

SECTION ONE

SIGNATURE ACCOMPLISHMENTS in the FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS

The 2008 General Conference imagined together *A Future With Hope*, and from that time of worship and celebration emerged the denomination's Four Areas of Focus. These four areas united us then and now:

- Developing principled Christian leaders for the church and the world.
- Creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations.
- Engaging in ministry with the poor.
- Stamping out the killer diseases of poverty by improving health globally.

As we move into our third quadrennium with these foci, we celebrate the fruit born of these collaborative efforts across the globe. Just a few examples include:

The Young Clergy Initiative funded 78 projects this quadrennium to help young people discern their call and put faith into action.

The United Methodist Church has planted more than 2,000 new faith communities in the past four years, including new mission initiatives in Asia, Africa and Central America.

Leaders from across the church called together practitioners in ministry with the poor to lay the groundwork for partnerships and resource sharing, and to **organize a strategy to deepen the impact these partnerships** are making in communities in every annual conference.

Together, **United Methodists around the world raised 92% of our goal of \$75 million** and have been a part of a larger global health effort that has resulted in cutting deaths by malaria in half worldwide.

SECTION TWO

COB/CT Collaboration Process

Strengthening the Connection: Collaboration and Design for Missional Effectiveness

The Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table continue to work collaboratively in a consultative relationship, as outlined in the Book of Discipline. During the 2013-2016 quadrennium, this was embodied through COB/CT Collaboration Groups, in which the episcopal leaders of the COB Teams joined the Connectional Table leaders to focus on aligning denominational resources toward Vital Congregations through the Four Areas of Focus and move toward a more authentic and equitable worldwide church.

For the 2017-2020 quadrennium, the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table remain committed to this collaborative approach of aligning and focusing the Christ-centered vision and mission of The UMC. Chairs of the following COB Leadership Teams collaborate with the Connectional Table's Vital Congregations through Four Areas of Focus Working Group:

- The Congregational Vitality Leadership Team (Mueller)
- The Justice and Reconciliation Leadership Team (Dyck)
- The Missional Engagement Leadership Team (Holston)
- The Leadership Development Leadership Team (Hagiya)

In the work of increasing Vital Congregations through the Four Areas of Focus, the primary role of the COB Leadership Teams through the Chair will be to:

- **BUILD OWNERSHIP:** By equipping residential bishops with resources for carrying out the work as residential bishops in the areas of focus.
- **MAINTAIN FOCUS:** By championing the “strategic direction” and helping residential bishops stay focused on Vital Congregations through the four areas of focus.
- **BE ACCOUNTABLE:** For helping and supporting residential bishops achieve desired outcomes in the strategic directions.

In the work of increasing Vital Congregations through the Four Areas of Focus, the primary role of the Connectional Table will be to:

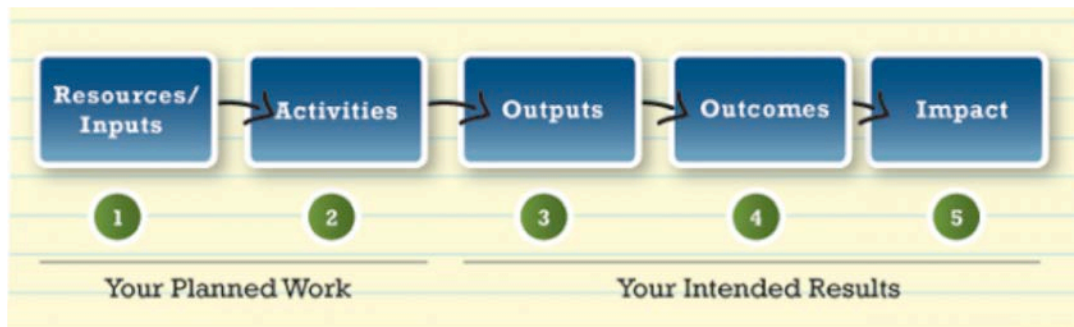
- **DISCERN & ARTICULATE VISION:** through providing forums among the leadership of the Council and membership of the Connectional Table.
- **STEWARDSHIP MISSION, MINISTRIES & RESOURCES:** through planning, evaluation, and budgeting for leveraging resources for greatest missional impact.

