational document for our ministry of Christian education and formation, you are encouraged to read this document with your team before beginning to plan. (See the listing on page 8 for downloading information.)

The first section focuses on “to know and experience God through Jesus Christ” and reminds us that we do that through the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

The second section focuses on “to claim and live God’s promises.” Those promises being that God will be our God, God will live in relationship with us, and God will be with us forever.

The third section focuses on “to grow and serve as Christian disciples.” We do this by growing in faith, living in community, and serving in the world.

The standards statements in the white boxes of each section reflect the outcomes we would expect as people are informed (know), formed (shaped), and transformed (live) in these three areas.

Remember that the flow of inform, form, and transform is not always linear. Some people, for example, may want to learn more because of a radical cultural experience on a mission trip (transformation to information). Others may have a life-changing crisis that prompts them to change poor habits to healthy ones, and then gain the insight from Scripture for how to hang on to those changes (transformation to formation). Someone else may have been formed with values contrary to the faith, seen the example of a mature Christian, then engaged in Bible study to gain that same maturity (formation to information to transformation).

## Planning for Intentional Faith Development

The chart “Sample: Planning for Intentional Faith Development” follows the same basic organizational principles as the previous chart. In place of the standards statements are examples of subjects, experiences, activities, and practices that can help achieve the standards. For example, the standard “we know the Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments is the sufficient rule of faith and practice,” can be achieved by Bible study.

Of course the type of Bible study will be influenced by the developmental stage of participants, their previous experiences, and their current life issues.

The disciple making process is not merely a function of your Christian education ministry. The whole church and all its ministries together are responsible for the formation and nurture of people as Christian disciples. The chart, then, also offers examples from a broad range of ministry areas.

One value of this interrelated and more holistic approach is that it allows us to see intentional faith formation as a function of more than Christian education ministry (or even the Sunday school). Disciple making is a combined work among the ministries of evangelism, worship, stewardship, missions, leader development and administration, fellowship, accountability groups and more.

## Using the Charts

You can use these charts in several ways. **One way is to examine the standards that are currently stated or implied in your church's faith formation ministry.** What are your standards? Are they clearly stated and clearly understood?

**Secondly, clear standards are the platform on which you build your church's disciple-making plans and strategies.** If the standard is to know that "spiritual disciplines are a means of grace that help us grow closer to God," what strategies or plans must be in place to reach that standard?

For the strategies to make sense, you will need to consider developmental stages as well as individual and community context. For example, the strategy for a three-year-old to understand that "spiritual disciplines help us grow closer to God" might be to model prayer and have them see

teachers reading from the Bible. A strategy for young adults might be to have them develop a "Rule of Life" that includes prayer and Bible study to which they commit for a specific period.

**A third way to use these charts is as a filter through which you examine your overall ministry and the resources you use to conduct that ministry.** If your church's ministry is organized using this model, then all your ministry activity would need to fit into and fulfill at least one of the blocks on the model. The things we spend our time and energy on, however good, are not necessarily ministry, so we need a way to decide what is done with the time and resources at hand.

In other words, you might hold up for examination everything you do. If that activity, however good it seems, does not serve the purpose of informing, forming, or transforming people as they know and experience God, claim and live God's promises, and grow and serve as a disciples, then you would eliminate it from your plans. The Church needs to do what only the Church can do. Having a filter through which you examine your plans and activities helps to focus your ministry on what is most effective for disciple making.

In addition, the charts may be used to assess the curriculum or other resources that you use as tools to accomplish your ministry. As you examine the Sunday school, small group, and other study material, can you find in it how it helps the user to know and experience God or to grow and serve as a disciple? Not every resource needs to speak to every part of the process, but overall, your curriculum and other resources should support your plan to inform, form, and transform people according to the established theological framework of the Church.

# Standards for Growth in Christian Faith

Our faith rests in knowing and experiencing God through Jesus Christ, claiming and living God's promises, and growing and serving as Christian disciples. As United Methodists, we value the Wesleyan Quadrilateral of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as filters through which we both understand and interpret our faith.

