

Intentional Discipleship Systems/Pathways Manual

Eastern Pennsylvania Annual Conference



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How to Use this Manual

This manual is designed to walk a church from the creation of an Intentional Discipleship System team through some of the important conversations the IDS team will need to have, to the creation and assessment of the church's intentional discipleship system.

The first worksheet, "Creating an IDS Team," walks through the steps for creating this team. This worksheet functions like a frequently asked questions sheet concerning who should be on the IDS team, who to look for, how many should be on the team, and other issues.

Once the IDS team has been established, the "Shift from Membership to Discipleship" worksheet will help give some orientation to the team and offer some important questions to help this team wrestle with shifting the culture of the church from focusing on membership to focusing on discipleship. It also offers practices to evaluate current activities in the church and in the community to become more intentional in making sure activities connect to discipleship.

The third worksheet on spiritual habits helps the IDS team understand the role church activities and ministries contribute to discipleship formation. There is additional space for IDS teams to take the next step in evaluating their activities in terms of discipleship formation.

Having done evaluative work and some work in understanding how activities contribute to discipleship and the need to shift toward a discipleship culture, the IDS team will be ready to begin crafting its intentional discipleship system. It might be easy to skip the above worksheets and jump right to this step. Hopefully, your team will resist the urge, as the worksheets will help team members understand how the components work together (like a system). The creation of an intentional discipleship system (IDS) will not likely be achieved quickly. The "Sample Worksheet for Creating an Intentional Discipleship System/Pathway" helps the brainstorming process and offers some samples (specifically for smaller congregations).

The "Definitions of Discipleship" worksheet should be used with the "Sample Worksheet for Creating an Intentional Discipleship System/Pathway." While there is no perfect definition of *discipleship*, having a concise definition gives clarity for where we are hoping the intentional discipleship system (or pathway) guides the church and participants.

Finally, since discipleship propels us to follow God into our community, the "Community Engagement Worksheet" helps to make sure the focus of the church is on discipleship and not merely membership.

Creating an Intentional Discipleship System (IDS) Team

Who should be on the IDS team?

OPTION 1: Key Team Leaders: Trustees, SPR, Education, Finance, Church Council, Worship etc. *(Yes, this will involve every level of the church structure.)*

OPTION 2: Passionate Leaders: Who are those who are excited about making this shift from membership to discipleship happen?

What attributes to look for in choosing the IDS team:

- Maturity
- Willingness to dream and welcome change
- Good listener of people and the needs of the community

How many should be on the team?

At least 4 and no more than 10.

Should the pastor be on the team?

The pastor will need to be a champion for the team but does not have to lead the team or even be on the team. If not on the team, however, the team will need to keep the pastor in close communication with the progress and challenges the team faces.

What will the IDS Team do?

The IDS Team will envision a shift in culture from membership based to discipleship based. The IDS Team will also help design, implement, and evaluate the church's IDS which will include opportunities for personal spiritual growth and community engagement. The IDS team will also help the church as a whole wrestle with ineffective systems, assess current and ongoing events and programs, and to nurture and intentional discipleship culture.

What elements of an IDS will need to be included?

- Definition of disciple
- Characteristics of a disciple
- Stages of growth
- Understanding how the opportunities, experiences, activities of the church's IDS contribute to a discipleship culture

What will the IDS team do following the creation of the IDS?

While the pace or frequency of meetings of the IDS team, might slow down following the creation of an IDS, there is still work to be done. The IDS Team should meet on a regular basis to cover the following:

- Continue to modify the IDS as a living document based on feedback, needs, and community engagement.
- Collect stories that illustrate discipleship growth and reveal a shift towards a discipleship culture in order to share with congregation.
- Use IDS as an assessment and evaluation tool. (Stories or lack thereof of discipleship growth and the needs for new opportunities and experiences.)

Shift from Membership to Discipleship

Questions for IDS Team (Leadership Team/Church)

Where on this lifecycle would you place our church?

If possible, create a large-scale version of this illustration and ask participants to place a sticky dot or post-it note on the location where the church is in its lifecycle.

How would you describe the current culture of our church?

Possibilities include but are not limited to the following:

- Stale
- Stuck
- Vibrant
- Decline
- Disconnected
- Focused
- Vision Oriented
- Consumer-Focused
- People-Focused
- Plateau
- Routine
- Anxious
- Scarcity
- Generous

Split into groups of two or three to answer the following questions.

You could have each group give one to two sentences of their answers before moving to the next question.

- Why did you become a follower of Jesus?
- Why do people need Jesus?
- Why do people need the church?
- Why do people need this church?

