

MSAC Definition of New Faith Community

Definition

A group of two or more people, non-related (by blood or marriage) who regularly meet together to worship and discuss Jesus Christ and Holy Scripture (based on Wesleyan theology), regularly engage in telling others about Jesus Christ and His Gospel, work together for the transformation of themselves, their friends and family and community moving ever closer to the character, image, and likeness of Jesus Christ, and work to establish other groups like themselves.

Characteristics of these groups may include but are not limited to:

- Are theologically Wesleyan
- Worship together and celebrate the sacraments
- Have written systems for developing disciples of Jesus
- Teach and practice biblical stewardship
- Are missional and work toward community transformation
- Will remain connected and accountable to The United Methodist Church for at least 5 years if they are receiving or have received within 5 years of last payment of any UM grant funds of any type. *(In order to be eligible to be considered for receipt of any MAC grant funding.)*

New Faith Communities may include [but are not limited to] the following models, so long as they meet the above definition/criteria:

1. Partner Church/Multiple “Parent”	2. Classic Missionary
3. Multi-site Expansion	4. Church-Within-a-Church
5. The “Elijah/Elisha”	6. Vital Merger
7. Closed/Reopened Facility (Restart)	8. House Church
9. Intentional Communities	10. The Surprise Birth
11. Integrated Multi-Ethnic Projects	12. Fresh Expressions
13. Adoption	14. Online Faith Community
15. Relocation	16. Laity-Led New Start

1. **Partner Church/Multiple “Parent” Strategy** (also known as Mother/Daughter)- An existing United Methodist congregation (or, perhaps, several churches) serves as an anchoring, sponsoring or parenting force in launching a new church. This could be a cluster of partner churches or a combination of partner church(es) and another entity (e.g., a United Methodist campus ministry, retirement home or church agency).
2. **Classic Missionary Strategy** - This type of plant happens when a cabinet sends a planter into a territory to plant a church and (a) that planter is not from that territory plus (b) there are no active partnerships in place with other United Methodist churches or institutions in the area.
3. **Multi-site Expansion Strategy** - A new faith community meeting at a new site remains part of a sponsoring church, even as they may develop a distinct staff and ministry team system. Multi-sites vary in pastoral and staffing strategies. They typically have a site pastor – who may or may not be the lead preacher at the site.
4. **Church-Within-a-Church Strategy** - In a world of very expensive real estate, many new churches will share space with other churches (both partner churches and other collegial congregations). Existing congregations choosing to share property may find that new churches may better serve their immediate neighbors, especially when the new church specializes in a certain racial-ethnic culture and/or a certain generation or social group.
5. **The “Elijah/Elisha” Strategy** - This strategy requires a proactive discernment process with the district superintendent or conference staff. Congregations may either discover a new vision and recommit to fruit-bearing ministry or respond to God’s call to become an “Elijah” new church start (2 Kings 2:1-14 tells how Elijah passed on the legacy of his ministry to Elisha). Elijah churches intentionally choose either to (a) join another church and give their physical assets to the conference to reach a new group of people or (b) open their doors to a planter and launch team that takes over management of the facility to start a new congregation.
6. **Vital Merger Strategy** - Most of the time, mergers do not truly create new churches. Two declining churches typically agree to share one facility and decline together rather than alone. However, East Ohio Conference, for example, has a strategy that requires both of the merging churches to sell their buildings, pool the funds, move to a temporary location, find a new name, receive a trained planter and proceed as if they were a new church. Leadership of the planter is key.
7. **Closed/Reopened Facility Strategy** - Similar to the above strategies, except that there is no church left to share its facility, turn over its ministry, or merge with another congregation to create something new. The new church begins to address the needs and culture of the community population.
8. **House Church Strategy** - This may well be the oldest strategy for church planting that exists, certainly reaching back to Asia Minor in the first century, and also to frontier America when population was very sparse. House churches are typically small, limited to the number that can fit in a home or a small meeting space. They are often lay-led, with clergy visiting to bring the Sacraments. House churches may organize into networks, akin to circuits of very small congregations.

9. **Intentional Communities** - The strategy is often traced back to the early church movement described in Acts 2. There have been Intentional Communities throughout most of Christian history, going back to Franciscan, Benedictine and early Celtic orders. More contemporary examples of this strategy, still in existence, were founded in the early 1950s. Typically, Intentional Communities remain small in size (3-12 people) and have no plan to “formalize” as chartered churches with land and a church structure.
10. **The Surprise Birth** - Sometimes, churches are born unexpectedly – just as children may come along in a season when we did not expect them. Some of our best United Methodist congregations have emerged in this way, as a work of the Holy Spirit and faithful laity. With wise pastoral care and negotiation, these projects often can be brought into the United Methodist fold as official new church projects.
11. **Integrated Multi-Ethnic Projects** - This strategy results in an intentionally multi-ethnic church plant that worships as one integrated body to create a unique cultural expression and reflect all groups involved. This is what heaven looks like, so why not intentionally plant churches that are integrated? This strategy reflects the work of the Holy Spirit to bring together as one in Christ a multitude of cultural, racial and ethnic groups. We recognize that The United Methodist Church is just learning how to implement this strategy effectively.
12. **Fresh Expressions** – A fresh expression of church is a form of church for our changing culture, established for the benefit of those who are not yet part of any church. Each fresh expression of church is unique and designed for their particular context. They can be rural or suburban, in public spaces, housing projects, college dormitories – ranging from “Messy Church” for families with children, “Amore Groups” led by married couples, biker church, cowboy church, burrito church, dog park church; the sky’s the limit.
 - **Missional** – Joining God’s mission by going to those not currently served by any church
 - **Contextual** – Grounded in the language and culture of the people in and for their particular context
 - **Formational** – Focused on discipling people in the way of Jesus
 - **Ecclesial** – Forming local, tangible Christian communities that are able to step out as church in their own right.
13. **Adoption** – When a larger church absorbs a smaller church, working with the leadership and the already existing facilities and programs at minimal cost. They grow together into a larger, stronger church with multiple locations.
14. **Online Faith Community** – Many churches are beginning to add an online worship service. Facebook live, YouTube, and online services are making these worship services an indispensable option for our communities by, “reaching people we are not already reaching.” This is a way of adding “virtual” seats to existing worship services and/or creating an identifiable new faith community where people can grow in discipleship, relationships and faith.
15. **Relocation** – When a church finds the need to move to a new location in order to reach more people for Christ. This may be due to a dwindling population, older facilities, or a number of other

factors. Once re-located, the church then begins to address the needs and culture of the surrounding community population.

- 16. Laity-led New Start** – Laity assume leadership of new congregations; creating a contextual, relevant new faith community that reaches people who are unchurched to bring them to Christ.