



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

Fresh Expressions United Methodist

Local Church Guide

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Introduction

The church is living through one of the most significant missional moments in its history. People long for belonging, meaning, healing, and authentic community. The Holy Spirit is moving in the places of everyday life, inviting us to join in God's mission in the world in fresh, creative, and relational ways.

The church is rediscovering the power of a single word Jesus used to change the world: **Go**.

In *Sending Grace*, we explain that mission is not an add-on to the gospel but its pulse. God comes near, transforms, and then sends. *Sending Grace* is about movement: grace that refuses to sit still, grace that puts sandals on our feet and a blessing on our lips. It is the same grace that turned a handful of disciples into a global movement and transformed plastic chairs under a mango tree into a community of hope. It is the grace that turns pews into launchpads, committees into mission teams, and everyday spaces into holy ground.

Fresh Expressions is a movement built on the holy rhythms of listening, loving, cultivating community, spiritual formation, and being sent. Wesley called prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace the lifelong journey of God's love. What we add is simply what Wesley assumed: sanctifying grace always includes sending grace. There is

“no holiness but social holiness,” because holiness that does not move toward the neighbor is not yet holiness. When Christ is being formed in us, Christ begins moving through us—into classrooms and coffee shops, neighborhoods and networks, workplaces and wilderness places.

Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) did not emerge in isolation. FXUM was birthed through Path 1 at Discipleship Ministries and remains one of Path 1’s most dynamic ways of helping local churches cultivate new Christian communities among new people in new places. As *Sending Grace* emphasizes, the Spirit is already present in the ordinary spaces where people live their lives, and Path 1 continues to equip lay and clergy leaders to join that movement—teaching churches to listen deeply, experiment faithfully, discover people of peace, and organize communities of love shaped by Wesleyan grace. FXUM is a living expression of Path 1’s mission to help the church keep the “Go” at the center of discipleship, multiplying fresh, contextual, relational forms of church across the connection.

This leader guide is designed to help you live out sending grace with intention—not by starting programs, but by joining the Spirit’s movement of love in the ordinary places people live their lives. Fresh Expressions grow at the pace of relationships. They begin when ordinary disciples listen, love, form community, share faith, become church, and repeat. They flourish when teams cultivate a habitat of inclusive, accessible, transfiguring, connectional love. They multiply not through prediction or perfection but through prayerful experimentation, small risks, “failing forward,” and trusting the Spirit to guide the next faithful step.

What follows is a practical roadmap for teams that want to cultivate new Christian communities with and among new people in new places. You'll learn how to pray like listeners, discern like missionaries, build teams of diverse gifts, discover people of peace, and live out the kind of organized love that shaped the early Methodist movement. You will also learn to measure what truly matters—calling, movement, and multiplication—so that the Go stays at the center of your ministry.

Our world is aching for good news—for disciples who carry the flame into streets, workplaces, and third spaces. The Holy Spirit is still sending us. The harvest is still plentiful. And grace still has momentum.

May this guide help you hear the Spirit's invitation, gather companions for the journey, and step into the adventure of loving your neighbors in new ways and new places.

Let's Go...on mission together.

CHAPTER 1

Prayer: Contemplation & Action

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way...”

—LUKE 10:1-2, NRSV

In this verse, Jesus is orienting the disciples to their surroundings. He is teaching them to see the plentiful harvest and to understand that the laborers are few. He instructs them to pray, “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers” (Luke 10:2).

The disciples then become the answer to their own prayers. They must put sneakers on their prayers and then go! As they prepare to go, Jesus sends out the disciples in teams of two.

Perhaps there is a blueprint for the team formation process as we head out. Let’s begin with a conversation with God as a first step on our journey with Fresh Expressions.

Here are some prayer prompts:

- God, with whom are you calling me to partner?
Who is/are my teammate(s)?
- God, what people group are you calling us to be with?
- What place are you sending us to?

In Mark 1:35–39, Jesus retreats into a space of prayer and solitude. While the disciples rushed to find him, upon discovering him, they rushed to say that everyone had been searching for him. Jesus responds in purpose-driven confidence after his time in prayer. After prayer, Jesus pursues his purpose as he preaches in a nearby village. Luke 5:12–16 shows Jesus in action, healing a man with leprosy. This is a movement of action with the ending point, “He [Jesus] would withdraw to deserted places and pray.” Jesus’ life modeled a rhythm of retreat and advance, slow and fast, still and sent, contemplation and action.

Most church teams get stuck in the still form of contemplation without action for long periods of time. This delay of action can cause anxiety in members, as the movement of the church steadies to match the posture of stillness. It is often a response out of self-preservation, fear, or need that a church begins to attempt movement. We urge that this not be the motivation to begin the work of Fresh Expressions. Fresh Expressions must begin with listening first to God, neighbor, and self before stepping into action. We must be willing to retreat to a space where we fully listen and love to begin this work of discipling. Before moving into action, try praying the prayer prompts above and stepping out into your community in a prayerful posture.

As you begin to prayerfully spend time out in the community, do a prayer walk. Whom do you see? What do you notice? Remember these three guides:

- **Pray:** Actively pray over your harvest field; see the people and places.
- **Observe:** what do you notice about the people, places, and practices?
- **Encounter:** If someone engages with you, have a conversation, ask questions, learn their name and story.

Spend time in contemplation. What is God showing you from your time in prayer? Who is God showing you through the people and the places? What do you notice as a commonality or thread between those people and places? During your time in prayer keep a prayer journal to note what God may be laying on your heart.

Henri Nouwen wrote in *The Only Necessary Thing - Living a Prayerful Life*, “Prayer is the center of the Christian life. It is the only necessary thing. It is living with God here and now.”

