



G U I D E L I N E S

A diverse group of adults, including a woman with blonde hair in a blue polka-dot shirt and a man with a large afro and glasses in a grey blazer, are smiling and looking towards the right. They are seated in a classroom or meeting room with large windows in the background.

Adult Ministries

Help Adults Love God and Neighbor



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Discipleship Ministries

ADULT MINISTRIES

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Blessed to Be a Blessing

If you are reading this Guideline, you have said yes to servant leadership in your church. You are blessed to be a blessing. What does that mean?

By virtue of our baptism by water and the Spirit, God calls all Christians to faithful discipleship, to grow to maturity in faith (see Ephesians 4). The United Methodist Church expresses that call in our shared mission “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, or the *Discipline*, ¶120). Each local congregation and community of faith lives out that call in response to its own context—the wonderful and unique combination of God-given human and material resources with the needs of the community, within and beyond the congregation.

The work of servant leaders—your work—is to open a way for God to work through you and the resources available to you in a particular ministry area, for you are about God’s work. As stewards of the mysteries of God (see 1 Corinthians 4:1), servant leaders are entrusted with the precious and vital task of managing and using God’s gifts in the ongoing work of transformation.

In The United Methodist Church, we envision transformation occurring through a cycle of discipleship (see the *Discipline*, ¶122). With God’s help and guidance, we

- reach out and receive people into the body of Christ,
- help people relate to Christ through their unique gifts and circumstances,
- nurture and strengthen people in their relationships with God and with others,
- send transformed people out into the world to lead transformed and transforming lives,
- continue to reach out, relate, nurture, and send disciples . . .

Every ministry area and group, from finance to missions, engages in all aspects of this cycle. This Guideline will help you see how that is true for the ministry area or group you now lead. When you begin to consider all of the work you do as ministry to fulfill God’s mission through your congregation, each task, report, and conversation becomes a step toward transforming the world into the kingdom of God.

Invite Christ into the process to guide your ministry. You are doing powerful and wonderful work. Allow missteps to become learning opportunities; rejoice in success. Fill your work with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

God blesses you with gifts, skills, and experience. You are a blessing when you allow God to work through you to make disciples and transform the world. Thank you.

(Find additional help in the “Resources” section at the end of this Guideline, in *The Book of Discipline*, and through <http://www.umc.org>.)

Biblical and Theological Foundations

The apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians:

“[B]e filled with the knowledge of God’s will, with all wisdom and spiritual understanding. We’re praying this so that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God....

So live in Christ Jesus the Lord in the same way as you received him. Be rooted and built up in him, be established in faith, and overflow with thanksgiving just as you were taught.” (Colossians 1:9-10; 2:6-7)

This passage is one way to describe the desired results of ministries with adults—wise, knowledgeable adults who are growing in the faith and who consistently demonstrate their love of God and neighbor.

Called to Lead

You have been called to work with other leaders in the church to fulfill the church’s mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Research indicates that two of the primary drivers that have an impact on the vitality of congregations are small groups and effective lay leadership. As a leader of adult faith formation and discipleship, your ministry relates directly to both of these drivers. You have a unique responsibility to provide leadership in your congregation so that adults in all life stages are:

- accepted as beloved children of God;
- provided opportunities to relate to God through worship, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines;
- nurtured in the faith through Bible study, mutual accountability, and other faith-forming practices;
- sent out as disciples of Jesus Christ to participate in God’s transformation of the world.

The Book of Discipline states that the function of the local church “is to help people to accept and confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to live their daily lives in light of their relationship with God” (§202). As the body of Christ, we are challenged to take the gospel of Jesus Christ to all people.

As a spiritual leader in your congregation, you will find support, courage, and wisdom through the Holy Spirit. As you engage individually and with others in adult faith formation and discipleship, you will experience God’s grace and be empowered to lead other adults as they grow in faith.

The Core Process: Offering H.O.P.E. with Adults

The invitation to be part of the kingdom of God is good news! People of all ages thrive as they receive and respond to God’s prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace in and through the church. As you meet and get to know the adults of your community, you will find opportunities to invite them into the life of the congregation, which embodies our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We do this by providing H.O.P.E. **H**ospitality, **O**ffer Christ, **P**urpose, and **E**ngagement.

Hospitality—Are you reaching out and receiving all people, including those not in the church? Is your church intentionally proclaiming the gospel, seeking, welcoming, and gathering people into the body of Christ?

Offer Christ—What opportunities does your congregation offer for adult spiritual formation? What intentional processes are in place to lead people to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the Spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ?

Purpose—How are you equipping people for Christian discipleship? How are you nurturing people in Christian living to help them find a true sense of purpose in life? Are people learning what it means to live out their beliefs through acts of piety and acts of mercy, through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing?

Engagement—The ultimate test of effective discipleship in and through a congregation or an individual Christian is found in the family, the workplace, the political arena, and in relationships with neighbors. How are you sending people into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel?

As adult ministries coordinator, you assist your congregation in developing ministries that embody H.O.P.E. The “H.O.P.E. with Adults” chart can help you think through how you “work” the flow with various groups of adults.

H.O.P.E. with Adults

Using the chart “H.O.P.E. with Adults” (available as “Adult01-Hope with Adults Chart.pdf” at www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines and www.MinistryGuidelines.org), list the settings and/or ways in which you live out H.O.P.E. through your congregation with single adults, single parents, married couples, working adults, homebound adults, adults living in long-term care facilities, and other groups of adults in your congregation and served through your congregation. You may want to add notes about how often each setting or method is offered, who is involved, and any thoughts you have about improvement.

Ministry Description

Your congregation will decide what kind of structure is needed to plan for adult discipleship. Some structures will be formal and ongoing, such as an adult council or education/nurture team. Some structures may be informal and short-term, such as a task force formed to plan an older-adult retreat. Your position title may be coordinator of adult ministries, team leader for adult discipleship, coordinator of singles ministries, or some other title indicating that you are a leader in adult ministries. Regardless of your title, church size, or structure, this Guideline is designed to help equip you in leading adult ministries in your congregation. (Note: If you work with young adults, ages 18–30, please read *Guidelines: Ministries with Young People, 2017–2020*.)

