

# Building Up the Body of Christ

## Being a District Superintendent in the City

*The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

*(Ephesians 4:11-16)*

## Introduction

The churches of the first and second centuries were composed of people from various cultures and backgrounds. Convinced that they had a message for all people, the churches struggled with many issues, including how to negotiate cultural differences, how to equip leaders who had no previous church background, and how to provide for the needs of those who lacked economic means. Today the churches of our cities find themselves in a situation similar to that of the early church.

Demographic analysis shows that in the most densely populated parts of the United States, where 25% of the U.S. population is found, there are approximately 1,800 United Methodist churches. These churches represent less than 8% of all United Methodists in the United States. So, a case could be made that where we are most likely to find people is where we are less likely to find United Methodists—a reality that should cause great concern for the heirs of John Wesley.

If we take seriously Jesus' message that where we find those on the margins, there we will also find him, then most of those 1,800 churches are sitting in the middle of Jesus' home turf. What incredible potential we have to help people encounter, perhaps for the first time, the transforming love of God! What significant opportunities we have for committed Christians to have intimate and ongoing interaction with the living Christ! The churches in these areas of high-population density have a great potential to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, hence the term high-potential metro church. They are places in which God's justifying and sanctifying grace can lead to the transformation of the community and the world.

However, the churches in these areas also have great challenges. Many have large historic buildings that swallow huge chunks of the church's resources. The churches are often in transitional communities, making old ways of doing things no longer effective. Sometimes the enormous ministry needs that are all around the church seem to overwhelm the congregation's ability to respond. These are just a few of the challenges that face churches in high-potential metro areas.

The apostle Paul would have felt at home with the superintendents who guide districts in our most densely populated cities. Paul kept in contact with the churches in his care, encouraging them, admonishing them, helping to equip them for the task at hand, and always telling the truth in love. As a district superintendent, you are called to a similar task.

The task of the district superintendent in a high-potential metro area is no less challenging than it is for the pastors and congregations in these areas. It is also no less of an opportunity to be engaged in the Master's business. You have been blessed to be placed in an area where your ministry can play a crucial role in equipping the saints and building up the body of Christ. Pastors serving in high-potential areas have reported the powerful difference it makes when their district superintendents walk with them as they seek to lead prophetically in the congregation and the community.

While a loving heart, a sincere desire to serve the risen Lord, and a passion for the city and its people are essential ingredients to an effective ministry as a district superintendent in a high-potential area, there are also skills, knowledge, and experiences that will increase your effectiveness. Whether your district is in an entirely urban area or includes suburban and

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(Ephesians 4:15-16)

rural churches as well, we hope this booklet will assist you. It will not answer all your questions, but it will help you think about questions to ask, people to seek out, resources to explore, issues to consider, and actions to take as you lead in your district and annual conference.

This booklet comes to you from the High-Potential Metro Church Initiative of the General Board of Discipleship. Many people, both clergy and lay, have had a role in its development. While it is impossible to list everyone who played a part in creating it, we particularly want to thank Marvin Arnpriester, Inday Day, Craig French, Susan Hansen, Vincent Harris, Susan Hay, Tamara Lewis, MaryJane Pierce Norton, Susan Ruach, Paul Slentz, Deb Smith, and Karen Vannoy.

What a great and awesome ministry you have been called to. May you speak the truth in love as you promote “the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”

## **Your Shepherding Is Needed**

One of your roles in “building up the body” is supporting pastoral health.

Clergy in high-potential metro areas often experience stress that, while not unique to these areas, may be more pronounced. There may be some physical danger and other fears that need to be acknowledged. Because of lack of access to educational opportunities, within the congregation there may be fewer people with developed leadership skills. Therefore, things that are often done by lay people with minimal oversight, such as doing financial reports and leading various committees, may require greater involvement by the pastor.

Coming face to face every day with human needs that are chronic and often unsolvable can lead to compassion fatigue. This can result in reduced ministry effectiveness, deterioration of family life, a decline in general health, and destructive personal behavior.