The flow or process of Christian formation shows how we move among what we know, how our lives and identity are formed, and how we are transformed fully into living as

Christ would live in the world. This process is more cyclic and interrelated than linear, and people can enter the flow in many places.

When we lay out the process, as it stands upon a firm theological foundation and as it is filtered and interpreted through the Quadrilateral, we identify key standards for our faith formation. The task of the local church is to identify, in ways appropriate to age and context, the specific strategies or plans that will achieve the standards and to establish the measures

## WE KNOW AND EXPERIENCE GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST BY Being Grounded in Scripture, Enlivened by Experience, Enlightened by Christian Tradition, and Tested by Reason

INFORM: We know...	FORM: Our identity is shaped...	TRANSFORM: We live...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Word of God contained in the Old and New Testaments is the sufficient rule of faith and practice.</li> <li>• Spiritual disciplines are means of grace that help us grow closer to God.</li> <li>• Elements of Christian tradition, such as prayers, hymns, creeds, sacraments, and celebrations help us to express our faith.</li> <li>• The ability to think critically and creatively is a gift from God that is to be used in our whole life, including our faith.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By sacred story as we read and study the Bible.</li> <li>• As we practice both corporate and individual spiritual disciplines and other means of grace.</li> <li>• As we live within the rhythm of the church year.</li> <li>• Through reasoning as we reflect upon the implications of Christian teaching, evaluate our actions in light of Scripture, and make decisions for the future.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In accordance with Scripture, sometimes resulting in actions that are at odds with the values of our culture.</li> <li>• More like Jesus as we experience God's sanctifying grace and reach out to those who are on the margins.</li> <li>• As participants in the continuing story of the Church in the world, inviting others to join us in working for a more just and peaceful world.</li> <li>• As those who are able to analyze current and emerging situations in light of the gospel, changing structures and systems as needed.</li> </ul>

## WE CLAIM AND LIVE GOD'S PROMISES THAT

God Will Be Our God, God Will Live in Relationship With Us, God Will Be With Us Forever

### INFORM: We know...

- God as the Creator in covenant with the whole of Creation.
- God as incarnate in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- God continues to be present with us for providing guidance, comfort, and strength through the Holy Spirit.

### FORM: Our identity is shaped...

- As we practice gratitude and thanksgiving and as we give and receive forgiveness.
- As we participate in a covenant community of faith and invite others into Christian community.
- As trust in God's love and grace gives us the confidence to live into the future with hope.

### TRANSFORM: We live...

- As people created in the image of God, as we treat all of Creation with care and respect, advocating for practices that honor and preserve Creation.
- So as to affirm and nurture the presence of God in our lives and in the lives of others, including those who do not know God.
- As partners in God's intention for the world and as advocates for peace with justice.

## WE GROW AND SERVE AS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES BY

Growing in Faith, Living in Community, Serving in the World

### INFORM: We know...

- Christian faith is an ongoing process and a way of life that goes beyond teaching concepts and ideas.
- Healthy, mutual relationships are necessary for discipleship.
- There are many ways to be in ministry and that ministry is an expression of our love for God and our neighbor.

### FORM: Our identity is shaped...

- As we express our personal experience of the Christian faith.
- By participating with others in Christian community that has both support and accountability.
- By including the needs of others in our local community into our prayer life and our other spiritual disciplines.