Your role is to keep the big picture of adult faith formation and discipleship in view and to help develop a comprehensive strategy appropriate for your context. Within those boundaries, your responsibilities may include:

- becoming familiar with the overall goals of your congregation and how the goals are achieved through the congregation's ministry with adults;
- identifying and articulating the needs of adults of all ages and life situations in your congregation and community;
- serving as liaison with organizations, people, and resources that relate to adults and their concerns for personal growth and service;
- supporting and guiding the work of the adult council (or other structure) throughout the year, planning agendas, and presiding at meetings;
- helping to plan and carry out a varied and wide-ranging ministry with adults, including worship, study, fellowship, intergenerational events, and service opportunities;
- communicating the goals and plans for ministries with adults of all life stages;
- reviewing and evaluating resources and programs that address the faith formation needs and passions of adults at various life stages and stages of faith;
- representing the vision of adult ministries on the church council and charge conference.

Where to Get More Help

You can consult these people or agencies for help:

- your pastor
- adults in your congregation and community
- your church council
- your district adult ministries council or coordinator
- your annual conference staff, adult coordinator, or council
- Discipleship Ministries staff (see the Resources section)

The Roles of the Adult Coordinator

Whether you are the coordinator of all adult ministries or a specific segment (single adults, older adults, and so forth), you fulfill a crucial role of leadership in the life of the congregation. Since adults make up the majority of members in most congregations, the work of the coordinator heavily influences the life of the church. Your position as leader can involve several roles.

Servant Leader

First and foremost, you are a servant leader. In the broadest sense, you serve as a leader for all adults in the congregation and as one partner to the lay leader. Specifically, you lead the adult council or ministry team. You were chosen because you have exhibited the qualities needed for such an important position in your congregation.

A servant leader models openness to God and continues growing in the Christian faith. This role requires such skills as the ability to listen to the needs of others, compassion, discernment, and scriptural understanding. As a leader of adults, you have the privilege and opportunity to invite others to join in the journey. Helping adults become transformational disciples of Jesus Christ is an important role for the coordinator of adult ministries.

A servant leader understands and supports the mission of the church. It is important to participate actively in all aspects of the church's life. You work with the church council to plan how your congregation fulfills the mission. As you work with other adults, you also build healthy relationships, balancing the concern for accomplishing a task with tending to the feelings and concerns of group members.

You set the pace for the work of the adult council (or committee or team) by carefully planning the agenda, keeping members informed, involving members in decision making, equipping and encouraging your team members to fulfill their agreed upon tasks, and seeking at all times to embody what it means to be a Christian disciple.

Visionary

Helping to envision what is possible and what is needed is a crucial role. You will be called upon to “think big,” but at the same time not to lose touch with the realities of the

situation. A vital part of our United Methodist theology is the desire “to go on to perfection.” One of your roles is to envision how adult faith formation and discipleship help adults strive to emulate the example of Jesus in every aspect of their lives. You will help discern how and where God is calling adults to live and grow as God’s people in your specific context.

Advocate

The coordinator serves as an advocate for adults in the various groups that plan and administer the church’s ministry. You report to the church council on the goals of the adult council and advocate for adults who are left out or whose needs are being overlooked in church programming or in the community. Advocacy may take many forms, all the way from seeking more financial support for adult ministries and planning retreats for single parents to providing caring outreach to older adults in long-term care facilities.

Planner

You lead the adult council in planning ministries that will involve adults in worship, study, fellowship, service, and mission. You work with the adult council to interpret and promote adult ministries within the context of the church’s mission, evaluate present ministries, identify additional needs, set priorities, enlist leaders, and implement plans. This role is particularly important for baby boomers who tend to work better together with less structure than older adults. Their work styles are more focused on tasks than on relationships.

Equipper/Recruiter

You serve as a lookout and coach, as you identify potential leaders, invite them to assume specific responsibilities, and provide them with the support needed to serve effectively. As you consider the various opportunities offered for adults, identify the gifts needed to lead those opportunities. Then consider those who have the gifts, passion, and potential for leadership in the area of adult ministries.

Evaluator

A key to good leadership is the ability to evaluate what is happening in the present. Are the present ministries working effectively? Are they meeting needs? Are they focused on helping adults grow in faith and discipleship? Are they helping to fulfill the church’s ministry (H.O.P.E.) of offering **H**ospitality, leveraging opportunities to **O**ffer Christ, **P**urposely nurturing Christian living, and **E**ngaging people in God’s world?

If you have questions about your role, consult with your pastor or chair of the church council. In addition to this Guideline, consult *The Book of Discipline* and other resources available through your church office or library.

Getting Started

How might a local church develop an intentional ministry among adults? While there is not a one-size-fits-all plan for every church or context, these general suggestions should apply.

A Five-Step Design

The following five steps will help you and your congregation design a ministry with, by, and for adults.

1. Organize a Ministry Team

If there is no adult council, find one other person who shares your vision for adult ministry in your church. Begin looking for others who are especially interested in sharing your vision. Review the names of people with your pastor and the committee on nominations and leadership development and consider the suggestions they make. Organize an adult ministry team with a cross section of all adults, including women and men; people who are single, married, divorced, and widowed; people representing a variety of ages and stages; people with disabilities; and people representing multiracial and multicultural diversity. After the adult ministry team is approved by the charge conference, the team should receive clarity regarding its relationship with the church council, committee on education, or other related committees.

While some churches may just have one adult ministry team, others will have several teams (task forces, councils, or committees) organized around specific life stages or experiences. For example, a church might have a singles ministry team or an older-adult team.