Prayer is receiving and truly listening to God’s call in the here and now. Just as Jesus sent the disciples, Jesus sends us into the world. Because we are so busy, it is easy for us to become separate from our sent purpose. We must remember that a posture of listening is still, focused, and engaged. We cannot pray in a rush. To center our Christian lives, we must retreat from the rush. That will often free us from the stressors, anxiety, and expectations. How can we center our personal lives in scripture as Fresh Expressions leaders? What about as a church community? How can we expect our leaders to anchor themselves in prayer? What would it look like to become a community of prayer as we

engage and love new neighbors in our community in new places and new ways.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers and that we are anointed in the waters of our baptism. However, our human need for perfection may keep us in pause, even from God.

In *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, chapter four, C.S. Lewis answers a friend who asked how we know our desires are “worthy” to bring to God in prayer. In his response, Lewis says:

“Meantime, however, we want to know not how we should pray if we were perfect but how we should pray being as we now are. And if my idea of prayer as “unveiling” is accepted, we have already answered this. It is no use to ask God with factitious earnestness for A when our whole mind is, in reality, filled with the desire for B. We must lay before Him what is in us, not what ought to be in us.

Even an intimate human friend is ill-used if we talk to him about one thing while our mind is really on another, and even a human friend will soon become aware when we are doing so. You yourself came to see me a few years ago when the great blow had fallen upon me. I tried to talk to you as if nothing were wrong. You saw through it in five minutes. Then I confessed. And you said things which made me ashamed of my attempt at concealment.”

We must pray and listen for what is already within us, not what we want, hope, or think ought to be within us. As you venture into a journey of Fresh Expressions, you will begin to hear stories of practitioners who are engaged in some of the most beautiful stories being written by God in

this moment. They have started awe-inspiring expressions of church that are changing the lives of those in their community, seeing new disciples coming to faith and bringing the vibrancy of new life. A common thread among successful Fresh Expressions practitioners is to start from what is already within the practitioner. Start with what is in your hand, as God tells Moses.

Don't feel you need to compare yourself to other Fresh Expressions leaders or to replicate something outside of who you are. As you pray, allow the Spirit to move within you to bring forth your call in Fresh Expressions.

You will move out of the prayerful space into action as you receive clarity. To move into action, begin with these questions:

- Do you have at least one friend with whom you can partner?
- Are there people in your congregation, your family, friends, or a co-worker, who will commit to join you in this work of deep love?
- What do you already do every week—as a hobby, health or activity—that you could do with others?
- What places do you already spend time in your community (gym, playground, park, favorite restaurant, classroom, theater, coffee shop, library, online hangout)?
- Whom do you connect with in those spaces and how can you love them more intentionally?

CHAPTER 2

Purpose: The Greater Good

Then Jesus called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.

—LUKE 9:1-2, NRSV

Every great team is grounded in a shared purpose focused on the greater good. The kingdom of God refers to the will of God being done through the love and peace of God made real on earth. Purpose involves healing from hurt, wrongdoing, or brokenness.

The healthiest teams form around a common mission or shared dream. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines mission as “a specific task with which a person or a group is charged” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mission>). People are not our mission, and our goal is not to bring people to something. Fresh Expressions are forms of church for people who are not currently connected to any church. Amid an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, communal life in Jesus can provide safe relationships where people find authentic connection and healing. How do these communities connect to our purpose, mission, or dream?

Jesus sent out disciples in teams with a mission to “proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal” (Luke 9:2). In the United Methodist church, we are sent out in teams “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” “Making disciples” still does not make people our mission. It is important to understand what a *disciple* is. A disciple is a learner, pupil, or student. To be a disciple of Jesus Christ means studying the life of Jesus, engaging with the teachings of Jesus, and implementing those teachings in daily life. We are often asked where the discipleship is within a Fresh Expression. People may ask about Bible study or group book studies. However, discipleship is a journey. We share stories contextually as they relate to people and their lives. As we go about our days, we center on the growth of our community in depth and as individuals. We grow best in communities with a diversity of thought.

Ours is a polarizing world, and religion is often seen as more divisive than unifying. We must ask how we can center on our purpose without causing harm to people who have been traumatized by religious institutions “in the name of Jesus.” We must center on the teachings of Jesus and the way of Jesus.

Jesus laid out a path for discipleship through his life and teaching. Discipleship is not limited to one act or way of being. Jesus taught by engaging in personal conversations (see John 4:1–26), inviting questions and dialogue (see John 3:1–21), and using stories (Luke 10:25–37). Jesus did a lot more than just teaching with his disciples. He modeled a way of being. Jesus shared meals with people of all social standing, including those ostracized by society (Luke 5:29–32, Luke 19:1–10). Jesus met people where they were. He

met the fishermen in their workplace and used fishing as a metaphor (Luke 5:1-11). He connected to the daily lives of those he met, so his call to action was accessible. Jesus called people by name (Luke 19:1-10), showed compassion and empathy (Mark 5:25-34), walked alongside people (Luke 24:13-35), modeled servant leadership (John 13:1-7), tailored his words to individual needs and doubts (John 20:24-29), empowered others (Luke 10:1-20), wept (John 11:35), asked questions (Matthew 16:15), valued young people and children (Mark 10:13-16), and demonstrated sacrificial love (John 15:13).

Jesus' examples teach us how to relationally engage and disciple others. As we explore how we might "make disciples" in the way of Fresh Expressions, let's consider these questions.

- When have we engaged in conversations with someone new? How might we invite opportunities for conversation with strangers in day-to-day life as we feel called?
- Have we created a space for shared exploration that is safe for questions or dialogue? Are we regularly taking a judgment-free posture and respecting other opinions?
- Have we shared a meal with others recently? How might we add sharing meals as a regular practice?
- Have we connected to the practices of the day to share wisdom or hope from Jesus' teachings? How might we engage deeply with the world today and understand the lives of those we want to love more fully?
- Have we remembered and used people's names? Our waiter/waitress, cashier, or neighbor?

- Have we met people where they are? Have we intentionally engaged with people in the community, work, or recreation areas?
- Have we shown compassion and empathy rather than pity? Have we been with people?

What is the purpose of your team? Here are some guiding questions:

- What are the assets and opportunities in our community?
- What are the broken places and needs in our community?
- With whom is God calling us to form relationships?
- What are the intrinsic motivations of our team?