The following members of the Council of Bishops connect to the Advisory Groups of Worldwide Nature Working Group of the Connectional Table as needed:

- The Committee on Faith and Order Chairperson (Jones)
- The Standing Committee on Central Conference Matters Chairperson (Francisco)
- The Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships Ecumenical Officer (Watson)

Planning Connectional Ministries: Using a Logic Model to Identify Outcomes

During the past few years, the Connectional Table and the general agencies have worked collaboratively to begin incorporating a simple yet important planning tool called a Logic Model for the ministries of the general program agencies. A logic model helps identify specific and measureable outcomes – the difference we want to make – so that resources, activities and progress measures can be aligned toward those outcomes. This is leading to a more focused, strategic approach to the ministries of the agencies.



Agencies also are using the logic model approach to identify inter-agency collaboration and partnerships with annual conferences. We anticipate that this will lead to stronger collaborations among agencies and stronger connectional ministries between and among agencies and annual conferences. As we continue to identify needs and areas for improvement and growth through the mapping of ministries in the logic model, we hope this work will build stronger relationships between agencies and annual conferences, and more effective connectional ministries that will lead to an increase in vital congregations.

Assessing Connectional Ministries: Churchwide Assessment Tool

Another exciting way the Connectional Table is partnering with the COB to align ministries for our shared mission is through the development of a new assessment tool to be implemented throughout our worldwide church. With 132 annual conferences spanning four continents, it is important to reflect upon and improve our connectional life so that we can strengthen our networks, share our resources and communicate our stories of God at work in the world.

Our United Methodist movement lived out through the connection of churches, districts, conferences, institutions and agencies is vital in many places. Core elements of that vitality include: strong and effective leaders; ongoing creation of new places for new people; engaging in ministries with the poor; and improving health in our communities and around the globe. In places where congregations are lagging in vitality, we want to be able to assess needs and align resources to strengthen the whole connection and allow us to offer the love of Christ to those in our midst.

The assessment tool will gather information from annual conferences, general agencies, the Council of Bishops, the Connectional Table and the General Council on Finance and Administration to review and assess how we are living out our connectional life using the Four Areas of Focus as our lens for connectional ministries.

Resourcing Connectional Ministries: The General Church Budget

The Connectional Table and the General Council on Finance and Administration work in partnership to design and implement the general church budgeting process each quadrennium. Since 2008, the World Service Fund has been allocated by the Four Areas of Focus. This has been another step in the overall alignment of resources and ministries to the work of increasing vital congregations so that together, we can all stay focused on our disciple-making mission.

In 2016, the General Conference approved apportioning general church funds in the amount of \$604 million for the next four years. The seven apportioned funds support the ministries and the infrastructure of the connection. The allocations across the seven apportioned funds are as follows:

Fund	Amount
World Service Fund	\$310,728,409
Episcopal Fund	\$ 92,019,335
General Administration Fund	\$ 36,896,453
Ministerial Education Fund*	\$104,949,647
Black College Fund	\$ 41,863,455
Africa University Fund	\$ 9,368,872
Interdenominational Cooperation Fund	\$ 8,207,820
TOTAL	\$604,033,991

**25% of the Ministerial Education Fund remains in the annual conference for scholarships, continuing education, etc.*

The World Service Fund is the church's first benevolent responsibility and is divided among eight of the program-related agencies to support developing leaders for the church and the world, creating new places for new people and renewing existing congregations, engaging in ministries with the poor, and improving global health. World Service ministries are the foundation for our United Methodist connection worldwide.

SECTION THREE

2017-2020 STRATEGIC DIRECTION

OUR 2020 VISION: STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR 2017-2020

Aligning The United Methodist Church for greater missional impact has been and will continue to be at the heart of the work of the Connectional Table. Last quadrennium, the Connectional Table, together with the Council of Bishops, formed a Collaboration Group on Vital Congregations. This serves as the key body responsible for connecting our strategies and building relationships among those working collaboratively in Vital Congregations and seeking to bear fruit in the Four Areas of Focus. This body discerned and affirmed measurable goals in strategic directions through these focus areas for our church in the next quadrennium.

Progress reports on these goals were offered and affirmed by the Council of Bishops and the Connectional Table in early 2015. These emerging strategies have generated enthusiasm and collaborative energy for the work of grounding the church in our core values as a worldwide connection. The Connectional Table remains committed to developing these goals and the strategies that support them. These strategic directions represent our **2020 VISION** for the next quadrennium.

