



Circuit Ministry 2.0 Imagining Wisconsin Circuit Ministry Anew

A New Day for Circuit Ministry

This year (2014) is the first conference-wide upgrade of Circuit Ministry since it was initiated in 2003.

First there was listening to Circuit Leaders and conversations with Circuits. Circuit Ministry 2.0 is derived from extensive listening, learning, and careful analysis about what is working and what is not working, and why. The Circuit Assessment includes data from all circuits.

The Assessment Report and a Transition Document were provided to Circuit Leaders in early December, so that circuits as they are currently meeting would have a chance to see the research, and talk about it.

Today I am asking you to temporarily suspend your current understanding about Circuit Ministry, and to use this time to imagine something with me - a different approach going forward – Circuit Ministry 2.0.

Beginning in 2014 the focus of Circuit Ministry will be on the implementation of the conference vision: Imagining Wisconsin Anew.

Is the upgrade to Circuit Ministry 2.0 a re-launch or an adjustment?

This is a re-launch of circuit ministry, but your experience of change with this upgrade will depend on which version of Circuit Ministry you are currently using, the way your circuit is currently functioning, the way you currently practice. It is not the same everywhere in Wisconsin.

For a few circuits this builds on current practice. This upgrade offers clarification of purpose. For these circuits it may feel more like a fine tuning to the conference vision involving little change in their circuit configuration, organization or functioning.

For some circuits this is an adjustment that narrows expectations and builds on current practices with new training. These circuits will experience the change as a refocusing on the core purpose of circuits.

For many circuits this is a bigger change, including the opportunity to engage laity in a circuit ministry process in ways they have never been engaged before; or to engage clergy in a circuit ministry process with a clearer sense of expectation and outcome for their efforts. The change will be experienced more like a reboot to launch the missing half of the program.

For many circuits this is an opportunity to reconfigure or realign with different churches to work with a more realistic geographic region. This means that many circuits will be smaller than they are now. This change will feel like a reorganization and re-launch with major adjustments.

For some circuits this is an opportunity to stop doing practices that do not produce new ministries or encourage healthier spiritual leadership. Some of the ways in which circuits expend time and effort will be questioned. Some of the efforts that feel like exercises in futility will be ended. This change will feel like a pause, like on a computer when you press the control / alternate / delete keys at the same time.

For many circuits this is a complete re-launch with more guidance and training, and more clearly defined laity and clergy roles for involvement in circuit level work. This change will feel like total system reboot.

Not all circuits in Wisconsin have developed in the same way. We understand that we will working with circuits as they are. Circuits will be worked with and trained individually rather than engaged in a one-size-fits-all generalized approach to training. The research clearly indicates that circuits and circuit leaders want contextually relevant support to be provided in their area by the annual conference.

In the brochure please note a series of open events in 2014 that are scheduled in every region. These are offered to provide transparency for all clergy and laity in our churches regarding the change in Circuit Ministry, and to establish a common language for our training. I want to be clear: these are the re-launch events, not the ongoing training process.

This is not a quick fix. This will take some time to change our process and to develop circuits in a new and different way, to do a more specific kind of work. The purpose is to redevelop circuits in ways that result in new ministry through local initiatives, but with focused and individualized training and support.

Are Circuits Ministry Producing Units or Administrative Structures?

This question points to one of the key elements highlighted as an issue in the Circuit assessment process. Not all people have understood this the same way. We measured what works and what doesn't work so well. Circuit Ministry 2.0 is about new ministry rather than administrative structure.

Clearly we don't want to fix things that are not broken. We don't want to prevent Circuits from doing things that have worked for them. Circuits with existing and established mission, shared programs that are currently working, these circuits will be encouraged to continue them. Circuits without existing ministry intentions in their region will be consulted with, and considered for realignment to a more appropriate geographic area, and then trained for this missional purpose.

The practice of using Circuits for administrative functions attached to the Cabinet will end. Circuits will be used to generate new ministry possibilities rather than used as structures for administration, places to download. The role of the appointed Clergy Circuit Leader will no longer include doing proxy District Superintendent functions. District Superintendents may task any elder at any time to assist with a variety of administrative tasks, but the idea that this is a default role for Clergy Circuit Leaders is gone. The Clergy Circuit Leader will facilitate a Clergy Circuit Team to focus on doing ministry, doing ministry better, and doing ministry better together.