2. Gather Information about Adults

The adult ministry team can collect information in a variety of ways: face-to-face interviews, telephone calls, focus groups, and surveys via e-mail or your church's website. With each adult's permission, record as much information as possible. Include:

- name, address, phone numbers, e-mail, and other contact information;
- information about their needs as adults;
- information about ways they, as adults, can be in service to others.

TIP

Survey Monkey is a user-friendly tool for creating surveys that can be e-mailed, posted to your church's website, or distributed through Facebook and other social media. For information, see <https://www.surveymonkey.com>.

3. Identify Existing Ministries and Community Programs

Review and identify all church programs and activities for the previous year or two that involved adults, families, and single adults. You will want to know:

- the audience for each ministry (all adults, older adults, people new to the church, and so forth);
- the kind of activity involved in the ministry (worship, study, fellowship, or service);
- the duration of the ministry (one-time, short-term repeated, ongoing, and so forth).

Also collect information about community programs, organizations, and activities that involve adults. A community organization might already be providing a program that successfully addresses a need of adults in your congregation. You may want to explore whether a partnership is desirable and feasible. Identify ways adults can be involved in community service.

4. Set Goals

Set S.M.A.R.T. (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound) goals, clarify objectives, and help in the evaluation process. These can be helpful in explaining the direction of the adult committee to other church teams. Make sure these goals are in line with the overall goals of the church (especially as they relate to H.O.P.E.).

5. Design Your Ministry

After gathering information about adults in your congregation and community, assessing current ministries, and setting goals, you are ready to begin planning for the coming year. Your design should include:

- priorities for developing new ministries and continuing current ministries that best use your resources for nurturing adult faith and discipleship;
- benchmarks to measure your progress (see the Resources section for more information);
- goals and strategies for achieving ministry priorities, along with a timeline for each ministry opportunity;
- finances, resources, leaders, and facilities needed for the various ministry opportunities;
- plans for communicating and promoting adult ministry opportunities throughout the congregation and community;
- methods for evaluating the effectiveness of your plans.

Faith Formation and Discipleship in Adulthood

The word *adulthood* is amazingly succinct when you consider how many years of the lifespan it encompasses. We generally think of at least three stages of adulthood: emerging, middle, and older. Each of these stages represents a number of developmental tasks for adults. We also know that adults have varying religious experiences and knowledge as well as different understandings of religious language and traditions. Generational theory adds another lens for considering how adults perceive themselves and the world as they go about their daily lives.

As a leader of adults, you will be providing opportunities for continued growth for new Christians, deeply committed Christians, and everyone in between. This Guideline specifically looks at these three aspects of adult faith formation and discipleship for emerging, middle, and older adults. If your responsibility also includes young adults, see *Guidelines: Ministries with Young People, 2017–2020*.

TIP

Throughout their lives, adults will experience change. Some are *expected changes*, as we move into another life stage:

- physical changes due to aging
- moving from active parenting to an “empty nest”
- retirement

However, some adults also experience *unexpected changes*, such as:

- loss of employment
- divorce
- death of a child, spouse, or grandchild
- caring for adult parents
- raising grandchildren

Developmental Tasks in Adulthood

In the modern era, adulthood lasts much longer than in years past because of the extension of life expectancy. Adulthood is marked by transition points (marriage, children, empty nests, retirement, etc.) that sometimes challenge faith, but also may encourage its greater growth. You can help adults of all ages grow toward spiritual maturity by providing caring and challenging opportunities for making sense out of their experiences in light of their Christian

faith. Adults who participate actively in the full range of worship, learning, and mission opportunities through the church will grow in faith and discipleship. In this fast-changing world, adults of all ages continue in the process of identity development and discovering purpose.

When adulthood actually begins seems to have more to do with life experiences and responsibilities than an exact age. Some people experience the transition into young adulthood in their twenties, while others are still dealing with what are traditionally considered “young-adult issues” in their forties.

Emerging Adulthood

The period of adolescence appears to be extending, and the twenties and thirties are varied in terms of life experiences (career, education, marriage, children). Emerging adults tend to uphold the importance of selfhood and individuality—almost as virtues. This often results in moral relativism. Relationship boundaries tend to be vague. Religion is largely seen as unimportant or irrelevant to spirituality. A major task for emerging adults is learning to be financially, emotionally, and spiritually autonomous. These adults continue with identity formation.

Middle Adulthood

Because of the wide variety of life situations that are the norm for people at midlife, the issues they face are diverse. Generally speaking, during middle adulthood, people have completed their education and have established their homes and careers. Many have been married at least once, but a significant number have divorced and may or may not have remarried. They may be the parents of young children, adolescents, and/or young adults. Some have also become grandparents. During midlife, most people will experience the death of at least one parent and/or begin to care for and deal with the realities of aging parents.

At midlife, people begin to shift from thinking about how long they have lived to how long they have left to live. Making meaning of life is a major developmental task as people begin to ask, “So what difference does it make that I’ve been on this earth for 40 or 50 years?”

Baby Boomers

Adults who came into adulthood in the 1960s, 70s, and early 80s are not one uniform group because their experience and the events of their emerging young adulthood varied substantially. Transitioning into older adulthood will occur at various times because of a variety of factors, such as health, the age of parents, and when they choose to retire.

With better medicine and more active lifestyles, members of the baby boom generation tend to resist viewing themselves as older adults. Most physical abilities peak in young adulthood and begin to decline modestly as people move into middle adulthood.

Some baby boomers were activists in movements attempting to change the world, so service ministry is attractive to them. Others learned to question institutions and authorities, including the church, and became unaffiliated with religion; ministry that includes spiritual practices and/or is related to social justice can be a link back to faith. Many adults 55 and older are health conscious, so fitness is an important component in their lives; recreation and wellness are important ways to reach this group.

Older Adulthood

Older adulthood can be a time of creative growth and development and a time of reinvention of identity. Some older adults are more active physically and intellectually than their children and grandchildren! For older adults, though, this stage of life is a time of learning acceptance for limitations, processing losses, and coming to terms with approaching death for them and for loved ones.

