

FAQ Sheet for
the Citywide Action Plan

version 1.1 (February 2015)

*This FAQ sheet will be updated and expanded,
as new questions emerge.*

NOTE: There are many questions that remain about the citywide ministry planning process and its outcome(s). The truth is, we cannot think our way into a new way of living; we have to live our way into a new way of thinking. It is simply impossible to anticipate all the possible questions and answers--and if we try to do that, we will never get going on the work to which we've been called. Most importantly, trying to answer all questions in advance is not only impractical but unreasonable too ... because the answers need to come from the churches themselves, as they pray and plan and work together. Even so, there are some basic questions that need to be answered up front, so we can be as clear as possible about what we're doing and thus move in concert together.

1. What authority and responsibility does the citywide Parish Council have, relative to the individual congregations? In what ways are the individual congregations accountable to the citywide Parish Council?

Under the new Action Plan, a citywide Parish Council will replace the current Leadership Group and have a primary focus on the overall state of mission and ministry in the city of Syracuse, with clear and carefully defined responsibilities to that effect. As a corollary to that, much of the congregational visioning, planning, strategizing and development will take place in the co-operative structures that are part of Paths 1, 2 and 3 ("Fast Track," "Slow Track," "Side Track").

In terms of its make-up, the new Parish Council may look very similar to today's Leadership Team, with representation from all of the city congregations. The current Leadership Team will help shape and birth the new Parish Council, as quickly as possible.

The Leadership Team will continue to meet regularly for the next several months, during the transitional period. Once the Parish Council is established, the goal will be to have it meet quarterly, in order that more planning time might be devoted to the work within each Path.

The responsibilities of the citywide Parish Council are envisioned to include the following:

- *Assess, develop and coordinate United Methodist mission and ministry in the city of Syracuse as a whole*
- *Do overall strategic planning for United Methodist mission and ministry across the city of Syracuse*
- *Monitor and support implementation of the benchmarks for mission and ministry established by the UNY Cabinet in 2014 (See list of benchmarks below)*
- *Monitor, support, encourage and assist the work being done in each Path (or Track)*
- *Develop and provide appropriate resources to further the work of each Path (or Track)*
- *Serve as a "learning circle" for sharing the best practices, accomplishments and lessons from each Path with the other Paths*

- Provide regular and ongoing leadership training for members of the Parish Council, plus leaders (and prospective leaders) from the various congregations
- Create ways for administrative leaders (S/PPRC, Trustees, Finance) from the various churches to meet and work together
- Other responsibilities as agreed to and granted by the collective congregations

Because the citywide Parish Council is eventually expected to meet only quarterly, its focus will necessarily remain on the "big picture." In conducting and implementing overall strategic planning, the Parish Council understands that mission and ministry are rooted in the local congregation. Thus, planning and accountability are mutual. Congregations will respect and be responsive to the overall plans and direction determined by the citywide Parish Council. Meanwhile, the Parish Council will respect and be responsive to the need for flexibility and adaptability at the local church and neighborhood level, not to mention the opportunity for geographic and programmatic diversity. Most planning for and structuring of mission and ministry will be done through the partnerships forged in each Path (or Track), in order to maximize our resources, capabilities and fruitfulness.

Benchmarks for
Syracuse United Methodist Ministry
(as established by the UNY Cabinet)

Be lay driven, in partnership with the clergy.

Begin its implementation in fall of 2014 and be established by 2016.

Significantly downsize Syracuse UM infrastructure, in order to facilitate:

- a. better stewardship of resources
- b. strength of numbers in worship
- c. full participation in shared ministry
- d. freeing of dollars for community outreach

Be mission centered, strengthening current effective ministries and increasing outreach to underserved community populations.

Promote diversity.

Reach the span of generations with a strong focus on the young.

Promote ecumenical [*interfaith*] and interagency involvement as a way of producing the greatest results with the best economy of resources.

