

**LOUISIANA UNITED METHODIST CHURCH CONFERENCE BOARD OF LAITY
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY—2014 LAITY FOCUS GROUP SESSION**

The Board of Laity conducted a focus group at the 2014 Laity Session of the Annual Conference. Each table appointed a leader and recorder. The questions were available at the table and also on screen. Trained facilitators were located throughout the room to assist a table, if needed. The facilitator/time-keeper maintained notices of time left for each question. All recorded responses from each table were kept in order and entered into a computer; first by table number and then by question number. The following information was gleaned about the data:

- 51 tables; 8-10 persons/table; 408-510 lay persons in the focus groups
- When information is organized by table, there are 168 pages of comments
- When information is organized by questions—there are 95 pages of comments

The questions and aggregated answers are listed below:

1. How does your church live out the mission of the Louisiana Annual Conference?

- 20 pages of thoughts of lay persons
- Selected answers—28 answers to the question
 - √ Small groups x 5
 - √ Intergenerational connections
 - √ Bible studies x 16
 - √ Congregational care
 - √ Dynamic worship services
 - √ Meet with non-churched people in non-church settings—"lounge area of a bar"
 - √ Honest & genuine accountability
 - √ Discipleship coaching/formal Discipleship training program

2. What risks would you recommend to your church in order to demonstrate movement toward the mission of the church?

- "Provide education on what the connection mission of the church is"—one answer from a table
- Radical evangelism—fear of losing traditions
- All congregations need to move toward unification (in and out of worship) across cultural, racial, and gender barriers.
- Accepting all people even when others get uncomfortable or frustrated

3. What would you list as the job responsibilities of laypersons in your church based on the LA UMC VISION/PREFERRED FUTURE? Please use bullet points to list the items of the job description.

- Accountability x 6
- Bible Study x 15
- Small groups x 5
- Why are we Methodists? x 3
- Spiritual formation x 2

4. A. How do you hold yourself accountable for your work/support of the church?

- Attendance and Giving
- Prayer and Personal piety
- Some answers about district and conference level service

Two interesting comments:

- “But what do we do to make disciples?”
- “Don’t be afraid of rejection by the older members of the congregation!”

B. How does your laity hold themselves accountable for the work of the church?

- Communicate explicitly what is required of all members of the church
- Shows the “church”—the people in the congregation are not accepting accountability for the work of the Church’s vision
- New visioning committee?
- Worry that some laity think “someone else will do it”, so that laity doesn’t take the initiative
- Worried that our vision of the church isn’t really being heard—“Make disciples for Christ—is that what we are really about?”
- “A self-assessment of laity may be lacking”
- “Core laity are accountable, others may not be”
- “We don’t, for the most part”
- “They don’t”
- “Pastor that leads”
- “Not well enough—not held accountable—support to churches which are failing in their mission—not bringing in new people”
- “Epicenter of each church is the minster = they should also recruit”
- “Most churches have a core group of laity that are trying to fulfill the mission, and understand the mission, but it is not a large group”
- “Haven’t seen an organizational way that the laity does that”

5. What training does your church/laypersons/clergy need to move your church in transformation toward the mission of the LA United Methodist Church Conference?

- Training on Methodism/structure/Wesleyan Principles x 12—most frequently mentioned area
- Pastor needs to step out—preacher needs training to be able to step out so s/he can lead
- “Formalized” mentorship of new members
- Training to identify what the community needs rather than what the church wants to do
- More training
- Need people on the district and conference level to attend and train local church members

6. What priorities are first—the needs of the people/community or the support of the buildings and maintenance? Why did you make that selection?

- 33 tables (65 %) agreed unanimously that people/community were top priority
- 13 tables were split (25 %), came to no consensus, and reported no data on split
- 5 tables (10 %) reached no consensus and reported the number of people in each group
- 90 % of those counted agreed people/community top priority; 10 % of those counted agreed that buildings/maintenance top priority

Final Thoughts and Recommendations—District lay leaders and the Conference Chair of the Board of Laity met in January at the Wesley Center to formulate plans for next steps. Decisions surrounding more district training opportunities are in the works; highlights of several conference programs are being presented at the 2015 Laity Session; and a new accountability structure is being released for laity at the 2015 laity session.