Older adulthood can generally be described as having three phases: active older adulthood, paced older adulthood, and inactive older adulthood with limited mobility. In the active phase, adults may be adjusting to reduced income, retirement, changes in health or the health of a spouse, death of a spouse, and establishing a new social network to replace a work network. In the later phases, adults may experience limited mobility, loss of autonomy, need for assistance and care, loneliness due to loss of family and friends, and the need to face the reality of death.

Older adults are concerned with finding worth in *being* more than having or doing, claiming the life journey and faith story, confronting losses and acknowledging gains, dealing with independence and dependence, experiencing a new (or renewed) relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and serving the needs of others.

Some of the faith needs of adults at this stage of life include the need to know that God loves them and to experience a community that cares about them. They need to serve as mentors and role models for succeeding generations, and they need support systems for coping with losses.

Older adults and those who love them may have to deal with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. When older adults are homebound, the ministry that keeps them connected has to be intentionally and carefully planned. It requires the church to reach out to the homebound members rather than expecting the homebound to reach out to the church. Ministry to those who suffer from dementia, their loved ones, and their caregivers takes on many forms, including worship, respite care, and support groups.

Religious Experience of Adults

Because adults have varying experiences related to faith, congregations need to provide settings appropriate for their levels of experience. Some adults need to learn “the basics”; some adults need refresher courses. Other adults need to be challenged to move deeper into their relationship with God and in living out their faith at home, at work, and with their neighbors. Here are some ways to think about these different points along the spiritual journey.

None/SBNR

Some adults have grown up without any religious affiliation and might see religious institutions as archaic or merely serving the purpose of self-help. Some may see spirituality and spiritual practices as meaningful, but they may be divorced from religious organizations (thus the term Spiritual, But Not Religious—SBNR).

Cautious

For some adults, faith in its institutional form is largely unexplored. They may show some interest, but they are unsure about what to expect. They may have had an earlier

painful experience in a congregation or with an individual that was harmful; though mildly interested, they can still be distrustful.

Curious

These adults have sufficient interest to investigate the Christian faith. They are willing to engage in some way with a congregation, although they may not attend worship. Their first entry point might be a small group, mission, or fellowship event. Their attendance will often be the result of a friend intentionally offering hospitality by inviting their participation.

Committed (to Something)

Some adults are interested enough to participate regularly in some aspect of a congregation's life. Their commitment may not yet be to Christian discipleship; it may be commitment to the pastor, to a particular ministry, or to a group, such as the choir or a Bible study.

Professing

When adults respond to God's love and grace, they will take some initiative for learning about Christian spiritual practices and involvement in a church community. These adults have recognized God's presence in their lives and have made the decision to order their lives on the example of Jesus.

Inviting

These adults live a life of active discipleship. They take responsibility for being mentors and models with others. They are intentional about offering Christ and engaging in the world as they move toward a life that is entirely within the mind of Christ.

Stages of H.O.P.E.

Regardless of age or religious experience, all adults need to be related to other people in meaningful ways. When relationships are strained or broken, adults face the need for support and healing. In times of crisis, the church can play an important role in caring, supporting, and healing.

As a leader, you can use the above descriptors in planning. Someone who has no faith, is *Spiritual But Not Religious*, or cautious will not necessarily respond to the same type of opportunities as those who have made professions of faith and are actively deepening their relationship with God. You will need to review current ministries to determine the ways your congregation is offering H.O.P.E. to adults in various stages of faith formation and discipleship.

Adults of all ages may experience physical, psychological, or spiritual changes that can cause great anxiety and may dramatically alter personal and family-life patterns. You will want to be sensitive to the wide range of personal changes going on in the lives of adults in your congregation.

Adult Developmental Characteristics

The chart that follows indicates some of the descriptors and issues of middle and older adults. Think of ways of ministering to the wide range of adults in your congregation as they work through these challenging times.

Adult Developmental Characteristics

	Midlife Adults	Boomers & Older Adults
Physical	Begin to measure time as “time until death”; coming to terms with mortality; midlife physical changes	Learning ability may be affected by hearing and sight losses; increasing health-care needs and chronic illnesses
Psychological	Developmental task: Generativity vs. Stagnation (Erikson*)—serving others vs. being self absorbed; range of interests include career planning, personal growth, relationship development, problem solving, and values clarification	Developmental task: Integrity vs. Despair (Erikson*)—life has meaning vs. a life of regrets; adjustment to retirement; loss of relationships due to death; increasing dependence upon others; volunteerism and caregiving are important
Emotional	Managing midlife transitions, such as death of parents, children leaving home, parenting, and aging parents	Need to be valued, respected, and accepted by people and institutions
Intellectual	Self-directed learning; want to be involved in decisions about learning; want input from knowledgeable people, resources, and groups	Build on life experiences; use visual images and mental pictures to enhance learning; encourage self-paced and problem-centered learning activities
Spiritual	Want to understand the meaning of life and one’s place in the world; focus on values and priorities; take responsibility for one’s own spiritual journey	Want arena to grow in faith and make sense of life story; need purpose and to feel life is worth living; may want to share one’s life faith story and to mentor others
Special Needs	Learning context is important; climate for learning and thinking; traumatic events or life transitions often prompt involvement in learning activities	Opportunities for continued growth; significant service vs. busy work; daytime activities and accessible surroundings; good lighting and acoustics
Gifts to Share	Dependability; steadiness; concern for the future; financial resources	Wisdom; time; endurance; objectivity; life experiences; hope; acceptance of death
Vocation	Questioning; reaping; career changes; mentoring	Retirement from primary career; may reenter or reinvent work life
Expect of the Church	Want help in making meaning of life and finding balance	Stability; place for friendships; sacramental nature of church

*Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994).

Generational Snapshot: Millennials

Born between approximately 1982 and 1999, the members of the millennial generation began to enter young adulthood in 2000. In 2016, the youngest will be 17; the oldest, 34, so nearly all young adults are millennials. Some in this generation are emerging into adulthood; others are young adults.