Some circuits have a Laity Circuit Leader. Now they all will. We have learned that this matters, and that it works. What does not seem to work is clergy efforts to organize laity to come together for circuit level events or circuit level mission and ministry projects that are not embedded in local congregations. This is one of the areas where largely clergy have experienced a sense of futility. The critical factor in circuits where this works is Laity Leadership. The role of Laity Circuit Leaders will be to lead a Laity Circuit Team, and to collaborate with the Clergy Circuit Team for new ministry possibilities.

The Clergy Circuit Team will not direct or lead the Laity Circuit Team. Pastors will be encouraged to team up with their Laity Circuit Team member to share their best ideas, and to make sure they are developing a shared way of visioning the future. But to be clear, we are trying to develop a process for our laity to work together in visioning.

Is the function of the Clergy Circuit Team and the Laity Circuit Team the same?

The answer to this question is no. They are complimentary, intended for partnership and collaboration, but they are not the same. They have differentiated functions.

A Clergy Circuit Team will meet regularly and separately for distinct clergy leadership development and training, peer support and accountability. This is a closed professional mutual support group for clergy.

A Laity Circuit Team will meet regularly and separately for distinct laity leadership development and training, and to imagine collaborative strategies for new externally focused ministries in their region.

Laity Circuit Teams and Clergy Circuit Teams will collaborate to design and implement new ministry strategies that are proposed by the Laity Circuit Team.



What if a pastor has a great new idea for a circuit ministry and wants to lead the circuit to do it? The pastor's job is to equip, empower and enable their laity member of the Laity Circuit Team. Connect with that person and plant the idea, invite them to explore it with you, think about it together, and then let them lead the way with the other circuit laity.

Are Circuits New Ministry Idea Think Tanks or Planners of Circuit Wide Programs and Events?

The function of the Laity Circuit Team is to study the region, and imagine new ways to reach new people based on demographic reality, changes in the population, new people they discover, as well as working knowledge about the limitations and strengths of existing ministries of the congregations of the circuit. As a Think Tank they generate new ideas, try to see possibilities for ministry that haven't happened yet.

The Laity Circuit Team, with the Clergy Circuit Team, explores design and implementation options of their new idea (what would it take?) with the intention of embedding their ideas for new ministry into existing United Methodist congregations, or local strategic collaborations of churches within the circuit. New ministries will be connected to existing congregations if and when there is willingness and capacity is developed. There is a hand-off here. Congregations eventually accept the ministry idea (or not), plan and implement, experiment, adjust or adapt to make it their own; while the Laity Circuit Team moves on to work on new ideas.

Why embed new ideas in congregations and collaborations, and not implement ideas as a Circuit Team? In the United Methodist Church local churches are understood as vital centers for mission and ministry, not circuits.

Why embed new ideas in congregations and collaborations, and not implement ideas as a Circuit Team? New people connecting through new ministries need to be connecting and building relationships with people from our existing churches, or else working to start a new United Methodist congregation.

Why embed new ideas in congregations and collaborations, and not implement ideas as a Circuit Team? New ministries that could become new faith communities in Wisconsin are to be coordinated through District Strategy Teams. Circuits will learn how to connect with and work with District Strategy Teams.

Imagine Circuits as Learning Academies to implement the Conference Vision.

"New ministries with new people" remains the intended outcome of Circuit Ministry 2.0. What is new is focused guidance for "how" to develop circuits to do that, now provided by the conference visioning document *Imagining Wisconsin Anew*.

Circuits will look for ways to help local congregations "Engage Our Multicultural Communities."

Local training will be provided to Laity Circuit Teams on the use of demographic tools and ethnographic methods to better understand regional changes and see new ministry opportunities. This will include guidance, support and accountability measures on how to meet and develop working relationships with indigenous, immigrant and community leaders. Clergy Circuit Teams will receive specialized training on the use of community research methods to build and connect in pastoral ministry. Laity Circuit Teams will receive specialized training on how to use this research to imagine new ministry possibilities with new and emerging multicultural populations, and work with economic diversity in the local context.

Circuits will look for opportunities to "Plant New Ministries" (new faith communities).

Training in the use of demographic tools and ethnographic methods will be provided specifically to Laity Circuit Teams for the purpose of identifying potential new faith communities. This is related to the general purpose of the Laity Circuit Team as it imagines new ministry possibilities; it may also imagine the need for a new congregation. Working with this possibility on the local and circuit level affords the opportunity for the existing congregations in a circuit to be challenged



with claiming a sponsoring role or an extension campus relationship to a new faith ministry start at an early stage, leading to a stronger case for such a recommendation to District Strategy Teams. Circuits would be involved to identify partner ministries or partner congregations for new faith starts.