The demands on pastors in high-potential metro settings often encourage patterns that lead to addictions and addictive behavior, such as overeating and overworking. The pastors in your district may need your support in developing accountability structures to assist in developing behavioral patterns that will facilitate spiritual, physical, emotional, and relational well-being. It is essential for the long-term health of leaders that they experience joy in their lives. Nurturing of healthy relationships, continued learning, and opportunities for play and relaxation are an important part of a balanced life.

You can model this balance in your own life, as well as holding the pastors in your district accountable for

- taking a regular day off,
- creating sabbath time apart from the day off,
- planning and taking vacation,
- not slighting family time.

Remind pastors of the quadrennial renewal and sabbatical leaves encouraged in Paragraph 349 of the *Discipline*, and be an advocate for ways that financial support can be provided to allow that leave to occur.

Serving in diverse communities can bring to the surface unresolved issues related to stereotypes, biases, and prejudices.

Some pastors in your district may find they need the help of mental-health professionals or other professionals to deal with compassion fatigue and other issues. You can help facilitate this by

- making sure that pastors are aware of any financial help available through the annual conference for counseling,
- helping pastors view seeking professional help as a indication of health and not failure,
- occasionally asking a pastoral counselor or other mental-health professional to speak at district meetings on compassion fatigue and related subjects,
- telling the truth in love when you observe pastors exhibiting behavior that may indicate that additional help is needed,
- encouraging pastors to attend training and other events that deal with racism and bias.

Clergy serving in high-potential metro areas often struggle with definitions of success. The church system sometimes seems to equate success with a big church in the suburbs. Some would see a successful career path as one that moves from less-affluent churches to more-affluent ones. Sometimes clergy colleagues will suggest that an appointment to a high-potential metro church is a punishment or a dead end. Even when done in a joking manner, these sorts of comments over a period of time can cause committed clergy to doubt themselves. Financial concerns push some committed to ministry in less-affluent areas to feel compelled to join the march toward higher-paying appointments.

Congregations may be unrealistically comparing themselves with the way things used to be, defining success as the way the church was in years past in a very different city context.

Your leadership at charge conference provides an opportunity to help both the congregation and the pastor see success in a more biblical manner. Be creative in the questions you ask at charge conference. Think of ways you can help congregations celebrate the ways that they are changing lives and transforming their community. Help the congregation name the positive things they have and do that build up the community. Encourage them to understand success as being faithful to the gifts one has for the building up of the Kingdom.

Being in a metropolitan area has many advantages. Resources in the community often include a rich heritage in the arts, music, and other cultural traditions. A greater variety of jobs, public transportation, educational institutions, and so forth provide opportunities not always available in rural areas. As a leader, you can encourage the churches in your district to celebrate with one another and with the community. Having fun can be a means of grace.

One of the times that pastors most need your supportive presence is during times of conflict or crisis in the church. In most cases, the pastor does not need you to step in and act as a rescuer or a mediator. Rather, he or she needs you to act as a coach to help identify the real causes of the conflict and strategize how to deal with it in an effective manner. This may include helping the pastor recognize the ways his or her actions or attitudes are affecting the situation. Sometimes this means that the pastor will

have to take to take a stand that will upset some people in the congregation (and possibly you). Knowing how the district superintendent will support him or her in this stand is critical.

Your pastoral care is also critical at times of personal crisis (death, illness, and so forth) in the lives of your pastors. Pastors in metro ministries often feel isolated from the connection. Your pastoral presence at these times represents not only your personal care and concern but also the presence of the annual conference.

## **Your Presence Counts**

Your support and encouragement is keenly felt through your presence. The relationships you develop through your presence in the community and the churches build credibility that enables you to be more effective during difficult times. While physical presence is important, it is not the only way your presence is experienced.

### **Prayers**

Your prayer support is vital. The pastors and congregations in your district need to know that you are intentional about praying for them. Do not assume that those in your district will automatically know that you regularly pray for them and for the concerns of the church and the community. E-mail, notes, and phone calls can communicate that you are praying for specific people and situations.

Consider creating some sort of communication method for receiving both joys and concerns. You may want to develop a prayer calendar, and let the congregations know the shape of that calendar. For example, on Mondays you name in your prayers all the churches in the district who are involved in ministry with the homeless, on Tuesdays you specifically pray for clergy families, on Wednesdays you pray for issues of justice facing the community, and so forth.