Population

They are also known as generation next or generation Y. They will soon become the nation's largest living generation (<http://www.people-press.org/2015/09/03/most-millennials-resist-the-millennial-label>). This is the most ethnically and racially diverse generation and will likely become the most educated generation in the United States.

Issues

- This generation is the first to grow up in a world where technology—computers, cell phones, and television—has always been a driving force within the overall culture.
- One in five has posted a video of himself or herself online (Pew Research, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/02/24/millennials-confident-connected-open-to-change/>).
- This generation often blurs the line between “parent” and “friend” with their boomer elders. This has led to parents becoming much more active in the lives of their young-adult children. In extreme forms, the parents are referred to as “helicopter parents” (because they hover). This continues as roughly one-third of millennials live independent from their parents.
- Relationships, whether family, friends, or colleagues, are at the center of this generation's lifestyle.
- As one of the first generations to grow up in a completely “customizable” world, millennials are often criticized as feeling entitled, expecting things to be given to them exactly as they want them. When asked about perceptions of their own generation, millennials believe they are self-absorbed.
- They are the least overly religious American generation.

Employment and Social Engagement

- “[T]hey are relatively unattached to organized politics and religion, linked by social media, burdened by debt, distrustful of people, in no rush to marry—and optimistic about the future” (<http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/03/07/millennials-in-adulthood/>).
- Driven to action for causes that they feel are worthwhile, millennials' social action is most often seen as a communal event, unlike the individualistic postmoderns.

Life Events

- This generation has been shaped by the mass availability of internet connections and portable devices as well as the dangers of terrorism home and abroad,

including Columbine, 9/11, and Iraq/Afghanistan (Based on “Generational Snapshots: Postmoderns & Millennials.” © 2007 Discipleship Ministries).

Generational Snapshot: Postmoderns

Born between about 1965 and 1981, all those in this generation have transitioned from young adulthood to middle adulthood. In 2016, the youngest will be 34; the oldest, 51.

Population

- They are often referred to as generation X or baby busters.
- There is an often forgotten generation because they are wedged between boomers and millennials (the two largest generations in the current adult age span).
- This has led to a lack of cohesive generational identity and a strong sense of individualism.

Issues

- They seek to experience life and work for themselves rather than being guided or prescribed a particular path to the answers.
- They view faith as an experience tied to the individual. Community is expressed in terms of a small group as opposed to an identity within an overall faith community.
- This generation is increasingly being “sandwiched,” caring for both children and aging parents.

Attitudes

- Once thought of as a “slacker” generation, postmoderns express a more laid-back approach to the world than their boomer predecessors. However, this generation now is perceived more as responsible, hard-working, and self-reliant.
- Seeing corporate and moral decay in the culture around them, many postmoderns have developed distrust for authority (and in many cases, by extension, institutions as a whole).
- While mission and service rank high in the postmodern value system, they are seen as individual events. The postmodern is likely to say, “If the world is going to change, I have to be the one to do it.”

Life Events

- The explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger* is a major formational event for this generation, along with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the personal computer.

(Based on “Generational Snapshots: Postmoderns & Millennials” © 2007 Discipleship Ministries. Also www.pewresearch.org and <http://www.people-press.org/2011/11/03/section-1-how-generations-have-changed/>).

Generational Snapshot: Baby Boomers

Born between approximately 1946 and 1964, this large generation represents most of the people currently in middle adulthood, moving to older adulthood. In 2016, the first boomers will be 70; the youngest, 51.

Wellness

- Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death, with cancer and suicide also being higher than in other generations.
- About 40 percent suffer from diabetes, and many are overweight.
- Boomers are concerned with fitness and youthful appearance.

Life Events

- More than 50 percent have been divorced—more than any other generation.
- Thirty-six percent have lost a job; 45 percent have had multiple careers; and about 10 percent have retired already. Boomer retirement is changing, with some boomers choosing to continue to work rather than retire.
- Aging parents are a concern for many boomers. They may be wholly or partially responsible for the care of aging parents. About 50 percent have lost a parent or parents.
- Fifty percent are or will become grandparents in the next five years.

Attitudes

- Boomers have not given up trying to change the world, but may have tempered it somewhat. Making the world better is still a concern.
- Some mistrust authorities, institutions, or others in power.
- Boomers are idealists and are optimistic about their abilities to change or improve themselves and others.
- As baby boomers age, they resist being called “seniors” or “old.”
- Boomers are performance driven and oriented toward self-improvement.

Employment

- Almost 90 percent of baby boomer men and women are still working.
- In about 65 percent of boomer couples, both spouses work.

Money

- Baby boomers are both the nation's biggest spenders and biggest debtors.
- They are heavily affected by rapidly increasing healthcare costs.

Issues

- Many boomers are sandwiched between care of children, grandchildren, and aging parents.

- Boomers experience pre-retirement and post-retirement stress and depression.
- As they age, boomers are undergoing a change of roles, status, and identity.
- Some boomers are experiencing early onset dementia in themselves or in partners, spouses, and friends.
- Many boomers have boomerang children—adult children returning home.
- Boomers struggle with finding balance in their lives and with coming to terms with unfulfilled dreams and expectations, or fulfilled dreams that failed to live up to expectations.

(Based on U.S. Census Bureau data (www.census.gov) and Richard H. Gentzler Jr., *The Graying of the Church* [Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004]).

Generational Snapshot: Pioneers and GI Generation

Pioneers and the GI Generation are those born between approximately 1915 and 1945. In 2016, this group (70+ years in age) will include those who have witnessed more changes in their lives than any other generation. The older-adult population—people 65 years or older—numbers 40.2 million. The projected older-adult population is expected to increase to approximately 72 million by 2030.