These questions can help your team find its purpose.

Teams become dysfunctional when they start to exist only for themselves and to sustain their own existence. Unhealthy church teams often get confused about their purpose. They take an “any means necessary approach” to demonstrate success in the prevailing metrics. This may mean they prioritize “the mission” over relationships, and the mission is often to “grow the church.”

In the Fresh Expressions movement, *relationships are the mission*. Our purpose is not to grow organizations, but to authentically listen to and love our neighbors.

Cultivating the Habitat: Values

“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

—JOHN 13:34-35, NRSVUE

A team is more than a collection of individuals. A team is a communal environment that nurtures relationships alongside a shared purpose. Some refer to this as “team culture.” Jesus teaches the disciples the kind of relational environment that he wants them to embody:

“Love each other as I have loved you” (John 13:34, NIV).

Jesus taught the disciples to be a community that embodies love. Loving one another is not just a commandment that forms the disciples. The lived experience of love, humility, and service practiced in an embodied communal environment helped instruct the disciples in how to *be* the church. Through the cultivation of this habitat of love in the likeness of Jesus’ practice, we can help people come to know Jesus.

We like to think about a team as a habitat of God's love that grows and sustains faith in everyday life. Habitats are organic and life-giving ecosystems shaped by the condition of their environment. A rainforest thrives on interdependence, a coral reef sustains a diverse ecosystem, and a desert has plants that hold water through the harsh, dry heat. A compassionate team must create a space where God's love can flourish. When we think about a team, it is easy to picture a committee or an organization with roles, structures, and goals. Jesus does not build an institutional structure; instead, he cultivates a movement. Through Jesus, a dynamic, relational, and purpose-driven community is formed that is built on shared values not rigid hierarchies.

Values are not just ideals or aspirations of a hopeful "one day"; they are the embodiment of these ideals. If I want to run a marathon but never get off my couch, it's an aspiration but not a value. If I'm serious, I will exercise, eat well, and train my mind and body for the race. Values are lived out in daily habits that guide decisions, actions, and the way we treat one another.

At Fresh Expressions United Methodist, our core values shape the relational habitat we are cultivating to fulfill the mission of the United Methodist Church in making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. These values form a guiding framework for the environment in which many habitats of Fresh Expressions will bud throughout the United Methodist Church.

A Fresh Expression is more than an event or a project. It is a full expression of church in a new space deeply shaped by shared values. The values of Fresh Expressions are not mere words; they define the lived experience of the community.

Inclusive—God’s Outreaching Love

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19, NSRVUE).

Inclusion is not just about hospitality or welcoming. Inclusion reflects God’s expansive love in action alive in our habitat. Fresh Expressions should be places of healing, habitats of sanctuary from the world’s harm. We should acknowledge and create a space of grace without judgment. People should experience a space of belonging before believing, where prevenient grace is alive and real for them and the good news is truly “good” for their lives.

- Are we creating a space where everyone feels safe and valued?
- How do we respond when someone feels excluded or unheard?

Accessible—Embodied Presence

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NRSVUE).

God did not stay distant from us. God entered human culture through the bridge of Jesus, spoke the common language, and lived among people. We are likewise called to embody these same actions in our lives through our Fresh Expressions. They must be close, culturally

appropriate, and relevant to the people they serve by speaking the common language(s). This is not a way of diluting the gospel but making it so that people who have never heard the gospel proclaimed can hear, understand, and begin to experience the good news in their lives.

- Are we speaking the “common language” of our context?
- What barriers for entry are keeping people from engaging? These may be physical, cultural, social, or emotional.

Transfiguring—Seeing the Divine Image of God in Others

“So God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them” (Genesis 1:27, NRSVUE).

Every person with whom we interact is a product of and a carrier of the *imago Dei* (image of God) before they step into a faith community. *Transfiguring grace* recognizes the innate “very goodness” of each person and how each person is on a journey of renewal. We do not set out to “fix” people, but to recognize, nurture, and partner with the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, cultivating a loving space for them to emerge in wholeness. This cultivation empowers people for works of mercy and justice in their communities.

- Do we approach people as “very good” and as co-creators with God?
- How do we foster a culture of renewal, uniqueness, and valuing of each journey?

Connectional—A Church with Many Expressions

“Then the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, decided to choose some of their own men and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 15:22, NRSVUE).

Fresh Expressions are churches in and of themselves; however, they do not exist in isolation as a stand-alone movement. Each Fresh Expression is part of the larger body of Christ as a connection point of the wider church. Just as Jesus formed communities, not just isolated disciples, we must form in communal relation, responding to people’s innate desire to be networked.

- How does our Fresh Expression remain connected to the wider church?
- Are we fostering unity or isolation?

Living the Values as a Team

As a team, you should decide what your core values are and how you will embody those values in shared life. Remember to determine how you will respond if team members break those values.

A team is less an organization and more a living organism. But organisms need organization. I like to think of this as *organized love*, a term coined by Michael Moynagh, a writer and minister in the United Kingdom. Organized love is not chaotic; it is intentional.

John Wesley understood this intentionality when he created the Methodist societies, class meetings, and bands.

These relational networks helped launch the Methodist movement. Wesley's system of relational accountability fostered both a sense of belonging and spiritual growth for all those involved. Just as Wesley held that balance, those of us in Fresh Expressions must also balance organic relationships with intentional organization to ensure that our love is truly embodied.

CHAPTER 4

Loving-First Journey: Map

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on that person, but if not, it will return to you.

—LUKE 10:5-6, NRSV

The Journey of Love as a Movement

The Loving-First journey is a Spirit-led and practical guide to forming Christian community in places that may seem ordinary. Through this journey, we begin to recognize a lowering of the separation between what is secular versus what is sacred. This journey is a discipleship journey to recognize God is already moving in all spaces through the Holy Spirit, and we can come alongside that work with tangible actions.