As you read the newspaper and listen to news broadcasts, be particularly attentive to those things that are affecting the high-potential metro communities, and bring those situations into your prayer life.

### **Physical Presence**

Of course, you cannot be physically present at every event that occurs. However, it is hard to build a relationship with someone you see or hear from only when there is a problem in the church. Be aware of important celebrations in the life of congregations and try to be present. Occasionally show up at the routine events.

It may seem obvious, but one of the most important ways your physical presence is felt is by attending worship. An awareness of the cultural patterns and values of particular congregations will enable you to enhance the value of your time with the congregation. For example, in some congregations not staying for a fellowship meal after the worship service would be a slight on the congregation.

You can play an important role in helping the non-urban areas of your district and annual conference see the opportunity that the city setting provides for partnerships that allow for mutual ministry between city and suburban or rural congregations. Use your influence to help draw people into the city. Encourage district and annual conference

The district superintendent cannot always be physically present. But to the extent you can incorporate these suggestions, you will find your ministry enhanced.

events to be held in high-potential urban areas. Consider locating the district office and perhaps even annual conference offices in the available space of a downtown church.

Your physical presence is important not just in the church but also in the community. As a district superintendent, you will be viewed as an important church leader by many in the community. Your presence at city council meetings, local restaurants, festivals, and other community events communicates not only your personal commitment but also the commitment of the entire church.

Get to know the city neighborhoods of your district. Spend some time walking the streets. Talk to local residents about their hopes, dreams, and fears. Meet city leaders, such as the mayor, city council members, local business leaders, and school administrators. Find out who are allies of the church in the effort to create healthy communities. Introduce your pastors to these people.

## **Gifts**

As a district superintendent, you are no longer affiliated with a particular congregation. In your tithing plan, consider including a high-potential metro church. Many of these congregations are involved in specific ministries that you may also want to include in your tithing plan. The actual dollar amount of your support may not be as important as the message it conveys about the value you place on the work of these congregations.

## **Service**

As a district superintendent, you may easily be overwhelmed with administrative tasks. Not being in a local congregation may limit your opportunities for teaching and outreach. Consider the types of ministry that feed your soul, and look for opportunities to engage those gifts in the urban congregations of your district.

You will probably need to be the one to initiate participation in teaching or outreach ministries. While a pastor may invite you to preach, most will be hesitant to invite their district superintendents to take a shift in the clothes bank or to provide hospitality for a recovery group. Here are a few suggestions of ways you can live out your vow to support the church through your service:

- Teach vacation Bible school in an inner-city congregation.
- Teach a Lenten or Advent Bible study.
- Take a shift in a church food pantry.
- Spend a night in a church homeless ministry.
- Share a hobby or talent with a church weekday program for children.

## **Your Attitude Matters**

The pastors and congregations in high-potential metro areas face situations and issues that require bold leadership. They need your encouragement, affirmation, and compassion. They also need you to be a truth-teller.

## **Your Own Issues**

You cannot speak the truth in love to the high-potential metro churches of your district without first confronting truthfully your own

hopes and fears. At the very least, you need to name aloud your experience, inexperience, opinions, stereotypes, and prejudices related to urban life and ministry.

Attending an Institute for the Healing of Racism or a similar event may help you get in touch with unacknowledged attitudes and bias. It is important not only to explore your feelings related to racial and cultural differences but also to face your attitudes related to poverty, those in recovery for addictions, and those in need of recovery.

## **A Non-Anxious Presence in the Face of Change**

Many churches in urban areas face the burden of a “glorious past” and are stuck in memories of how things used to be rather than having a positive vision for the future.

Congregations in high-potential metro areas are experiencing a tremendous amount of change. While change is necessary, it is not easy. Helping pastors and congregations understand the dynamics of change may be one of your most important roles as an equipper of the saints.

In order to move forward and be the church that God is calling them to be, these congregations and their leaders need to confront their hopes and fears. They need to recognize the behaviors that may be holding them back from being the church they are called to be. They need to name the things they are afraid of. They need to identify the assets that they bring to the community and that the community brings to the congregation.