Population

- People over age 65 make up about 15 percent of the U.S. population, projected to be about 72 million by 2030.
- There are more than 80,000 people who are at least 100 years old in the United States.
- There are 72 men for every 100 women in this age group.
- Women reaching the age of 65 can expect to live another 19.8 years (nearly 85). Men reaching the age of 65 can expect to live another 16.8 years (nearly 82).
- Members of ethnic minority groups are projected to increase from about 8.1 million in 2010 (20.1%) to 12.9 million (23.6%) in 2020.

Living Arrangements/Family

- Of householders, 75 percent own houses, and 20 percent are renters.
- About 31 percent (10.7 million) of older adults live alone (7.9 million women and 2.8 million men).
- More than 10 million elderly, or nearly one-third of the older-adult population, need some type of long-term care. Only 12 percent will reside in nursing centers in their lifetimes.
- Fifty-four percent are married and living with a spouse.
- Loss of relationships and networks brought on by death or change of location is significant.
- About 671,000 grandparents age 65 or over maintain households in which grandchildren are present.

Health

- Nearly 74 percent say their health is good to excellent.
- Twenty-six percent indicate that their health is fair or poor.
- Transportation might be an issue for churches to consider as well as ministering to those experiencing a loss of independence.
- Many struggle coming to terms with death, death of loved ones, accumulated loss and grief, as well as depression and feelings of self-worth.

Life Experience

- More than 5.3 million older adults remain active in the workforce after retirement age. That number will increase to 2 million by 2020.
- Older adults make up 12 percent of the nation's business owners.
- Thirty-nine percent of older adults use the Internet.
- Major income sources are Social Security (90%), income from assets (56%), private pensions (30%), government pensions (14%), and earnings (23%).
- The poverty rate is about 10.1 percent.

Life Events

- War -The cold war for this generation and World War II were important events.
- The Great Depression occurred in the childhood of this generation, influencing their approach to money and resources.

(Based on U.S. Census Bureau data [www.census.gov] and Richard H. Gentzler Jr., *The Graying of the Church* [Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2004]).

Settings for Adult Faith Formation and Discipleship

An intentional and comprehensive system for forming adult faith and discipleship is crucial for the vitality of congregations and fulfilling the mission of the church. Keeping in mind the various characteristics of adults, your plan needs to include opportunities that help adults grow as disciples of Jesus Christ. Consider the following elements for your plan. In today's hyper-connected world, there are various geographically based and online ways to engage adults.

Study

Study settings for faith formation are an essential ministry of the local church and should be high in your priorities for adult ministry. Christian education and formation settings may include Sunday school classes, weekday Bible study (such as DISCIPLE), short-term classes on specific topics of current interest, workshops, leader training, and various small groups. Learning is central to discipleship formation and growth.

Spiritual Growth

Settings such as spiritual-growth groups and similar opportunities are at the heart of the church's ministry. Helping adults practice spiritual disciplines, such as prayer and Christian conversation, provides the daily support adults need to deepen their relationship with God and neighbor. Small groups for spiritual development provide adults with opportunities to tell their faith stories, and they offer accountability. Events such as the Walk to Emmaus (<http://emmaus.upperroom.org>) or the Academy for Spiritual Formation (<http://academy.upperroom.org/>) help to deepen faith and lead to other opportunities for Christian spiritual support and growth. Offer experiential environments for spiritual renewal and formation both for laity and clergy.

Fellowship

Fellowship settings are equally important in adult ministry. The church offers a special kind of fellowship that cannot be found in just any group or organization. As the body of Christ, we are concerned about one another so that when "one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it," and when "one part gets the glory, all the parts celebrate with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). Adults need to feel cared for, and they need to care for others.

Fellowship opportunities may be especially significant for single adults of all ages, adults who live alone, families with young children, and older adults who may be cut off from other family members and former work colleagues.

Support and Accountability

Support and accountability settings provide growth opportunities in safe, nurturing environments where adults encourage, support, and hold one another accountable within the challenges of daily living and Christian discipleship. These groups offer settings where adults discuss life experiences and reflect from a faith perspective on relationships, health issues, career and professional choices, vocational transitions, and life-stage transitions. Churches often host support groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Support Recovery, and others both as accountability types of groups and as a service to the community.

Activities may range from informal discussion groups to structured methodical gatherings with specialized instruction or instructors. Covenant Discipleship Groups are one example of structured accountability groups that focus on Christian discipleship (see *Guidelines: Small Group Ministries 2017–2020* for more information). Regularly scheduled gatherings, consistent attendance, and active participation are crucial.

Mission and Service

Mission and service opportunities are a critical component of living as disciples of Christ in the community and world. Adult disciples are in ministry in their daily lives through relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. They may also be involved in specific outreach projects sponsored by your congregation. Some avenues of service may include outreach ministries such as prison ministry, Meals on Wheels, feeding the hungry, visiting the homebound and those in nursing homes or long-term care facilities, and tutoring children and youth (see *Guidelines: Mission 2017–2020*, for more information). Others include social justice ministries such as advocating for and with marginalized groups, promoting faithful stewardship of creation and resources (see *Guidelines: Church and Society 2017–2020* for more information).

Mission and service opportunities may be domestic (such as Habitat for Humanity) or international (such as Volunteers in Mission work). Coordinate this ministry with your mission/outreach council or chair.

Online

Adults of all ages are online and engaged in social media. Churches can look for ways to leverage these media to engage faith formation with adults in a variety of ways, from podcasting the sermon to Facebook groups to hosting online Bible studies.

Settings for Adult Faith Formation and Discipleship

Use the “Settings” chart (“Adult02-SettingsforAdultFaithFormationandDiscipleship.pdf,” available at www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines and www.MinistryGuidelines.org)

to help you think through what settings to offer for various adults in your unique context. (While you will want to know how many people are served, this inventory is for planning in the different settings.)

List the various settings you offer for adults of various ages and life circumstances. You may want to add notes for each setting about frequency, what percentage of the congregation is involved, and any thoughts you have about improvement.