A church with a discipleship culture will have clarity about why people need a relationship with God and how the church is a vital connection to God and the world. An intentional discipleship system or pathway helps create a culture of disciple making that has an impact on the world.

As a large group, discuss the following questions.

- What do our replies (to the above questions) reveal about being a church community that has a membership culture and/or a discipleship culture? (While it has been said, “Membership has its privileges,” it can also be stated that “discipleship has its responsibilities.”)

- What things need to change to shift toward a discipleship culture?
- What are you willing to surrender to make this shift toward a discipleship culture?
- If this church community made the shift to being a discipleship culture, what would it look like five to ten years from now?

Move From Understanding Conceptually to Practice

Key Church Relationships (Inside the Church)

Look at the church calendar. List the top key activities in the life of the congregation.

These could include but are not limited to Sunday school, monthly potlucks, confirmation, worship, and so on.

As an IDS team, visit (if you don't already participate) at least one of these activities.

Have the following questions in mind to discuss as a team following the activity:

- How does this activity form vital relationships?
- How does this activity form disciples?
- Community Activities (Outside the Church)

List the key activities in the life of the surrounding community.

These could include but are not limited to community dinners, Relay for Life, fall festival, parades, and so on.

As an IDS team, visit (if you don't already participate) at least one of these activities.

Have the following questions in mind to discuss as a team following the activity:

- Why might these events be important to our community?
- How might our church contribute to these events?
- How might our contribution point participants to our love of God and neighbor?

Spiritual Habits' Contribution to Discipleship Formation

Spiritual Practices	Contribution to Discipleship
Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of regular habit of attentiveness to God, our community, and God's world • A reminder that we live and move within God's story
Small Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurture and accountability for discipleship formation • Mentoring and modeling of the faith
Generosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving of our time, talents, and resources grows our capacity to love and experience God's abundance. Through the practice of giving, we become freed to serve God and neighbor.
Outreach / Service Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See and respond to the hurts, pains, needs of others whom God loves • Grow capacity for compassion and extend God's love. • Advocacy
Age Level / Intergenerational Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grow relationally with those in peer groups and across generations

UMC's Spiritual Habits and Their Contribution to Discipleship		
List your church's activities, ministries, and events below.	Describe the contribution this makes to discipleship formation at your church.	Who is the primary audience? <i>(Our Congregation? Our Neighbors?)</i>

Creating an Intentional Discipleship System/Pathway

Definition of Discipleship:

Characteristics / Habits of Discipleship:

Stages of Growth:

Metaphor:

SAMPLE GRID FROM “CHARTING THE COURSE OF DISCIPLESHIP”

Definition of Discipleship:

	Cautious	Curious	Committed	Professing	Inviting
Know God		Attends an Alpha class or other class sporadically	Participates in Disciple 1; Participates in the Means of Grace	Facilitates Disciple 1; Facilitates a Sunday School or Small Group	
Love God	Attends worship sporadically	Attends worship irregularly	Attends worship regularly	Leads in Worship	Regularly meets and invites new people to worship and/or church events
Serve God		Attend a Habitat for Humanity Build		Leads a Habitat for Humanity Build; Actively looks for ways to extend acts of mercy and compassion	Guides others in pursuing acts of mercy and compassion

Definition of Discipleship:

	Cautious	Curious	Committed	Professing	Inviting
Know God					
Love God					
Serve God					

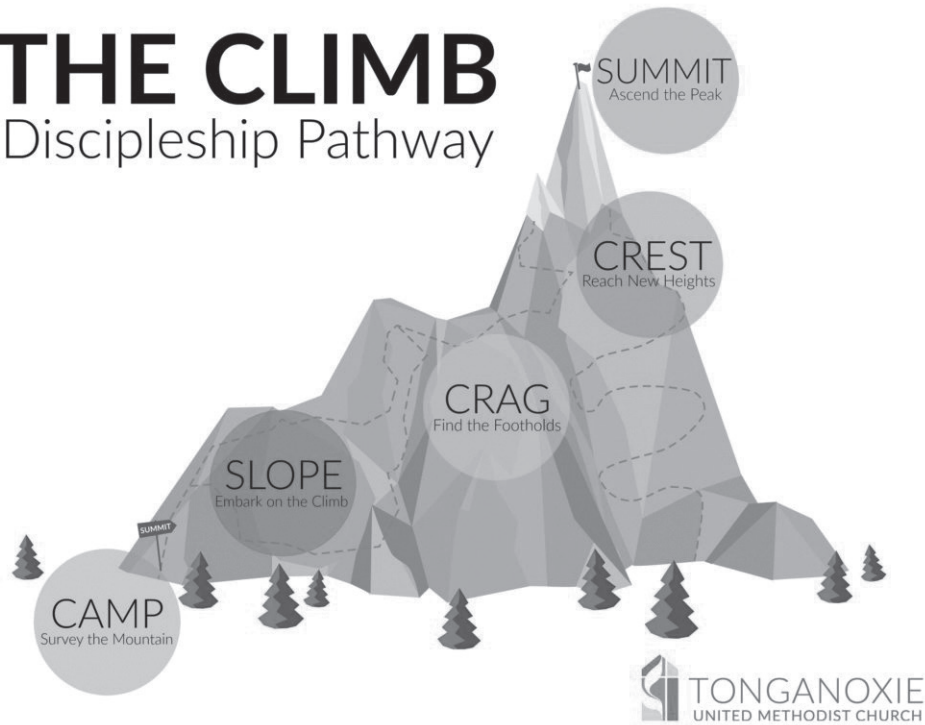
Definition of Discipleship:

	Unchurched	Curious	New Believer	Season	New Paradigm	Fully Committed
Hospitality						
Worship						
Faith Development						
Mission & Service						
Generosity						

Definition of Discipleship:

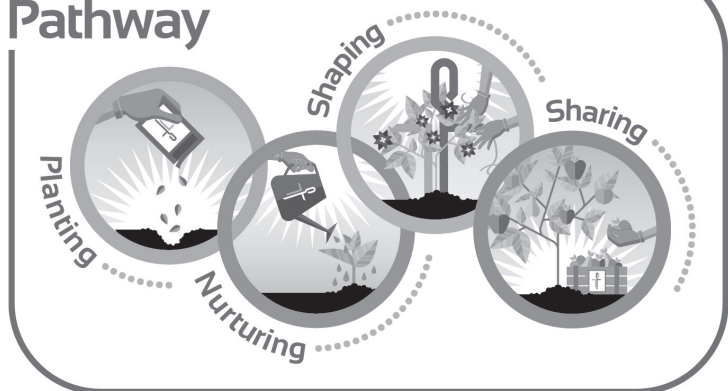
IDS EXAMPLES

THE CLIMB Discipleship Pathway



PROVIDENCE CHURCH, MT. JULIET, TENNESSEE

Faith Growth Pathway



CENTRAL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, WATERFORD, MICHIGAN

Definitions of Discipleship

Below are a variety of definitions of discipleship. Your church can use one of these or use them as inspiration to create their own. A helpful definition of discipleship gives participants a vision of where the Intentional Discipleship System is guiding.

- Appropriate and intentional participation in the redemptive activity of God.
- A way of knowing based on supra-cognitive conviction.
- Being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Genuinely committed to being a life-long follower (learner) of Jesus Christ.
- Discipleship is saying yes to allowing Jesus to be Lord over the next experience you will face.
- “A Disciple is one who knows Christ, is growing in Christ, serving Christ, and sharing Christ.” – JUNIUS DOTSON
- “A mature disciple is one who effortlessly does what Jesus would do if Jesus were him.” – DALLAS WILLARD
- “Daily process of laying down our lives to follow Jesus.” – MIKE BREEN
- “People who demonstrate their love of and response to Christ by loving one another in word, in deed, in prayer, and in every other possible way.” – *Charting a Course of Discipleship*
- “A disciple is a witness to Jesus Christ in the world who follows His teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” – *General Rule of Discipleship*
- “Showing others how to commune with God, relate to one another and engage with neighbors and networks.” – M. SCOTT BOREN
- “Disciples, grace-filled followers of Jesus Christ, make up the body of Christ. The body of Christ, when whole, healthy, and multiplying are vital congregations. Vital congregations are the primary means of making disciples of Jesus Christ.” Or the shortened version, “Grace-filled Christ followers who puts faith into action.” – TIM BIAS
- “Discipleship is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love.” – JAMES K. A. SMITH, *You Are What You Live*

- “Discipleship means to follow the way of Jesus—how he lived, what he taught, what he made possible” – JOHN ROBERTO, *Reimagining Family Faith Formation*
- “Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ which is the law of the cross.” – DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *Cost of Discipleship*
- “The process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others.” – M. ROBERT MULHOLLAND, JR.
- “The essence of Christian discipleship is this: participation in the giving and receiving of love...Christian discipleship, then, consists of our participation in the triune God’s dance of love, whatever our status or capacity.” – KENNETH CARDER, *Ministry with the Forgotten*

Community Engagement

Community engagement is focused on the relational life and involves skills and attributes that help to create as well as raise awareness for opportunities that serve to deepen relationships, often beginning in those places we already find ourselves.