Circuits will support the “Launch of Turnaround Movement with Vital Congregations.”

The joint New-Launch Training for Laity Circuit Teams and Clergy Circuit Teams together is on what it means to organize a local congregation to be a Discipleship System. Congregations able to understand and practice ministry as such a process (seek, engage, equip, deploy) will be more prepared to hear, accept, engage, and act on new ministry recommendations from Laity Circuit Teams, and to see possibilities for themselves or desire new collaborations. The Clergy Circuit Team would be the forum for support and accountability Conversation about local church aspects of Vital Congregations (worship, new members, small groups, mission, outreach, stewardship). The Laity Circuit Team will stay focused on the work of discovering new ministry possibilities that may be beyond the current vision of any of the local congregations in the circuit.

Circuits will “Imagine Mercy and Justice Ministries in Both Rural and Urban Communities.”

Laity Circuit Teams will learn about and connect with local movements, interfaith networks and community based ministries already in existence as they do their community study. They are to imagine what United Methodist participation would look like and accomplish, and to make recommendations regarding involvement, or encourage continued involvement. Laity Circuit Teams will also look for unmet needs and unique ministries of justice and mercy for United Methodists that ecumenical collaborative groups and other community ministries may not currently address.

Circuits will look for ways to “Create Soul Food in Wisconsin.”

Laity Circuit Teams can find ideas to guide their thinking about food ministries such as urban or community gardening, food pantries and shelters, connecting with and welcoming migrant workers, or ecology and stewardship of the environment. Imagining Wisconsin Anew can be used as a guide to help Laity Circuit Teams find direction as they look for new ways to help our congregations connect with their changing communities.

Training for Circuit Ministry 2.0

Circuit Ministry 2.0 training will be organized through the Coordinator of Circuit Ministries using resources of the Discipleship Leadership Council and the Ministry and Outreach Staff. Clergy Circuit Teams are not expected to train the Laity Circuit Teams. Training will be provided locally, and tailored to the current state of development in each circuit. Realignment questions will be resolved on a case by case prior to training.

The training focus for Clergy Circuit Team will be:

- Congregation as Discipleship System
- Community Research – practical use of Demographic and Ethnographic Methods
- Off-Stage Leadership – a guided Support and Accountability Process
- Practicing the Clergy Covenant – general support and accountability, team building

The training focus for Laity Circuit Teams will be:

- Congregation as Discipleship System
- Community Engagement
- How to locally and collaboratively implement Imagining Wisconsin Anew
- Developing cooperative and collaborative ministry (models and methods)
- How to identify new mission and ministry possibilities
- How and When to coordinate with District Strategy Teams for new faith community starts

Circuits will receive consultation and training based on a priority ranking:

Tier One: Circuits that already involve laity and are functioning (assist in adaptation)

Tier Two: Circuits in key population and areas where District Strategy Teams see new starts

Tier Three: Circuits demonstrating readiness by local initiative (Laity Circuit Team established)

Tier Four: Circuits demonstrating readiness with M&O staff initiative for a Laity Circuit Team

Benchmarks toward Success as Ministry Producing Units

Laity Circuit Team Process

- Clergy Circuit Team identifies leadership for Laity Circuit Team
- Laity Circuit Team is established
- Laity Circuit Team is meeting and involved in training components
- Laity Circuit Team studies local community demographics and identifies population change
- Laity Circuit Team engages with their community using ethnographic methods to learn existing ministry and needs
- Laity Circuit Team develops ideas for new ministries

Point of Collaboration and Embedding Process

- Laity Circuit Team and Clergy Circuit Team meet together and consult on idea, identify strategic collaborations for referral and implementation (what would it take to do it?)
- Laity Circuit Team and Clergy Circuit Team work with selected congregations to embed the idea and/or refer to the District Strategy Team
- Local Congregations collaboratively develop a plan including leadership and financial support
- Laity Circuit Team seeks next new possibility

Clergy Circuit Team Process

- Clergy Circuit Team meets regularly and trains with the Laity Circuit Team on the Congregation as Discipleship System
- Clergy Circuit Team meets regularly and trains together for doing Community Research
- Clergy Circuit Team establishes support and accountability rubric for Off-Stage Leadership
- Clergy Circuit Team develops professional collegiality toward shared leadership and team ministry

Point of Collaboration and Embedding Process

- Clergy Circuit team collaborates with the Laity Circuit Team to present ministry ideas in local congregations.
- Clergy Circuit Team works with Laity Circuit Team to present ministry ideas in local congregations.
- Clergy Circuit Team works with congregations to engage in new ministries