VITAL CONGREGATIONS:

Our 2020 Vision looks forward to a United Methodist Church that can double the number of highly vital congregations excelling in the five markers of vitality - disciples in worship, new disciples (professions of faith), disciples in small groups, disciples in mission, and giving to mission.

*A **vital congregation** is the body of Christ making and engaging disciples for the transformation of the world.*

The goals, planning processes, and strategic visioning for vital congregations exist to enable each local church to have a vital future in disciple making. Achieving goals is not an end in itself, but rather a tool to see if what we are doing is producing fruit. The actual process of disciple making, the *means of grace*, is our main priority.

In the congregation, these have been practiced through the ministries of worship, making new disciples (professions of faith), small groups, mission and generous giving. Congregations that consistently engage in the process of making disciples, *grace filled Christ followers putting faith into action*, and practicing the ministries of discipleship increase vitality for making more disciples and transforming the world.

Making disciples through vital congregations increases our opportunity for witness in the world. Vital congregations are shaped by and witnessed through ministry with the poor, improving global health, creating new places for new people, and shaping principled Christian leaders.

THE FOUR AREAS OF FOCUS:

Calling and Shaping Principled Christian Leaders:

Difference makers are current and future United Methodists who undertake an intentional process of first discerning their God-given call and then actively working to answer that call through world-changing service.

The United Methodist Church needs leaders, clergy and laity, who can carry out the ministries of their baptism and lead the church toward its mission. The development of these leaders is essential and is happening throughout all levels of the connection. Local churches, annual conferences, and general agencies are directing energy and resources toward this effort.

*Our 2020 Vision looks forward to a United Methodist Church equipping **3 million difference makers** for the transformation of the world.*

Our connectionalism gives us a unique opportunity for collaboration. We acknowledge and celebrate the variety of methods and spaces that shape our principled Christian leaders. We also want to align our work strategically throughout the connection.

Creating and Sustaining New Places for New People:

*Our 2020 Vision looks forward to a United Methodist Church with **1,000,000 new disciples** who profess their faith through renewed and new faith communities around the world.*

*A **disciple** is one who knows Christ, is growing in Christ, serves Christ and is sharing Christ.*

We receive new disciples through professions of faith and increase professions of faith through new and renewed faith communities. The denomination is reaching more people, more young people, and more diverse people for Christ by creating new places for new people. The people of The United Methodist Church seek to cultivate the leaders, develop the systems, and implement the strategies necessary to regain our healthy denominational practice of starting two faith communities each day.

The real measure of success will not be in those numbers or in membership increases or improved giving but in the lives that will be touched and drawn to Christ as disciples because these new faith communities were able to reach people with the gospel of Christ who might otherwise not be reached.

Ministry with the Poor:

Vital congregations reflect God's transforming love into their communities and around the world. As faithful disciples, we are called to love our neighbors - to walk, worship and witness so that all may enjoy God's vision of abundant life. As United Methodists we will challenge and transform broken systems and structures that create and perpetuate poverty.

*Our 2020 Vision looks forward to a United Methodist Church that can build **400 vibrant, flourishing and transforming communities addressing issues of poverty and ministry with the poor, particularly with children.***

Wesley understood that ministry must be centered on **relationships**. To truly love our neighbors we must first know them: their struggles, joys, gifts and challenges. Rooted in these relationships, United Methodists are engaging in meaningful and transformational ministries with poor people and communities. Leveraging connections and partnerships within and beyond The United Methodist Church, we can transform communities and open doors for children to a more promising future.

Abundant Health for All:

*Our 2020 Vision looks forward to a United Methodist Church that can **reach 1 million children with life-saving interventions.***

Every child is a life filled with promise and potential, yet, every 5 seconds a child dies from preventable causes. There is a global move to significantly improve health for all by 2035, with a specific goal of saving the lives of 15 million children by 2020.

The United Methodist Church has a sacred calling to ensure abundant health for all children, engaging disciples to be agents of God's healing transformation in the world. Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly." (John 10:10) Our promise is to make that a reality for the millions whom Jesus has blessed – that is, all people.