The chart provides space to record ministry opportunities in each setting category—study, spiritual growth, fellowship, support and accountability, mission and service, and online—for each adult grouping in your congregation:

- single adults
- single parents
- married adults
- working adults
- homebound adults
- adults living in long-term care facilities
- others in your community

Leader Development

Those who are asked to assume responsibilities in the church need to be equipped for their jobs. This function may be planned by church staff or another ministry team. If not, leader development should fall under the auspices of the adult ministry team.

The guide, “Adult03-Comprehensive Plan for Teacher Development in United Methodist Congregations.pdf” (available from www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines) provides guidance for developing a leader development plan.

Start New Classes and Groups

Consider the following questions if you think you may need to start new adult classes or small groups. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, then the time may be ripe to act on your inclination.

- Do fewer than 50 percent of your adult members attend Sunday school or other studies?
- Do you have at least six to eight people who might be interested in looking at a particular topic or issue?
- What recent members have not been incorporated into existing classes or groups?
- Do you have several people who are not able to attend current small-group offerings because the meeting times conflict with work or other obligations? Might there be a way to use online settings to facilitate conversations to meet their needs?
- Are several people currently going through similar life transitions (e.g., divorce, death of a spouse, birth of a child, job loss) who may need support or idea sharing?

When Launching a New Group:

- identify potential members;
- identify potential leaders and offer training;
- determine areas of need and interest, as well as preferred meeting times and dates;
- send personal invitations to potential members;
- publicize the time, day of the week, and location for the group;
- provide needed support and ask for feedback.

Measures and Evaluation

While much of your responsibility entails planning and implementing adult faith-formation opportunities, an equally important aspect of your role is to measure how effectively the opportunities that are offered actually promote and deepen adult faith and commitment to living as disciples of Jesus Christ. There are several aspects to measurement and evaluation. Each of these reflects a different facet of adult faith formation; yet each is rooted in the mission of the church: making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. You will want to keep this mission in mind every time you engage in any aspect of measurement and evaluation.

Measure Participation

One of the basic measurements involves numerical data. You will want to know how many adults are taking advantage of the ministry opportunities offered by your congregation. There should be a system for record keeping already in place. If there is not, work with the adult council to establish one. This system should include:

- names of each class, small group, service opportunity, and other settings for adult faith formation;
- information about each setting for adult faith formation: how often the group meets, when it meets (day and time), how long it meets, and where it meets;
- number of new ministry settings offered during the year;
- number of participants for each adult faith-formation setting;
- number of leaders for each adult faith-formation setting;
- percentage of adults in the congregation who participate in some setting for adult faith formation and discipleship;
- percentage of adults in the congregation who serve as leaders in some setting for adult faith formation and discipleship;
- comparison of numerical data for the past five years.

TIP

Check with your church office to find out if the church uses a software system for maintaining attendance records. There may be a way to add information about which settings for faith formation and discipleship adults participate in, when they attend, and so forth. This can facilitate your record keeping.

Measure Effectiveness

As you work with your adult council, you will develop a shared understanding of what it means for adults to mature in faith and live as disciples of Jesus Christ. Each opportunity for ministry should support this vision of Christian maturity. Remembering the varying religious experiences of adults, you will offer some settings that cover “the basics,” while other settings are designed for those who desire to deepen their relationship with God and who are looking for ways to live out their faith in their daily lives.

The Core Process of offering H.O.P.E. with adults that we identified earlier involves information, formation, and transformation. To think about how effectively your current adult formation settings demonstrate this movement, consider and record your responses to the Measuring Effectiveness chart (“Adult04-Measuring Effectiveness Chart.pdf,” available at www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines or www.ministryguidelines.org).

Using your list of settings for adult faith formation in your congregation, make notes about how these settings develop knowledge and skills and provide meaningful experiences for adults. It could be helpful to identify which aspect (knowledge, skills, or experiences) is primary for each setting. You can then identify gaps to address.

One of the easiest ways to obtain this information is to survey participants in adult faith-formation settings. At the end of a short-term study or experience, or at least once a year for ongoing settings, distribute questionnaires that ask participants to reflect on their experience. (You can also e-mail these questionnaires or provide a way for adults to respond via your congregation’s website.) The questionnaires do not need to be long or highly detailed. Here are sample questions to ask:

- What was the most helpful part of this class/group/experience?
- Would you recommend this class/group/experience to another person? Why or why not?
- What revisions could improve this class/group/experience?
- What other classes/groups/experiences would be most helpful for you as you continue to grow in faith and live as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- What spiritual gifts have been evoked or nurtured?
- In what ways are your Christian life and faith different because of your experience with and participation in your class/group/experience?

You can also ask adults to rate settings according to a scale (1= high dissatisfaction and 4= high satisfaction). You can ask about content, leadership, facilities, and schedule, as well as spiritual growth.

Measure Appropriateness

You will also want to evaluate whether the settings that are currently offered are what is actually needed for the adults in your context to grow in faith and discipleship. It’s been said that the seven “last words” of the church are “We have always done it that way.” That may be true, but it’s not particularly helpful. Part of your ministry responsibility is not only

asking, “How well are we doing what we’re doing?” but also, “Should we be doing this in the first place?”

The standards you have identified related to faith maturity serve as the benchmarks for responding to that question. Additionally, you will take into consideration resources and leadership needed in order to determine the feasibility of continuing or beginning a setting for ministry. With your adult council, discuss whether the opportunities you offer are clearly designed to help adults grow in faith. If some are not, then ask yourselves whether you need to continue investing time and energy into those settings.

A Final Word

You've had an opportunity to think about your congregation and community, as well as the middle and older adults who are involved or who could be involved in faith formation. The preceding pages have included a lot of information and asked many questions. As a way of reflecting on the information and questions, take some time to record some of your important ideas about next steps (see the website www.UMOfficialResources.com/Guidelines or www.ministryguidelines.org for a fill-in worksheet, "Adult05-Next Steps Worksheet.pdf"):

- The church's vision for discipleship ...
- My vision or hope for our congregation's adult faith formation is ...
- This vision for adult faith formation has the potential for transforming the lives of adults in our congregation and community in these ways ...
- People who are potential partners in this ministry include ...
- To make my vision a reality, I will take the following steps (include due dates) ...