Your non-anxious presence can help clergy and lay leadership in high-potential churches to have both the patience and the openness that are needed when facing change. It is important to project a positive and Christ-centered attitude about the urban churches in your district. It is equally important not to sugarcoat the realities that these churches face.

## **Your Knowledge Is Important**

### **Life in the City—General Understanding**

Once thriving populations lived in the city. Many inhabitants of early American cities were wealthy businessmen dedicated to protecting their interest. Tenement-style accommodations were constructed along the rivers and docks for workers and their families. Lines were clearly drawn between the rich and the poor. Over time, the wealthy created environments to satisfy all their needs. Opera, theater, and concert halls were built in close proximity to fine restaurants and cafés. Parks and tree-lined avenues provided a finer aesthetic. During this time, entire ethnic communities began to form in small, concentrated areas, creating strong community bonds. The community supplied all the goods and services needed to sustain a comfortable life.

Then came the advent of the automobile and movement away from city life, which was characterized by the luxury of the wealthy to leave behind those who could ill afford to move. During this one hundred-year flight, cities became less welcoming. Murder, robbery, rapes all increased, as well as gang violence and drug-related crimes. The percentage of the population living below the poverty line in the inner cities went from 4% in 1955 to more than 20% by 1985, and it continues to rise. Many of those living below the poverty line are single parents with children at home and

*Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change*, by William Bridges (Perseus Publishing, 2003) is a practical guide for helping organizations deal with change.

older adults on fixed incomes. Now almost one hundred years later, we are seeing a population shift in some areas back toward higher-density metropolitan areas.

In many urban areas, major racial transitions have occurred over the last forty years. Today many first-generation immigrants are moving into the inner-city and into urban areas for affordable housing, creating multi-ethnic, multicultural settings with goods and services unique to their particular needs. Yet as a whole, the urban setting is lacking in social and economic services for those who live there. Doctors, lawyers, and shopping may be located on the fringes, and not in the midst, of the urban setting.

With all this flux, the population in urban and inner-city settings has increased, sometimes as much as 10%. Overcrowding, based on available housing, has become an issue for some urban areas.

Some cities are reclaiming the urban settings by renovating warehouses, old apartment buildings, and even hotels and turning them into high-end residential facilities for the wealthy. With the poor being displaced to other sections of town, justice becomes a prime issue.

Yet in some cities the social and economic complexity of urban life are being addressed in positive ways. These cities see opportunities of enrichment based on the multicultural, multiethnicity, and diversity of their urban areas and create opportunities for enrichment. In some cities, the major structural pieces of the downtown post office, government offices, and other services have stayed intact. And in some cities, green space is being created or enhanced to provide for safe places for people to gather and interact.

### **Life in the City—The District**

What is the urban setting like in your district? Is the urban area undergoing change? Is it for the better? for the worse?

The best way to get to know your area is to walk or drive through all the areas where your churches are located to get a feel for the community. As you walk or drive, be sensitive to the conditions of the area. Are businesses boarded up and empty? Do businesses have window and door guards on them? Do signs have more than one language on them? Are the business and living areas clean? Or is trash everywhere? Do you sense a level of pride for the area? Or is there the appearance that no one cares, not even the city?

Other things to be watchful of include signs of multicultural, multi-ethnic presence. Do certain sections of the area have strong ethnic ties evidenced through shops and food stores with one particular ethnic appeal? Are there signs of various interfaith (Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and so forth) populations? Is this an area that attracts new immigrants?

You will want to learn the history of the community and how it has changed over the years. What have been the pressing issues the community has had to face? Who have been the movers and shakers, and what have been the systemic political realities for this community? This research should not be focused just on civic systems, but should also look at the support or lack of support to the area from local church and annual conference leadership.