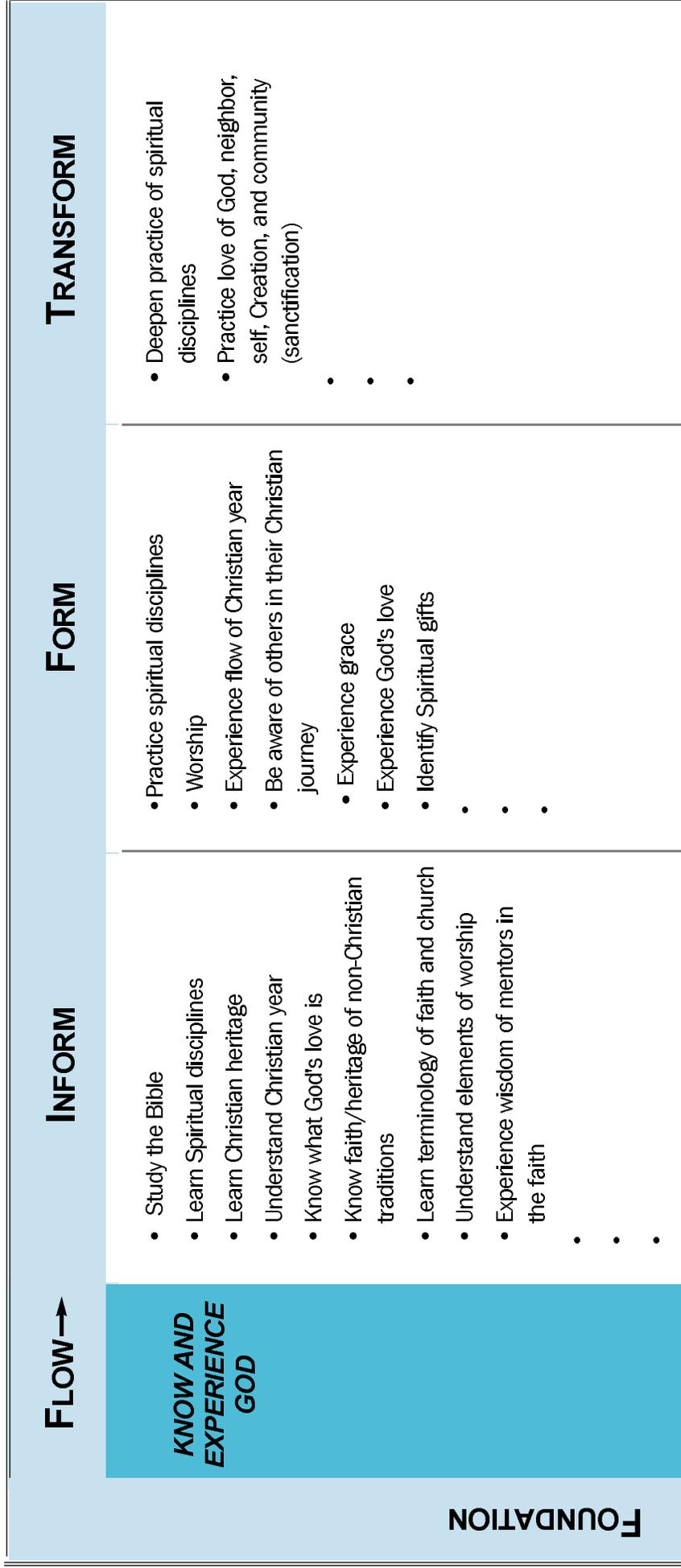
### TRANSFORM: We live...

- So that our faith bears fruit in the world and touches others.
- Out our discipleship so that our community is more just, whole, and healthy.
- As people called to ministry who have a vocation in the world to change systems that tear down rather than build up.

# Sample: Planning for Intentional Faith Development

The examples of subjects, experiences, activities, and practices found in this sample chart illustrate how you might begin to develop goals and strategies based on the standards from the chart “Standards for Growth in Christian Faith.” The examples are fairly general, but you may develop much more specific entries based on the activities of your church, the developmental stage of those you are in ministry with, and your community context. You may want to begin by identifying all of the ongoing ministries of your congregation and determining where in the chart they most appropriately fit.

Given the non-linear nature of faith formation, items can show up in different ways and with different emphases in more than one area. For example, an intergenerational Bible study in which older adults teach children how to look up passages in the Bible as well as tell Bible stories that have been significant in their lives, may be both informational and formational. It may be part of your plan to help the children study the Bible as well as a way to help the older adults share their faith. Such an activity might be placed in the “Information” section of “Know and Experience God Through Jesus Christ” as well as in the “Formation” section of “Claim and Live God’s Promises.”



