

2024 West Virginia Conference Goals



Three areas of focus:

1. Sense of Connection

- Although the UMC is a “connectional system” we have many congregations who do not feel connected.
- Many of the churches who have left seem to have not been United Methodist for a long time.
- The nature of our connection requires strengthening both directions.
Local Church > Conference **AND** Conference > Local Church

2. Discipleship

- There is a felt need for improved Biblical literacy.
- Many of the concerns/issues facing us today are symptoms of a need for intentional discipleship.
- People growing as disciples of Jesus (pastors and laity) will strengthen relationships with each other and our communities.

3. New Places • New People

- God is calling us to join this movement.
- Every existing church can have a connection to a NPNP where they are making disciples and growing together.
- There are too many people in our communities who will never set foot in an existing church for us to not engage in this ministry.

Connection

GOAL: In order to strengthen our sense of connection throughout the West Virginia Conference, we will equip and certify 10 Lighthouse Congregations by the end of 2024.

- These congregations will be identified using input from the Coordinating Cabinet, their District Superintendent, and the Conference Lighthouse Congregation process.
- The small number of congregations (ten) in this goal allows us to treat this as a “pilot” process so we can make any necessary adjustments prior to expanding the number of congregations.
- The focus in our process is on improving hospitality, first-time guests experience and connections, and accessibility. This will enable us to share best practices and learnings along with training resources with every congregation in our Conference.
- See the Lighthouse Congregation program for a complete definition of what is required for a church and the certification process.
- The stories and celebrations shared will demonstrate to all churches how we are not meant to do this ministry alone. We are all part of the Body of Christ (our extended family).



Discipleship

GOAL: Because the world needs us to be more like Jesus, we will build upon the foundation of prayer to transition 49 current expressions of faith formation in 2024 into the Wesley model of class meetings with a focus on the Bible.

- The response to Dynamite Prayer in September was overwhelming! This is an opportunity for us to build on that experience. (The phrase, “foundation of prayer” allows us to include other congregations who may not have participated.)
- The number 49 represents seven in each of our seven district areas.
- Current expressions of faith formation is a way to encompass all types of Sunday school classes, small groups, etc.
- A focus on Wesley’s class meeting model will move current curriculum based, presentation style groups into a more discussion based model. Along with an emphasis on the Bible, there should be an element of accountability for each person to grow as a disciple.
- Books such as: *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* by Kevin M. Watson; and *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* by D. Michael Henderson are good resources for this process.



Wesleyan Class Meeting Definition

A group will be identified as a Wesley class meeting when it meets the following criteria:

- The group consists of six to 12 people (not more than 15) meeting at least twice a month for four months.
- The meetings focus on Bible study and application with an element of accountability. (i.e. “How is it with your soul?”—“Bearing one another’s burdens”—“Speaking the truth in love”)
- The time together is not focused on a curriculum or led by a teacher. The time is spent more in conversation and discussion focused on growth as a disciple of Jesus.
- At least once a quarter the group serves together either in the church or in the community.
- At least once a year the group does something fun together, maybe enjoys a meal together.



New Places • New People

GOAL: In response to Jesus' call for us to go where people are, we will equip, resource, and support the launching of 15 New Places • New People (fresh expressions) connected to existing churches/charges in 2024.

- We are building upon the goal last year of doing at least one New Places • New People workshop in each district area.
- The intention is for this to be a lay movement, consistent to what is being done elsewhere and true to our Wesleyan heritage.
- Our Conference has more than enough church buildings. The communities we serve need more new churches, not more church buildings.
- This goal is also an opportunity for us to strengthen the connection since NPNP are most fruitful when connected to an existing church, and discipleship because that is a defining characteristic of NPNP.



Definition

A New Place New People (fresh expression) will be included in this goal as long as it meets the following criteria:

- Began meeting for the first time in 2024, and has met at least three times
- Consist of six to 20 people, at least 51% of them not connected to an existing congregation of any type
- Contains elements of worship and is moving toward intentional discipleship
- Is led by laity and is connected to an existing church/charge (and/or a Conference ministry of some type) which provides support, encouragement, and accountability