See the city of Syracuse, the UNY Conference and the world as the context of ministry.

Note: Two additional benchmarks were proposed in a lay response to this original list. However, the Cabinet has not acknowledged or affirmed these additions:

Focus on and facilitate the growth of our churches

Embrace evolutionary (rather than revolutionary) change, which seeks to strengthen our current churches and ministries

2. If a church elects to move toward closure ("Side Track" or Path 3), how and when would legal and fiscal responsibility be transferred to the citywide Parish Council?

In providing for the transfer of legal and fiscal responsibility, the goal is not a "hostile takeover," but a way for churches to free themselves from onerous administrative tasks in

light of a declining number of leaders. It is a way for the other churches in the city to enable a declining congregation to devote its resources to mission and ministry, not administration. The intent is for congregations to know that they are not all alone, having to fend for themselves, but that there are creative and helpful options available to them. As such, the transfer of legal and fiscal responsibility, along with the timing of the transfer, will be mutually determined and agreed to by the particular congregation and the citywide Parish Council. In the end, the transfer will also ensure that the congregation's remaining assets will continue to be used for mission and ministry in the city of Syracuse.

3. Who will be the consultant? How soon will the consultant begin working with us?

Inasmuch as funds for paying the consultant will come from the UNY Annual Conference, the consultant will be selected by the Crossroads District Superintendent, in consultation with the Syracuse city churches' clergy Director. Ideally, the consultant will have a proven track-record in both urban ministry and church consulting.

The consultant will begin working with the churches as quickly as possible, as mutually arranged by the consultant, District Superintendent and clergy Director, in consultation with the citywide Leadership Team / Parish Council.

4. What is meant by "experiment with integrated planning, budgeting, leadership structures and church staff"? (See "Fast Track" description)

The word "experiment" is intentional and key. Because we have little experience of Syracuse city churches working together in sustained, structured and substantive ways, churches will need to collaborate--and experiment--in finding ways to work together for the good of all (including strengthening and renewing United Methodism's overall presence, witness, visibility and impact in Syracuse). Churches at this stage will commit themselves to creating and testing ways to do this--including permission to fail and try again--and to provide models for other churches to learn from. The first steps in this may be piecemeal and tentative:

- Do we have similar visions, goals, ministries or target populations, that could be better served by doing joint planning, programming and activities?*
- Could we get a bigger bang for our buck by pooling resources in one area or another?*
- Are there savings to be found in bulk/group purchasing?*
- Could we find ways to share office equipment or snow plowing or custodial services?*
- Are there ways for us to share or combine staff, in order to improve and increase mission and ministry ... or to free up resources for mission and ministry by reducing or eliminating redundant costs?*
- What could happen if we combined Christian education committees or worship committees, in order to get a critical mass of passionate leaders and not have the same people feel they need to do everything all the time all by themselves? (In most cases, planning would be done jointly, with each church free to implement in their own setting ... though shared activities would hopefully take shape over time.)*

"Integrated planning and budgeting" and the ad hoc sharing or pooling of resources are not the same as the commingling of current funds and accumulated assets. More extensive and comprehensive commingling of funds and assets will happen if and when churches are ready for it.

5. Once churches assign themselves to a specific Path (or Track), what happens next?

At a minimum, the following steps will happen in short order to get us started:

- City churches, Leadership Team and the District Superintendent will be notified by 3/1/15 of the Path (or Track) chosen by each congregation.*
- The citywide Leadership Team will meet in early March to understand the feedback from the churches and help establish a smooth path forward, including next steps.*
- The Leadership Team will prepare and distribute an initial set of implementation steps by mid-March.*
- Churches in the different Paths (or Tracks) will begin to familiarize themselves with each other's aspirations, vision, values, assets, traditions, culture, operations, finances, staffing, etc., for the purpose of identifying ways in which their style and mission converge, and ways in which they differ, along with the strengths that each church brings to the table.*