**CLAIM AND LIVE GOD'S PROMISES**

- Know God's promises
- Learn core Christian values
- Understand covenantal nature of Christian community
- Recognize seasons of life— normative and non-normative experiences
- Understand nature of stewardship
- Develop skill of theological reflection
- Understand abundance of God
- Understand one's baptismal vows
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- Share my own faith story
- Use of music/ arts for faith formation and expression
- Worship
- Take responsibility for own discipleship
- Share own abundance
- Live out of Christian values
- Participate in accountability
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- Apply biblical lessons, principles to life situations and circumstances
- Share fruit of theological reflection with others
- Live in covenantal relationship
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**GROW AND SERVE AS CHRISTIAN DISCIPLES**

- Stay in learning opportunities for life
- Understand and develop theology of mission
- Learn nature of radical hospitality
- Understand one's membership vows
- Recognize the broad meaning of stewardship as a generous way of life
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- Participate in missions
- Give own money, time, talent
- Donate materially to meet need of others
- Employ spiritual gifts
- Intercessory prayer
- Deepen the practice of stewardship
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- Seek and work for justice and mercy
- Visit sick, prisoner, poor, vulnerable, homebound
- Accept spiritual challenges beyond comfort zone
- Love without reservation
- Seek the mind of Christ
- Sacrificial giving and living
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## Helpful Resources

The listings here can be accessed through [www.gbod.org](http://www.gbod.org) unless noted otherwise. Many of them are in the section for Christian Education and Formation [www.gbod.org/education](http://www.gbod.org/education). Often the quickest way to locate these resources is to go to your favorite search engine and enter the title of the resource followed by GBOD.

### Core resources

Use these resources for understanding, planning, leading, and evaluating your ministry of Christian education and formation.

- [www.gbod.org/education](http://www.gbod.org/education). Resources for Christian education and Christian formation leadership
- ***Comprehensive Plan for Teacher Development***. A chart showing a continuum of skills from “do no harm” to “do all the good you can” for teachers and group leaders.
- ***Development Through the Life Span***. A chart showing age-level characteristics, development in various areas, needs, gifts, expectations, and more.
- ***Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation***. This expresses core beliefs in Christian education and formation. Work with your team to unpack what this means in your own place, experience, and specific ministry plans.
- **The 2013 Guidelines** (available for purchase from Cokesbury in the fall of 2012) provide information on various ministry areas, including establish appropriate measures. See Christian Education, the age-level and family ministries volumes, and others.
- ***iTeach***. A free monthly e-letter for teachers and leaders on various aspects of Christian education and formation leadership.
- ***Conducting a ministry of Christian education and formation***. Articles on recruiting teachers, forming a leadership team, working with curriculum and budget, and more.

## GBOD Websites

- Children: [www.gbod.org/children](http://www.gbod.org/children) ; see in that site “What Every Child Should Experience”
- Young People: [www.gbod.org/youngpeople](http://www.gbod.org/youngpeople)
- Adult: [www.gbod.org/adult](http://www.gbod.org/adult)
- Older Adult: [www.gbod.org/olderadult](http://www.gbod.org/olderadult)
- Family: [www.gbod.org/family](http://www.gbod.org/family)
- Small Group: [www.gbod.org/smallgroups](http://www.gbod.org/smallgroups)
- Resources for Christian formation through The Upper Room: [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org), including the daily devotional and other magazines, Emmaus, Chrysalis, and the Academy of Spiritual Formation.

## Planning and Establishing Measures

- ***Measures and Evaluation Tool***. A thorough explanation of measures, how to set them, and how to do the planning leading up to the measures. (This is available through [www.umvitalcongregations.org](http://www.umvitalcongregations.org) in the Planning tab.)

## Congregational Vitality and Best Practices

- ***Pathways to Congregational Vitality*** is a series of occasional papers to help congregations gain insight into what makes a congregation healthy and positions it to grow more faithful and effective. Each of the papers is contained at this site and is also listed within the website in the specific area of ministry.
- **[www.umvitalcongregations.org](http://www.umvitalcongregations.org)** A collection of articles, tools, and other helps for planning for congregational vitality
- ***5 Ideas From GBOD***. A monthly e-letter with five different, short, great ideas for leading your church, to keep abreast of new resources and events.



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