Reflecting the pattern of Jesus' incarnational mission of meeting people where they are, walking alongside them, and sharing life together, we embody that same posture here. At the heart of this journey is listening, loving, forming community, sharing faith, becoming church, and multiplying or repeating. This is not a linear path but an adventure of compassion, creativity, and imagination

filled with unexpected moments, holy disruptions, and Spirit-led opportunities. Each movement of the journey is built upon the last through intentional, deep relationships. Loving someone is not a means to an end, leading toward becoming church. Loving people for the sake of love reflects the nature of God.

As you begin this journey, find a friend (or more than one) in a corner of your life.

“I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father” (John 15:15, NRSVUE).

Every Fresh Expression begins with relationships. Just as Jesus builds the kingdom by sharing time, friendship, meals, and experiences, we build from what we have. Those relationships in our lives that we hold near and dear may be the relationships that we should journey deeper with.

Receive this map as an invitation to journey with someone in each movement.

The Loving-First Journey: A Cycle of Grace

The Fresh Expressions journey is not a strategy or a program but a way of life. This tool is a rhythm of presence, care, relationship, and discipleship, which mirrors the relational approach of Jesus in action. We have seen this same approach within the early Methodist Movement through John Wesley’s methodical or intentional practices. The six movements outlined here overlap and weave

together. You cannot move forth without intentional time spent in each, but once you have spent time in one, you remain in that state while also developing further with other relationships.

“We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19, NRSVUE)

Listening First: Paying Attention to God and Others

“Let the wise, too, hear and gain in learning and the discerning acquire skill.” (Proverbs 1:5, NRSVUE)

Listening is the first movement of love. That is why this journey is called the loving-first journey. Before we act, serve, or speak, we must first pay attention to God, our neighbors, and the rhythms of the community. We listen to God through prayer, scripture, and discernment of the places the Spirit is already at work. As we listen to our neighbors, we begin to engage in conversation, asking more open-ended questions than leading the conversation. We begin to see what brings people joy or struggle. As we listen to the community, we are present in the shared communal spaces, take time reading local news, learn the history and stories of the place. As we listen, we must resist the urge to fix the problems, impose solutions, or jump to conclusions. Humility is the part of listening that builds trust among new relationships.

Loving: Embodying Christ’s Presence

“Just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”
(Matthew 20:28, NRSVUE)

We are not just sharing a feeling of love; we share love in action. The acts of compassion and hospitality of the early

church are why the church grew. We want to pay attention to those already in our lives and intentionally love them. That fosters relational trust. Even simple acts of care and thoughtfulness are the first steps in building trust. We must be active in our love. We will meet people in their everyday lives with kindness, generosity, and presence.

Some ways you can begin to love might be:

- **Small Acts of Care:** Offering help, remembering names or pronouns, following up on life events.
- **Meeting Real Needs:** If people are hungry, feed them. If they need companionship, be present. If they need friendships or resources, connect them.
- **Practice Generosity:** Give your time freely. Focus your attention and resources on giving without the expectation of return.
- **Consistency:** Love is not momentary but flows in a steadfast energy over time. Show up in the lives of people you love and become a true friend who loves without conditions.

Building Community: Creating Intentional Spaces of Belonging

“They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” (Acts 2:46, NIV)

As individual relationships from the loving stage continue to naturally deepen, people are called into deeper forms of connection. As a connector, you can bring people together into an intentional community. Community is not forced. There is an organic element to the formation of community where people feel safe, seen, and valued.

Deepen Relationships Over Time

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayer.” (Acts 2:42, NRSVUE)

Discipleship begins with relationship rather than a book or sermon. Someone who has never heard of Jesus will begin by engaging in a trust-filled relationship that allows for authenticity, questions, doubt, and shared growth. Jesus did not disciple from a pulpit; instead, he walked, ate, and lived with the disciples. Relationships take time and energy to deepen.

Sharing Faith: Inviting Others into the Story of Jesus

“Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:15, NIV)

We have learned that forced community does not form depth. We also know that faith cannot be forced. Faith is a journey to be shared with others. The gospel story is not an argument to be won but a means of love, hope, and grace.

So, how will a Fresh Expression of Church share faith? This stage happens and forms organically.

Church Taking Shape: Worship and Discipleship in Everyday Rhythms

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there with them.” (Matthew 18:20, NRSV)

Over time, what began as a friendship starts to take the form of church. No, this isn’t when the pews or hymnals strategically start emerging. This is where the conversations,

care, community, and friendships you have formed start to feel like church (maybe not in the traditional sense of doing conventional church things). What begins to emerge is similar to Acts 2 kind of church. You'll know you have reached this stage when sharing life together is deeper than checking in, when the community comes together around shared purpose, and when conversations are deeper. People naturally share and experience spiritual disciplines together. Faith in action is growing through the rhythms of the community. Deepening relationships lead to clear signs of the fruits of the Spirit from person to person.

Repeating the Journey: Multiplication and Sending

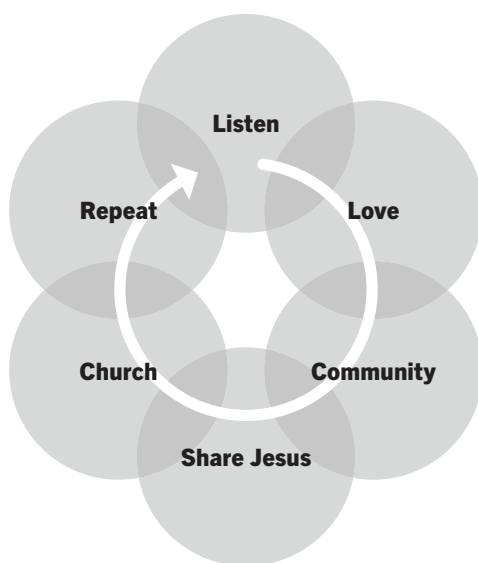
"As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (John 20:21, NRSV)

Every Fresh Expression of church is meant to multiply and repeat. As disciples are formed, built up, and equipped in loving community, they must also be sent forth into the world. As a United Methodist people, we are to "go" and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. If we are to fully live out our faith, recognizing the isolation and loneliness in the world around us that desperately desires close, contextual and loving relationships, then we cannot keep that gift of communal life in Jesus to ourselves. Michael Moynagh, a writer and minister in the United Kingdom, describes the church is a gift meant to be shared. The eucharistic nature of the church is that it is to be broken and given out in loving service to the world. You can do this by empowering your leaders, equipping those who have come up in a Fresh Expression of church to a new Fresh Expression, and to walk with them along the journey.