CONCLUSION

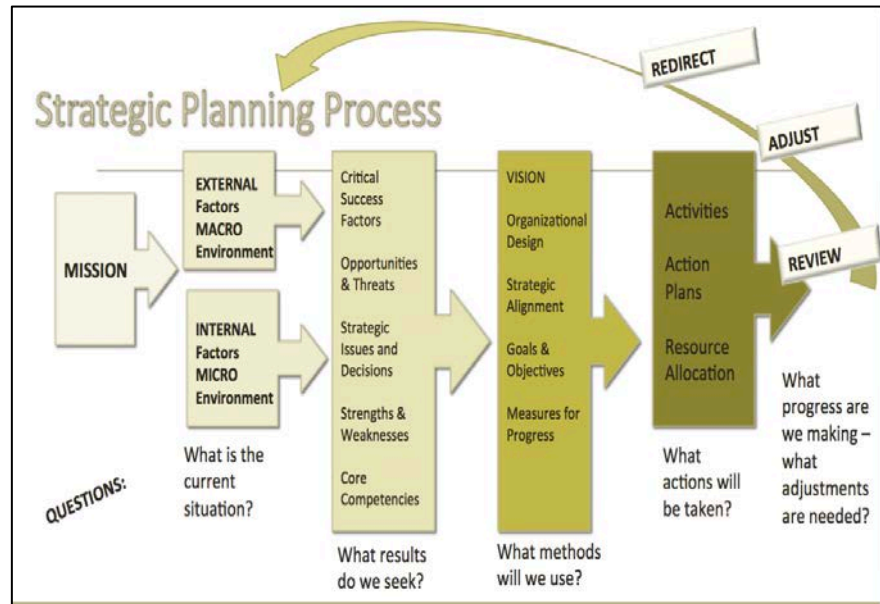
Together we have seen the denomination make significant advances in accountability, assessment and collaboration that have prepared us well for our future vision.

We take the submission of this report as an opportunity to celebrate all that we have been able to accomplish this quadrennium by the grace of God and through the Holy Spirit's leading in our connectional church. We look forward to seeing the fruit of this aligning and collaborative work as we continue to focus on our 2020 Vision for a more vital and authentically worldwide church, making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

SECTION FOUR

MACRO-ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

As a body of Christ we are called to create vital congregations throughout the worldwide United Methodist Church. To do this well – making good decisions that lead to wise stewardship of resources – we must think strategically. We must draw on a wealth of data and research that can inform, support, and challenge ministry plans and preconceptions. Working together to create vital congregations throughout our worldwide church, we seek to make informed decisions, plan mission and ministry strategically, and steward resources wisely.



The Connectional Table has been given the task of **providing leadership in planning and research** that can help all levels of the church to **evaluate needs and plan strategies to carry out the mission** of the church. One way we seek to do this is by convening researchers from our General Boards and Agencies. These persons design, implement, and evaluate research on behalf of their agency’s mission. The investment in well-trained, gifted researchers across the general church is a testament to the importance of this work. Moreover, the capacity of this group to provide strategic knowledge for mission and ministry, even across the different entities, is immense.

To illustrate some of that potential and capacity, the UM Agency Researchers Group has worked collectively on the final section of this report. They were asked to consider several macro-trends present in the United States and to offer preliminary analysis on their impact. This work was done with the conviction that access to this kind of data can illuminate and improve the strategic planning process.

There are a few caveats to note about this section:

- 1) This is **not** intended to be an **exhaustive** report on all major socio-demographic, technological, economic, and political trends impacting the United States at this time.
- 2) These macro-trends offer a snapshot of the bigger picture, which is meant to help frame questions for your local context.
- 3) This preliminary analysis is **not** intended to be universally prescriptive, but rather, help leaders engage data for the purposes of strategic planning.

This section of our report will:

- 1) **Provide a scan of macro-level trends** in the United States (the location of the Summit and context for its participants)
- 2) **Promote the value of research** in planning, managing, and evaluating mission and ministry
- 3) **Provide research methods, sources, and tools** leaders can access for further use in their local contexts

Socio-Demographic:

The United States is projected to have no ethnic majority within the next few decades.

