

SMALL CHURCH ADVOCACY TEAM
APRIL 16, 2005 MEETING MINUTES

The team met from 10:00 a.m. to noon at Akron United Methodist Church.

Present were: Don Dexheimer, Tom Shanahan, Brenda Ludwig, Jim Irwin, and Cindy Reynolds.

Don Dexheimer presented a devotional that pointed out that Jesus' commands to his followers called for making disciples without reference to church size. It was agreed by the team that our goal is to help small churches to be healthy and effective. It was also agreed that what is done by the team and its partners may benefit larger churches, but our focus is churches with an average worship attendance of less than 100.

Needs of small churches

1. The clergy of small churches need to be encouraged and enlightened so that they can empower the lay leadership of the small churches. Like circuit riders of past times, the pastors of small churches need to delegate and empower lay leadership.
2. It is important to value the ministry of small churches. About 2/3 of the churches in North Indiana are small churches. If most of those churches could increase worship attendance by 5-10% (add 1 or 2 families), it would have a major positive effect on the conference.
3. Need a vision of what God is calling the church to be. As the Bible says, without vision the people perish.

Situations of small churches

1. Many small churches do not know or do not apply spiritual gifts to ministry.
2. Many small churches are served by part time pastors who have limited time to serve.
3. Many small churches feel devalued, financially constrained, and in the shadow of a large church.
4. Many small churches have a "poor me" attitude influenced by comparison with larger churches.

Resources of small churches

1. Testimonies and success stories in small churches
2. Network in the community

Communication with small churches

1. How can the pastor of a small church talk with other pastors to find help with a problem?
2. How can laity of a small church talk with other laity to find help with a problem?
3. Have chat rooms for small church clergy and laity.
4. Publish feature stories of small church successes in Together
5. Create a 5-10 minute DVD presentation for 2006 Annual Conference showing success stories of small churches.

Additional research

1. Pastor longevity to worship attendance
2. Worship attendance to membership

Ideas of what we can do to help small churches be effective and healthy

1. Develop one or more teams of people who can help small churches become healthy and have a Christ centered vision. They can use information from “Natural Church Development” and other sources in this work. Ed Fenstermacher is a resource at the conference office. See the attached sheet on Characteristics of Healthy Churches.
2. Tell small church success stories to inspire other small churches.
3. Build vision and value of small churches.
4. By September 1, 2005, put a request to Cindy Reynolds for a 10 minute DVD at 2006 Annual Conference celebrating small church success stories. After annual conference the small churches would be able to take a copy of the DVD home to show to the local congregation.
5. Help laity to see the potential for accomplishment if they do something.
6. Inform small churches of how they can assess the health of their church. (Ed Fenstermacher)
7. Offer District training for small churches on Saturdays.