This full description, together with each stage, is a map for forming new Christian communities in the “listening-first journey.” The cycle begins with listening, loving, forming community, sharing faith, church, and repeat.

The journey describes how “organized love” usually works. Perhaps it's most helpful to think of these movements as an adventure filled with unexpected twists, turns, and even setbacks. As we keep moving and following the Spirit, we explore new horizons of possibility. Each movement overlaps with the ones that precede and follow it. We never stop “listening” and “loving” or “building relationships” as we journey toward church. Each movement of the journey is inherently good in itself. The movements are not means to an end; rather, each dimension is an end in itself.

Jesus sending out the disciples to locate a “person of peace” (Luke 10:5) looks a lot like this journey.



Start with Who You Have: Widening Circles

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

—MATTHEW 4:18-19, NRSV

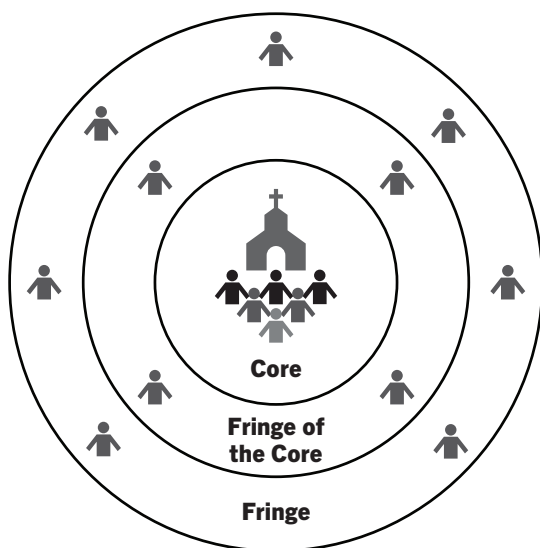
Many teams are so busy dreaming about the ideal team members that they miss the people right in front of them.

The best leaders we know discover “unseen” people. They have a knack for noticing people who are undervalued or “unqualified.” They see people and believe in them until those people believe in themselves.

Jesus started with the leftovers on the pick-up basketball court—the ones who weren’t picked first on anyone’s team. His team consisted mostly of the throwaways of society and those who were invisible to the religious establishment. As he encountered them in the midst of ordinary life, he invited them to follow him (Matthew 4:18–19). Each relationship expanded into more relationships. When Jesus went to Peter’s house to heal Peter’s sick

mother-in-law, word got out that in Jesus was even the power to heal in-laws! Suddenly, the whole town showed up on Peter's doorstep (Mark 1:29-34).

While it may not start in this way, your team should grow to include people in each of these three spheres:

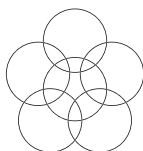


Core: Solid followers of Jesus; they may already be part of your church.

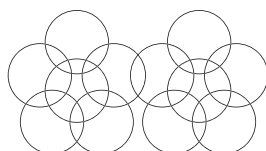
Fringe of the Core: These are people either new to the life of the church or maybe not in your church. These folks have relationships in the community and know the landscape of practices there.

Fringe: These are people outside the life of your church but will be r “persons of peace” from Luke 10:1-9. They may not be Christian, but they open the door to the potential relational networks in your community.

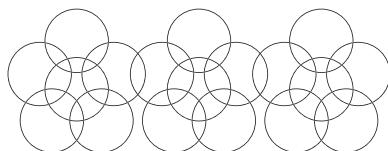
Every relationship opens more relationships. Consider if your team starts with a couple of friends you know:



Now, consider that each person on your team also belongs to a circle of relationships. One person can open a circle of an entirely new group of people:



Each person with whom you build a relationship as a team opens up more possible relationships:



Every circle represents a person of sacred worth and great value. You can begin to see how a small team can have relational connection and capital with an ever-expanding circle of inclusion.

“You have not because you ask not” is really true when it comes to building teams. Start with those you have. Once you establish a clear purpose, explain to people what you are trying to accomplish and invite them to join you!

Diversity:

Roles & Gifts

He himself granted that some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

—EPHESIANS 4:11-13, NRSVUE

Roles

In Fresh Expressions, several essential roles are needed in every team dynamic:

Adventurers: The Church of England defines *pioneers* as people called by God who are the first to see and creatively respond to the Holy Spirit's initiatives with those outside the church. They gather others around them as they seek to establish a new contextual Christian community. In Fresh Expressions UM, we call *pioneers...adventurers*.

Advocates: People who are passionate about supporting and releasing adventurers. These are people who see connection points and encourage those connections to form. The advocates are essential in growth as they listen to the context, keep the adventurer on track, and seek new ways of flourishing. Advocates ground the Fresh Expressions in deep, ongoing prayer.

Authorizers: People who use their role to foster the release of adventurers and to influence the system to be more willing to experiment. Usually, authorizers hold some form of authority within the system. These are the storytellers and the promoters who gather support and share the stories of the adventurers.

Persons of Peace: A “person of peace” is a concept drawn from Luke 10:6. Jesus sends the disciples out in teams of no less than two people to find people who exchange welcome and peace. We join them and do life at their tables, eating what is set before us. This puts us in the position of guest—not host. We are dependent on the hospitality of the host, not vice versa. A person of peace may let us meet in their home, office, shop, or restaurant. This person may be a native of the practice we are forming community around: yoga, dog walking, fitness, farming, social justice, art, tattooing, or eating burritos.