Source: <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/23/its-official-minority-babies-are-the-majority-among-the-nations-infants-but-only-just/>

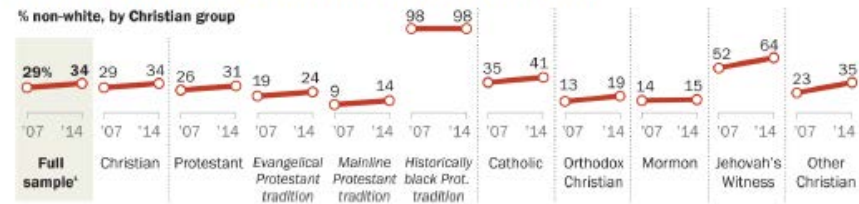
As our communities change, through patterns of immigration and fertility, socio-demographic research can help leaders better assess the make-up of the people of their parish. Demographic shifts, especially those related to migration patterns, on the whole in the U.S. are shifting toward diversity. As with many of these macro trends, a more nuanced understanding and analysis of these patterns ethnic and racial diversity by smaller, regional context would be beneficial.

Resources for Research:

<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/23/its-official-minority-babies-are-the-majority-among-the-nations-infants-but-only-just/>

Annual Conference Access to Mission Insight Data

Increasing Racial and Ethnic Diversity Within Christianity



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014. Whites include only those who are not Hispanic; the non-white category includes African Americans, Asian Americans, those of other races, those of mixed race and Hispanics. Results recalculated to exclude nonresponse.

*The demographic characteristics of the 2014 Religious Landscape Study's overall sample were weighted to known parameters from the Census Bureau's 2012 American Community Survey (ACS), which helps to ensure that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely match those of the U.S. adult population. See Appendix A for details.

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Even as their numbers decline, American Christians – like the U.S. population as a whole – are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. Non-Hispanic whites now account for smaller shares of evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics than they did seven years earlier, while Hispanics have grown as a share of all three religious groups. Racial and ethnic minorities now make up 41% of Catholics (up from 35% in 2007), 24% of evangelical Protestants (up from 19%) and 14% of mainline Protestants (up from 9%).

How might this relate to our mission of making vital congregations?

Worship Attendance	Engagement in Mission
Within the U.S., we are still seeing membership among persons of color increase, even as white membership decreases.	Where are we in mission with the increasing opportunities for cross-cultural engagement in our own communities?

How does it enhance our collective commitment to the Four Areas of Focus?

Principled Christian Leadership Development	New Places for New People
How are we equipping leaders for Cross-cultural appointments?	How are these new places representative of the diversity in our communities?

Technological:

Internet use and engagement continues to increase, with 282 million active internet users and 192 million social media users in the U.S.

Source: We Are Social: Digital in 2016 Report
<http://www.slideshare.net/wearesocials/digital-in-2016>

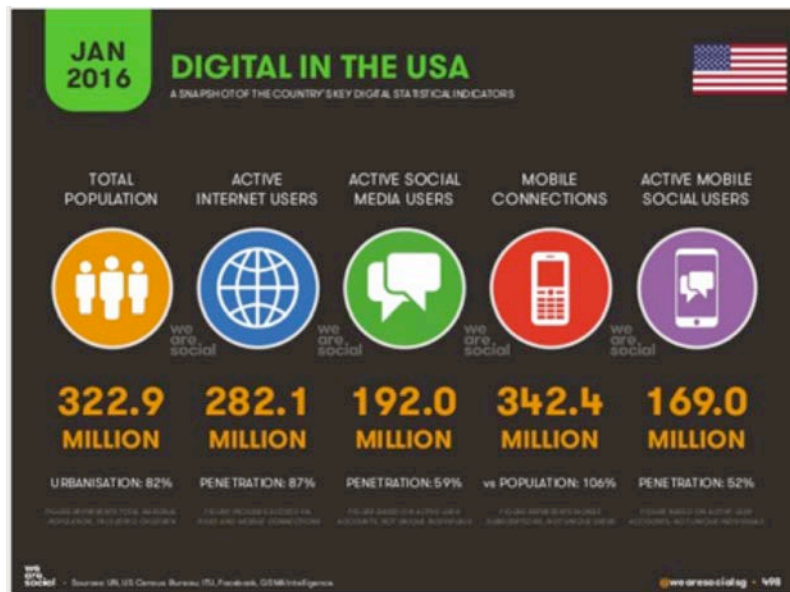
There are a number of studies on the influence of technology, but church leaders might wish to mine research for questions that go beyond the influence of technology on church attendance. Many studies have explored diverse impacts of social media on human and community life. It is easy to condemn social change, but as people of faith called to reach out in the name of Jesus Christ, it is also important to consider what possibilities for engagement and connection may emerge from social change. People use social media for information and connecting with individuals and groups, among other reasons.