Engaged Listening

What does an invitation to listen look like?

- Being present in the moment/place
- Prayerful
- Intentional
- Openness to offering authenticity and vulnerability
- Which also means building trust over time through consistent presence in a posture of humility

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”

— STEPHEN COVEY

Asking Questions

What can you learn?

- What’s their “why” concerns, passion, dreams, what do they value
- Gifts that are present what assets are available to be shared or is there someone you can think of that would be a good connector between assets
- Experiences and how they’ve shaped their life

Look for Partners

Other faith communities, ecumenical/interfaith, non-profits, etc.

- What organizations are engaging the community?
- In what ways are these organizations already servicing the community?
- Are there gaps between what is offered and what is needed?
- Where is there potential for partnerships with other groups?
- Who are the people being served, what are they saying?
- Who are community leaders that could offer insights on the community/neighborhood?
Ex school admin, city leaders, neighborhood association leader etc...

Identify Gathering Places

Make a list of the places and groups/clubs that could serve as a gathering place.

- Where do people go in your community?
- Where are the places you or the members of your team go?
- What groups or clubs are you or members of your team a part of?
- Who in your sphere of relationships are within those places or groups?

Identify Assets/Gifts that the Place/Person Has as You Listen and Discern

Make a list of the names and possible gifts/interests that you know of.

Are there opportunities to connect that person and their gifts with someone who shares the same or could be of benefit for both as way to create opportunity for relationship and connection?

Starter Questions

- What's something that you love to do?
- When situations are tough or you're feeling weighed down, what helps lift you up?
- What's a hobby or favorite thing to do that people might be surprised to learn about you?
- Neighborhood/community questions:
- How did you come to live in this neighborhood?
- How has the neighborhood/community changed over time?
- What's your favorite thing about the neighborhood?
- What's something exciting that's happened in this neighborhood?
- What's one thing you'd change?

New People New Places/Fresh Expressions

LISTEN—Prayer walks, conversations with people on your above lists, learning about your neighbors/community.

LOVE—As you listen and begin to understand and know your community, your neighbors, their gifts, hopes and longings, the challenges and struggles, what are practical ways that you and your team could offer acts of loving kindness? As you learn and discover more deeply your context and have an intentional mindset on seeing Christ and offering Christ those ways will begin to jump out at you in ways you don't always expect. Maybe it's

offering a dinner church experience in your neighborhood or developing a regular meal/snack/support for teachers at the school, adopting a grade level or classroom for tutoring, encouragement for front line workers. This begins to open the door to building relationships with people and further opens opportunities to offer loving acts and opens the door to reaching new people. It's loving hospitality that opens the door for relationships to begin.

COMMUNITY—This is built within these spheres of relationships through authenticity, consistency, and following the Holy Spirit's lead. Give yourself and the team permission to not rush relationships but to invest the time and intentionality to listen well in a way that allows relationships to grow.

SHARE JESUS—Listening, sharing God's love in practical ways that make sense in your context, and building community all can lead to that relational trust that it takes to move from community to faith community. Those relationships with trust help to create space to explore questions of faith and share good news of Hope Joy and new life.

It might be inviting the community, for those who are interested, an intentional spiritual group, wrestling with questions, book club, common non-profit service work/partnership, social justice issues/topical discussion. It might be many small steps that are taken between moving from community to sharing Jesus. It's ok, continue to give people space, continue to build relationships and grow trust, continue to listen and learn, and continue to offer generous hospitality that welcomes and accepts people where they are on their journey.

CHURCH—As the group is shaped and develops are there opportunities to connect people into the church, are there opportunities and invitations that can lead to the group becoming a faith community? Are there aspects of the Discipleship System that have taken root to which this group has grown into a faith community?

REPEAT—Repeat the cycle.

- Where are we at?
- What could we do next? (Dream Big)
- What will we do next?
- Stay where we are?
- Explore next step in cycle?
- Explore how to improve step taken?
- Explore how to further build on step/s already taken
- Revisit previous circle and improve?
- Something else?

Neighboring Movement

4 labs over 6 weeks, each forming cohorts.

Ingredients of Neighboring

Emphasizing abundance, relationship, and joy.

The 8 Front Doors Project

Provides focus on neighboring where you live.

Asset Mapping

Engaging in mapping the community assets.

Neighboring As Evangelism

Creates space for renewal and for spiritual curiosity.