Gifts

Ephesians 4:7–13 describes five distinct gift sets (or personality types) Jesus gives for maturing the body of Christ. Alan Hirsch, a prominent Australian missiologist, author, and thought leader in the missional church movement, describes this as an APEST typology (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher). He believes the five archetypes were evident long before the earthly ministry of Jesus. The five-fold typology is, in some way, a category universal to all humankind. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit breathes on these preexisting personality traits, imbuing them with new life for the service of the kingdom. These five personality giftings are the biblical expression of what personality psychologists call the “Big Five Personality Traits.”

A robust team will grow to include all five gift sets:

1. **Apostle:** the “sent one” and “healer.” Innovating, moving to the edge, connecting outsiders, and expecting the supernatural are the apostle’s primary gifts. Openness is a primary personality trait of the apostle.
2. **Prophet:** the “activist” and “truth teller.” Proclamation, outreach, and justice ministries are primary gifts. The personality of a prophet is understood as a spectrum of neuroticism. Think about Jesus as a healthy prophet, emotive and sensitive but calm and grounded.
3. **Evangelist:** the “recruiter” and “promoter.” Proclamation, networking, and connecting people are primary gifts. The primary personality trait of the evangelist is extroversion.
4. **Pastor:** the “nurturer” and shepherd.” Creating fellowship, caregiving, and cultivating others are primary gifts. The primary personality trait of the pastor is agreeableness.
5. **Teacher:** “the preacher” and “educator.” Proclamation and teaching are primary giftings. The primary personality trait of the teacher is conscientiousness.

Here are some guiding questions to help with team formation and development:

- Which of the primary roles is each person on your team (adventurer, advocate, authorizer)?
- Do you know a “person of peace” who might open a new circle of relationships, space, or practice for your team?

- Which of the primary giftsets does each team member bring (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher)?
- Who is missing from your team? Whom do you know that embodies these roles and gifts? Might those people have a conversation with you about joining the team?

CHAPTER 7

Fertilizer: Time

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

—JOHN 15:5, NIV

Here is the secret ingredient of every great team—time.

Good teams spend time together. Nurturing deep relationships does not happen overnight. It requires consistent and repeated patterns of being together.

Remember...*relationships are the mission*. The Fresh Expressions way requires more than task teams or people teaming up to try and accomplish a goal. Fresh Expressions teams are different from teams in the business world that work together ultimately to earn a paycheck.

Jesus gave us an image for the community of disciples. In John 15, Jesus describes himself as the true vine. He is the central life-giving relationship of the entire organism. A branch disconnected from the vine cannot bear fruit; it withers and dies (John 15:5). Another important aspect of the vine imagery is the “vine grower.” Jesus refers to God the Father as the vine dresser who cuts, prunes, and does the work of helping branches bear fruit (John 15:2).

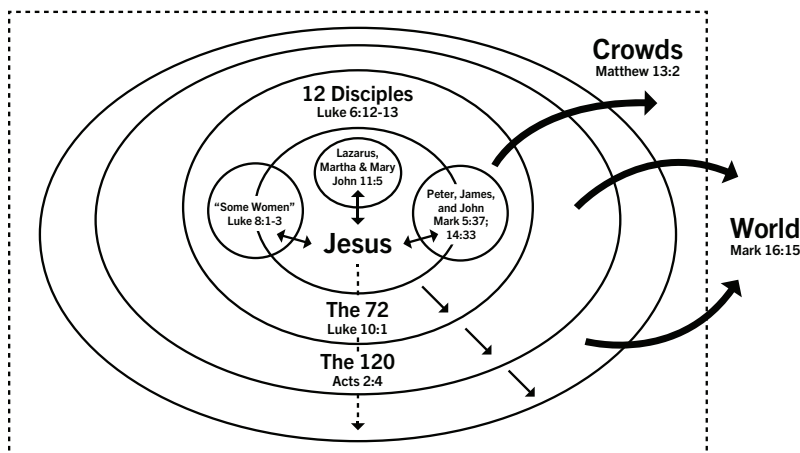
No one in the community is called to do that work. It belongs to God alone. We do not decide who gets cut off the vine. We dwell together, abiding in the vine, bearing fruit that glorifies the Father (John 15:8). Fruit bearing is less about action and more about abiding. We don't actually do anything in this image. God is doing all the work. God the Son is the embodiment of the life-giving vine. God the Father is the cultivator. God the Spirit is the life force that flows through the vine into us. Our only responsibility in this equation is to "abide" in Christ (John 15:4). Abiding in Christ and abiding in one another takes time.

We are a vine of many branches. Abiding, in this sense, is about living with, dwelling in, and inhabiting a living relationship with Christ. There are many ways to go about this abiding: prayer, meditation, studying Scripture, worship, to name a few. At the heart of each one is the intentionality of growing in our relationship with Jesus as a community—spending time with Jesus, listening to Jesus, hearing from Jesus, and communing with the Triune God. Good teams abide together in this way.

You may have realized that one leader can nurture only so many people. So, let's consider the relational circles and shared leadership way of Jesus. Jesus had people who lived in greater degrees of intimacy and followership: The female disciples who traveled along with him and provided for their support out of their own means (Luke 8:1-3); Lazarus, Martha, and Mary in Bethany (John 11:5); Peter, James, and John who were present for significant healings and the transfiguration (Mark 5:37, 14:33). There were also the twelve core disciples (Luke 6:12-13), the seventy-two sent on mission (Luke 10:1), and the one hundred and twenty who gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2:4). As he affected these

disciples deeply, they, in turn, interacted with the crowds and ultimately the entire world:

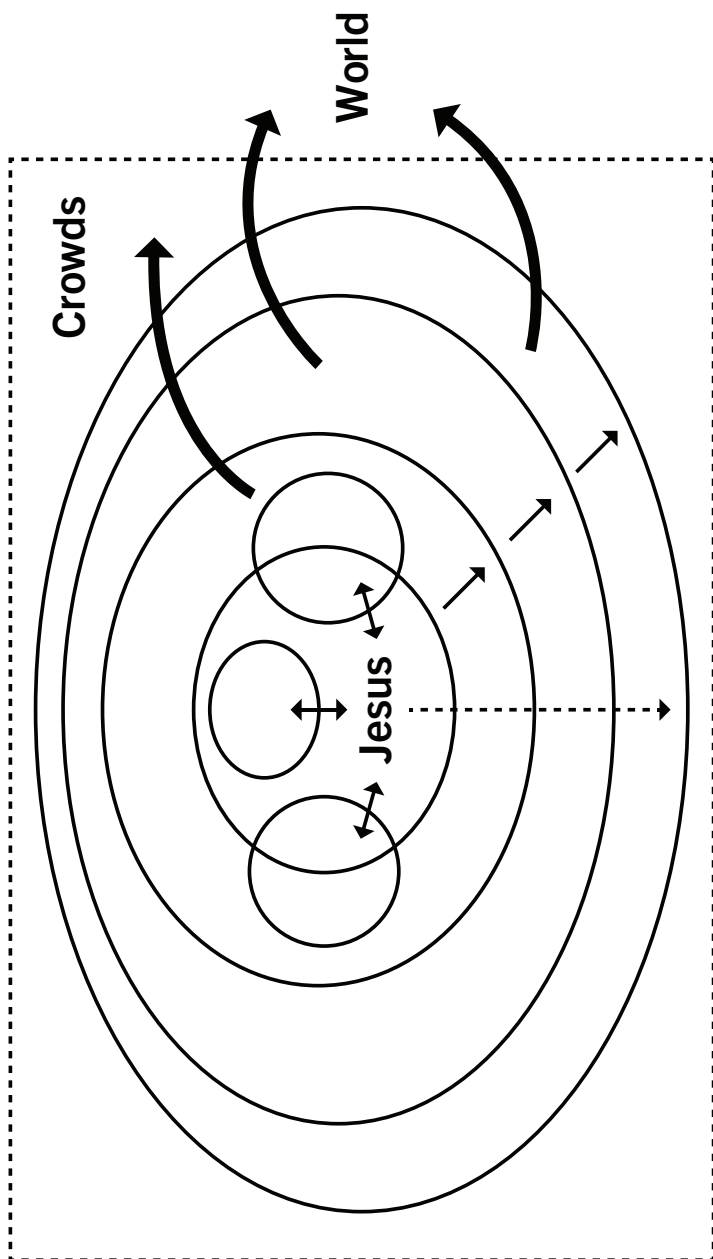
Jesus's Relational Circles



Using the diagram, imagine your team as a series of overlapping circles. Who seems to be in closest proximity to you as you abide in Jesus? How are you spending time with your core team? Are you sharing leadership with them? How will you empower your team to spend time with those in the more distant circles?

Leaders who want to bear “fruit that will last” are those who grow fruit on other people’s trees. They nurture others to the fullness of their potential. Fresh Expressions is not about big numbers and mega-gatherings. It’s a one-person, one small, beautiful community at a time way of being the church.

Shared Leadership Circles



Adaptability: Fail Forward

“Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not get bent out of shape.”

—An unrecorded beatitude of Jesus

This last chapter has to do with how your team should get started. The key is...to start. Start ugly.

Unlike the prevailing institutional church wisdom, failure is not only an option—failure is expected. Fail fast. Fail frequently. Fail forward. But learn from your failures. The failure to learn from your failures is the real failure.

A Fresh Expression team does not operate like a conventional church committee. Inherited church committees often function in causal logic systems. Causal rationality starts with a predetermined goal and seeks to develop strategic steps toward meeting that goal. We create a vision statement, then figure out benchmarks and a timeline to accomplish the vision.

Fresh Expressions teams often employ the effectual reasoning typical of entrepreneurs. The word “effectual” is the inverse of “causal.” Effectual reasoning does not start with a specific goal. Instead, it begins with a given reality and allows goals to emerge contingently in response to the

environment over time. Everyone on the team notices and imagines possibilities as the circle of relationships expands. A conversation with a newfound “person of peace” can send the team in a new direction.

While causal reasoning focuses on expected return, effectual reasoning emphasizes

affordable loss. We know some of our experiments won’t work, but we sustain a posture of just-in-time learning as we iterate our way forward.

Causal reasoning depends upon competitive analyses; effectual reasoning is built upon strategic partnerships. Each new relationship opens new possibilities. Causal reasoning urges the exploitation of pre-existing knowledge and prediction; effectual reasoning stresses leveraging contingencies.

Thus, by taking the “effects” and starting with who and what our teams already have, we create something new from the pieces. Multiple outcomes are possible through a series of relational interactions as opportunities and strategic partnerships arise. My wife, Rev Jill Beck, famously refers to this as “throwing spaghetti at the wall and seeing what sticks.”

Bad teams live in a posture of competition. They focus on efficiency, production, results, and surety. Good teams live in a posture of collaboration. They focus on relationships, wellbeing, experimentation, and wonder.

The key trait of Fresh Expressions teams is adaptability. We must develop different competencies: paying attention, being present, being aware in the moment, improvising, and adapting as things emerge.

So, a team should be less prepared to deliver a preconceived monologue and more prepared to facilitate dialogues. We don't need to have all the answers. We need to learn how to ask better questions.

Perhaps the most helpful guiding wisdom here is the forgotten beatitude of Jesus... "Blessed are the flexible, for they shall not get bent out of shape." We know he said this somewhere, but none of his disciples thought to write it down.

We hope that with these guides, you will be well on your way to forming an amazing team.

Remember to enjoy the adventure!

Taking Action:

Starting a Fresh Expressions Team

A Fresh Expression begins with prayerful discernment, intentional relationship building, and Spirit-led action. Use this checklist to guide your relational team to ensure you build a sustainable, mission-centered, and relationally driven expression of church.

Discernment:

Listening to God & Your Community

God, with whom are you calling me to partner?

- Have I been praying for God to reveal partners in this mission?
- Are there trusted friends, church members, or colleagues who share a similar heart for loving others?
- Have I invited them into a conversation about what God might be stirring within us?

God, what people group are you calling us to reach?