How might this relate to our mission of making vital congregations?

Worship Attendance	Participation in Small Groups
How are we accounting for the growing number of people who worship online?	What is the benefit of small group communities online? What are the challenges?

How does it enhance our collective commitment to the Four Areas of Focus?

New Places for New People	Ministry With The Poor
How can we best reach new people in a technologically rich environment?	What are the challenges to community partnerships in a hyper-individualized society?



Resources for Research:
http://www.nbcnews.com/id/38126658/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/technology-changing-way-we-practice-religion/#.V-kyFZMrLaZ
<https://www.technologyreview.com/s/526111/how-the-internet-is-taking-away-americas-religion/>
<http://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/06/religion-and-electronic-media/>

Economic:

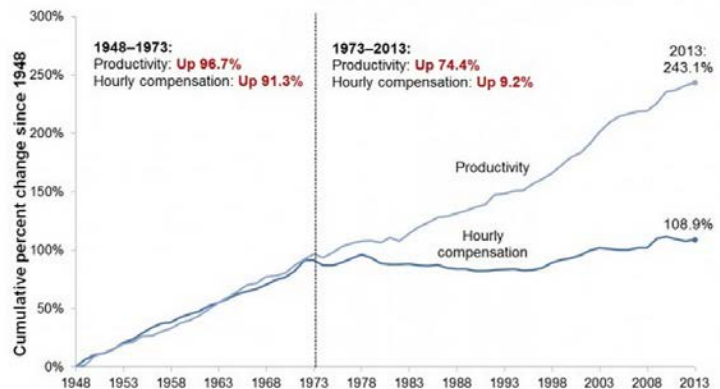
The U.S is experiencing wage stagnation – despite in increase in productivity and hours worked – and a decline in strength of the middle class.

Source: Economic Policy Institute <http://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/>

Economic trends influence more than our revenue stream. They are also a vital part of developing missional strategies to address the needs of the most vulnerable among us, as we seek to live like Jesus Christ in ministry with the poor. As with the other categories listed here, many other trends could be considered, including such things as shifts in industry, spending patterns, etc.

Workers produced much more, but typical workers’ pay lagged far behind

Disconnect between productivity and typical worker’s compensation, 1948–2013



Note: Data are for compensation (wages and benefits) of production/nonsupervisory workers in the private sector and net productivity of the total economy. "Net productivity" is the growth of output of goods and services less depreciation per hour worked.

Source: EPI analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics and Bureau of Economic Analysis data

Updated from Figure A in *Raising America's Pay: Why It's Our Central Economic Policy Challenge*

Economic Policy Institute

Resources for Research:

http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2015/12/2015-12-09_middle-class_FINAL-report.pdf

Changes in Giving Patterns (Crowdfunding):

<http://casefoundation.org/blog/givingtuesday-moves-campaign-tradition/>

How might this relate to our mission of making vital congregations?

Participation in Small Groups	Giving to Mission
How do changing work patterns affect the timing and offering of small group ministries?	What is the influence of wage stagnation on giving? How are we talking about our mission and ministry in ways that compel persons to give?

How does it intersect with our collective commitment to the Four Areas of Focus?

Principled Christian Leadership Development	Ministry with the Poor
What role does economic security play in leadership development? How does wage stagnation impact seminary indebtedness and pension contribution?	How do we define “the poor” in our context and how are our ministries deepening partnerships that contribute to larger systemic change?