Your job as coordinator of adult ministries can make a difference in many lives. If you start to feel overwhelmed, remember that when God calls us to a challenging task, God also offers us the strength and guidance to perform the task. You are part of a connectional church; there are people you can contact and a variety of resources to support you in a vital adult ministry (see the Resources section).

May God bless you and your congregation as you help adults grow in faith and live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Resources

**Indicates our top picks

Discipleship Ministries

Toll-free phone (877) 899-2780 (note specific extensions); fax (615) 340-7071; web: www.umcdiscipleship.org.

Office of Adult Ministries, Scott Hughes, director; ext. 7020; e-mail: shughes@umcdiscipleship.org.

Office on Aging & Older Adult Ministries, William Randolph, director; ext. 7173; e-mail: wrandolph@umcdiscipleship.org.

General Church Print Resources

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House).

The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2016 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House).

Planning Adult Ministries

***Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century: An Inquiry Approach* by Richard H. Gentzler Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008), ISBN: 9780881775402.

Baby Boomers and Beyond: Tapping the Ministry Talents and Passions of Adults Over 50 by Amy Hanson (Jossey Bass, an imprint of Wiley, 2010), ISBN: 9780470500798. A foundational guide into boomers and being in ministry to, for, and with boomers.

Baby Boomer Spirituality: Ten Essential Values of a Generation by Craig Kennet Miller (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2003), ISBN: 9780881771060. Based upon 20 years of research into the factors that helped form the way boomers express spirituality and how this is changing older adult ministry.

Designing an Older Adult Ministry by Richard H. Gentzler Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999), ISBN: 97808817726902. For equipping local congregations in developing and maintaining intentional older-adult ministries.

The Graying of the Church: A Leader's Guide for Older-Adult Ministry in the United Methodist Church by Richard H. Gentzler (Discipleship Resources, 2004), ISBN: 9780881774092.

****Living Fully, Dying Well Planning Kit** by Bishop Rueben P. Job (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), ISBN: 9780687335855. Designed to assist adults preparing for meeting life's most important moments. Resource contains leader guide, participant workbook, and DVD.

New Beginnings: The Gifts of Aging (DVD) by Richard H. Gentzler Jr. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2005), ISBN 9780881774825. A 20-minute video resource for congregation and small-group study showing creative ministries involving older adults in various settings, including mission opportunities, intergenerational sharing, and service.

Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography by Richard L. Morgan (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), ISBN: 9780835809634). Leader guide and participant workbook for helping people create spiritual autobiography.

Rock of Ages: A Worship and Songbook for Retirement Living (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2002), ISBN: 9780881773736. A large-print worship resource and songbook suitable for use with homebound and long-term care residents.

Safe Sanctuaries®: The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Older Adults by Joy Thornburg Melton (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012), ISBN: 9780881776133.

The S.A.G.E. A newsletter for leaders of older-adult ministries. Published by the Office on Aging & Older-Adult Ministries, Discipleship Ministries, PO Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003; (877) 899-2780 ext. 7177.

The Seasons of Adult Faith Formation edited by John Roberto (Naugatuck: Lifelong Faith Publications, 2015). Explores new research into four categories of Adulthood: Young, Midlife, Mature, and Older as well as faith formation programming for each.

Second Wind: Navigating the Passage to a Slower, Deeper, and More Connected Life by Bill Thomas (Simon & Schuster, 2015), ISBN: 978-1451667578.

Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults by Christian Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). In-depth research about emergent adulthood and their attitudes regarding religion and spirituality.

Web Resources

****Teaching and teacher helps:** www.umcdiscipleship.org.

****Curriculum resources:** www.cokesbury.com, Curric-U-Phone. (Curricuphone@Cokesbury.com; (800) 251-8591)

“A Comprehensive Plan for Teacher Development,” <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/comprehensive-plan-for-teacher-development-for-united-methodist-congregation>.

“Development Through the Life-Span,” <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/development-through-the-life-span>.

“Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation,” <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/foundations>.

“Intentional Faith Development: Establishing Standards for Christian Formation and Discipleship,” <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/intentional-faith-development-establishing-standards-for-christian-formatio>.

Older Adult Recognition Day Worship Resources, produced yearly in the spring of the year. Guides available at the Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministry, 615-340-7173, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/older-adults>.

UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

General Board of Church and Society, www.umc-gbcs.org, 202-488-5600; Service Center, 1-800-967-0880

General Board of Discipleship (d/b/a Discipleship Ministries) www.umcdiscipleship.org, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>, 1-800-972-0433; The Upper Room, www.upperroom.org, 1-800-972-0433; email: info@umcdiscipleship.org.

General Board of Global Ministries, www.umcmision.org, 1-800-862-4246 or 212-870-3600; email: info@umcmision.org

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, www.gbhem.org, 615-340-7400

General Board of Pension and Health Benefits, www.gbophb.org, 847-869-4550

General Commission on Archives and History, www.gcah.org, 973-408-3189

General Commission on Religion & Race, www.gcorr.org, 202-547-2271; email: info@gcorr.org

General Commission on the Status & Role of Women, www.gcsrw.org, 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, www.gcummm.org, 615-340-7145

General Council on Finance and Administration, www.gcfa.org, 866-367-4232 or 615-329-3393

Office of Civic Youth-Serving Agencies/Scouting (General Commission on United Methodist Men), www.gcummm.org, 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, www.umph.org, 615-749-6000; Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; Cokesbury, www.cokesbury.com, 1-800-672-1789

United Methodist Communications, www.umcom.org, 615-742-5400; EcuFilm, 1-888-346-3862; InfoServ, email: infoserv@umcom.org; *Interpreter Magazine*, www.interpretermagazine.org, 615-742-5441

United Methodist Women, www.unitedmethodistwomen.org; 212-870-3900

For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.