- Who in our community is spiritually disconnected, lonely, underserved, or hurting in isolation?

- Where do we already have relationships with people not currently engaged with our church?
- What cultural, generational, or social group is God placing on our hearts?

What place are you sending us to?

- Where do these people naturally gather in their daily lives?
- How can we incarnate in new places where these people gather?
- Who is gathering in places where we are already interacting?

Forming the Team: Identifying Strengths & Motivations

Who do you have? And what are some of the intrinsic motivations of the group?

- What passions, interests, and natural rhythms do you already share?
- How does each person's story and experience connect with the mission to create compassionate Christian communities?
- What are the group's spiritual motivations? Ask yourselves: "Are we being drawn by compassion, justice, creativity, adventure, or community building?"

What are you trying to accomplish? What's the purpose?

- What does success look to us for this Fresh Expression?
- Is our goal to build relationships, create a spiritual

gathering space, curate honest, authentic conversations, or serve a need?

- How will you stay accountable to our purpose without being driven by conventional metric success alone?

What are the roles and gifts of the people on your team?

- Who are the natural leaders, visionaries, connectors, and deep listeners?
- How do we balance different personalities and strengths?
- What do we need to support our team's developing habitat and environment?

Building a Sustainable Rhythm

What do we already do every week, where, and how frequently?

- Are these rhythms of gathering or activity something we can repurpose for mission?
- Do we meet naturally in social spaces, service opportunities, or shared meals?
- How do our current rhythms allow for spiritual conversation and relational depth?

Decide the rhythm of being together, how frequently, and when.

- Will we meet weekly, biweekly, or monthly?
- What time of day and location works best for our context?
- How do we balance structure and planning with the organic relational approach modeled by Jesus?

Decide how you will communicate.

- What method will we use? (*Group text, FaceTime, Zoom, in-person meals, Discord*)
- How frequently will we check in? (*daily, weekly, monthly?*)
- How can we care for one another and hold one another accountable to rest and sabbath?

Growing & Expanding the Circle

How do we include others as we go along?

- Do we have a posture of openness and invitation into leadership?
- Are we actively listening for those interested in participating but unsure how?
- How do we ensure new people are not just visitors but co-creators of this community?

What are the assets and opportunities in our community?

- What resources, partnerships, or spaces are already available to us?
- Are there local organizations, churches, or businesses that might collaborate with us?

What are the broken places and needs in our community?

- What gaps in care, belonging, or spiritual connection exist in our context?
- How does this Fresh Expression respond holistically to the gaps in our community?
- Are we addressing needs WITH rather than FOR the community?

With whom is God calling us to form relationships?

- Who in our community is longing for connection, healing, or faith exploration?
- Are there specific marginalized or overlooked groups we are drawn toward?
- Are we making space for mutual growth rather than just outreach?

Defining Team Roles & Structures

Which of the primary roles of a Fresh Expression does each person hold?

- Adventurer: the initiator, risk-taker and visionary on the ground.
- Advocate: the encourager and relational bridge-builder.
- Authorizer: the one who provides support, accountability, and connection to the wider church.

Do you know a “person of peace” who might open a new circle of relationships, space, or practice for your team?

- A person of peace is someone who is already trusted and embedded in the community you hope to reach.
- Who can introduce us to new people, offer us space, or give credibility to our vision?
- Have we prayed for God to reveal this person to us?

Which of the primary gift sets does each team member bring (Ephesians 4:11–13)?

- Apostle: The adventurer, entrepreneur, and visionary.
- Prophet: The voice of discernment and justice.

- Evangelist: The connector, storyteller, and community builder.
- Shepherd: The nurture and care provider.
- Teacher: The wisdom-giver and guide.

Who is missing from your team?

- Are we missing a diversity of perspective, experience, or gifting?
- Whom do you know that embodies these roles and gifts? Might that person talk with you about joining the team?
- Who might God be calling to join, support, or equip us on this journey?

Final Reflection: Is Love at the Center of the Habitat We Are Creating?

Are we cultivating a culture of love, grace, and belonging?

Are our mission, vision, and purpose rooted in relationships, not just activities or programs?

How will we ensure that love remains the foundation of everything we do?

“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Colossians 3:14, NRSVUE).

Go now in peace and grace, cultivating compassionate Christian communities through all the corners of our connection.

About the Authors

Rev. Dr. Michael Adam Beck is a pastor, professor, author, and spiritual guide, a rare leader who bridges frontline ministry with academic scholarship. Born addicted in the shadow of the 1980s crack epidemic, a street kid and ninth-grade dropout, Michael was gathered into the arms of a United Methodist congregation, a sanctuary that became his spiritual orphanage. Today he serves as Director of Fresh Expressions United Methodist at Path 1 and is one of the movement's founders in the U.S. Alongside his wife Jill, he co-pastors churches that operate as inpatient recovery housing and oversees a network of fresh expressions gathering in tattoo parlors, burrito shops, and digital spaces. Beck teaches sociology at the University of Florida and serves as adjunct faculty at multiple theological schools, including Duke, Candler, Perkins, Wesley, United, and Palmer. He is the author of 18 books and a leading voice at the intersection of theology and sociology, helping churches cultivate creative, incarnational, trauma-informed forms of Christian life.

Rev. Dr. Bener Baysa Agtarap is a United Methodist elder, church planter, and global leader in discipleship and congregational development. He serves as the Executive Director of Path 1 (Community Engagement & Church Planting) and Director of Connectional Mobilization at Discipleship Ministries. With decades of ministry

experience in the Philippines and across multiple U.S. conferences, Dr. Agtarap has equipped thousands of leaders in intentional discipleship, evangelism, church revitalization, and new church development. He cast the vision and spearheaded the launch of the Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) movement, helping to cultivate new and fresh forms of Christian communities rooted in Wesleyan theology and mission. His passion is forming everyday disciples who love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.

Join the Movement

Be the first to know about new initiatives that embody the Wesleyan call to “love boldly, serve joyfully, and lead courageously.” Let’s partner together to cultivate new expressions of church and equip world-changing disciples.

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