Political:

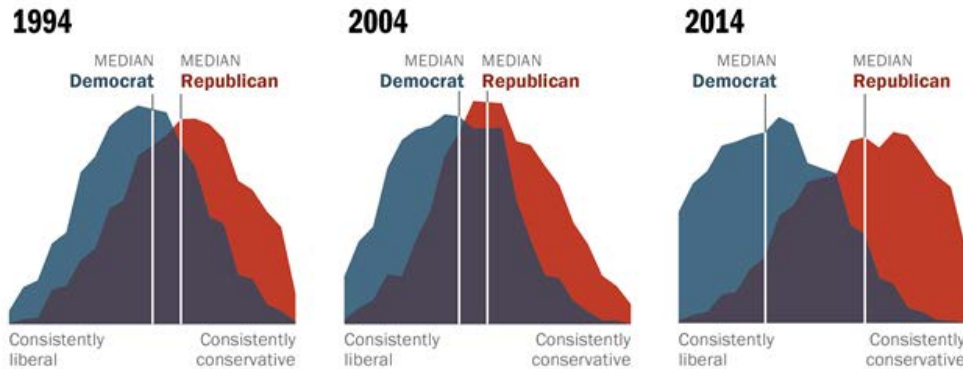
The build up to the 2016 Presidential Election in the United States has intensified political polarization and extremism.

Source: <http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

The political climate, particularly in a presidential election can influence the behaviors of and relationships between individuals. Awareness of the trend can influence the content of programming, the nature of community building, and the care of members. It can also be important for framing our external communication and welcoming the disenfranchised.

Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public
Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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Resources for Research:

<http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

<http://www.people-press.org/2016/06/22/partisanship-and-political-animosity-in-2016/>

How might this relate to our mission of making vital congregations?

Participation in Small Groups	Giving to Mission
How are small groups a place for discourse across difference?	How is giving affected by the political seasons?








How does this intersect with our collective commitment to the Four Areas of Focus?

Principles Christian Leadership Development	Abundant Health
How can we design leadership development resources that respect the diversity of political perspectives held by the constituents we serve?	How is the politicized nature of health care in the U.S. aiding or detracting from programs designed to increase health Christians, congregations and communities?

Conclusion

This has been a “sampler” – a very brief introduction of four significant trends in American life with implications for ministry. Many more trends could be considered, with different facets highlighted, different connections to mission, ministry, vital congregations and the Four Areas of Focus explored.

This kind of research can be customized to particular geographic locations and areas of interest or concern. This is something our general agency researchers are capable of doing and eager to offer as a service to the connection. The Agency Researchers involved in the production of this Macro-Trends report have expertise in finding and analyzing data. Access to these resources is a major benefit of our connectionalism. Please let us know how our agency staff might further equip the leadership of your Annual Conference for mission and ministry.

 <p>Connectional Table The United Methodist Church</p>	<p>The Connectional Table provides leadership in planning and research, assisting all levels of the church to evaluate needs and plan strategies to carry out the mission of the church.</p>
 <p>DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES General Board of Discipleship THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</p>	<p>Discipleship Ministries’ Director of Research and Strategic Evaluation, Naomi Annandale, has expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods, outcomes-based evaluation, demographic analysis, religious practices, pastoral theology, use of congregational data, and disability ministries.</p>
 <p>FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION General Council on Finance and Administration THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</p>	<p>The primary function of Research at GCFA is data collection with analysis as requested.</p>
 <p>COMMUNICATIONS United Methodist Communications THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</p>	<p>UMCom research acts as a resource for customer information, data analyses, and strategic consultations to grow The UMC.</p>
 <p>UMM UNITED METHODIST MEN</p>	<p>The General Commission on United Methodist Men is committed to reaching men for Christ, so others may know Christ. We provide our local men’s organizations with resources and extensive training so they can be “on-growing” disciples and doers of the Word in this world. UMM uses data to assess resources and programs, and develop and disseminate best practices to bring men into the church and help them to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.</p>
 <p>Wespath BENEFITS INVESTMENTS</p>	<p>The Center for Health, a division of Wespath Benefits and Investments (formerly the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits), has a research focus on clergy health and well-being and the vocational setting.</p>
 <p>HIGHER EDUCATION & MINISTRY General Board of Higher Education and Ministry THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH</p>	<p>GBHEM’s Office of Research and Evaluation creates research that is both rigorous and creative with the purpose of understanding how different factors impact the mission of The United Methodist Church, so we can educate and equip leaders of the UMC to improve programming and adjust activities to address the needs of clergy and lay constituents. Our theoretically grounded methods seek to inspire research supported solutions to the issues facing religious leaders.</p>