Indicators of the community's health will be crime rate, average age of the population, income above or below the regional average, median years

Demographic information for the nation's largest cities is available at

Kids Count,  
[www.aecf.org/  
kidscount/census](http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/census)

U.S. Census Bureau,  
[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

of school completed, and family structure. This information can be obtained from the school system, the municipalities economic and community development office, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

As you learn the lay of the land, important people to get to know will be the mayor and council representative(s) of the area, the school superintendent, the police chief and those officers who walk the beat in the neighborhood, and key individuals in the court system. Is there a inter-religious group of pastors who get together on a regular basis? Are there people in the community who are seen as the power-brokers, those people who are respected and have influence?

Discover what the healthy and unhealthy realities are for those who are the most vulnerable in the city. What rehabilitation centers are available for those dealing with addictions? Where are the shelters for the homeless? What are the trends they are experiencing? Where are the public libraries located? Who are the newest immigrants? Are there English as a second language (ESL) classes available? What gangs are operating in the city? What healthcare facilities are available for those without insurance? What housing facilities are available for older adults on fixed incomes?

### **Life in the City—The Congregations**

One thing that district superintendents discover with churches in the urban setting is that the buildings are *old*. Many are at least forty-five years old, and some are older than one hundred years. Some may even be on the historic registry of the community. In too many cases, the churches have gone for years without any preventive maintenance and have become a financial drain on the local church, always in need of some significant repair.

Many of these churches flourished for a period of time, and may have church members who remember when large numbers of children were in their Sunday school classes. In some of these churches, the numbers have dramatically declined over the past twenty years to few or no children. In many cases, the church membership has moved from being representative of all ages to being predominately older adults, sixty-six and older. In the past, many of these churches were predominately Anglo and may not have made the shift to represent the multiplicity of diversity in the surrounding area.

Some of these churches were built at a time and in a neighborhood where everyone walked to church, and now parking has become a limiting factor. Some have only on-street parking with no businesses nearby that could accommodate cars on Sundays in their parking lot. One of your first tasks may be to help the church leadership be realistic about the church facility and its ability to sustain quality ministry in a safe setting. Encourage the high-potential metro churches in your district to inventory their buildings, including needed repairs, equipment (useable and non-useable), useable space, and facility usage. This will help to create a better understanding as to whether the facilities are under- or over-utilized, and what improvements need to occur to enhance ministry. Be careful as you encourage this sort of work to make it clear that this is not part of a plan to close churches.

While finances are an important issue for most churches, they are a particularly critical issue for churches in high-potential metro areas. The costs

The following websites provide information about setting up a nonprofit corporation:

[www.nonprofitstartup.com](http://www.nonprofitstartup.com)

[www.cnm.org](http://www.cnm.org)

[www.nonprofits.org](http://www.nonprofits.org)

associated with maintaining the building, the types of ministry needed in the community, and the lower family income sometimes found among the church membership combine to make finances a significant issue.

You can help the pastor and congregational leaders understand conference formulas for setting apportionments, including how the church budget and membership relate to the formula. Some of these churches need to clean their rolls to reflect clearly their current membership. This could result in a more realistic assessed apportionment.

Some churches in the district may need help in finding funding sources to undergird and sustain ministry they are either already involved with or are seeking to start. Part of the plan for that ministry may include setting up a nonprofit corporation and funding through grants. While you do not need to be an expert in forming a nonprofit organization or grant writing, you do need to be able to point congregations in the right direction. Help the leadership of the church be realistic about the ministries they can take on based on the financial scope of the congregation. Grants and nonprofit corporations are not magic bullets, but they can be an important part of the funding strategy.

## Your Skills Help

According to city church pastors, they hope their district superintendents will cultivate some specific skills. While total mastery of them is not required, these skills will increase your effectiveness and enable you to suggest helpful resources to others.

## Assessing

Superintendents of high-potential metro churches need to be adept in assessment skills of two kinds. First, you need to assess for yourself and on behalf of the cabinet the congregational health and potential for health. This will assist you in making the most appropriate appointments as well as helping you to determine how your time and skills can best be used.

Assessment is enhanced by knowing the right questions to ask.

Questions to explore may include:

- What does this congregation see as God's vision for them?
- How does the congregation relate to the community?
- How do they help people become more faithful disciples?
- How do they invite people into the faith?
- How do they help people be in contact with God?
- What has been the length of tenure of the last few pastors?
- How does the congregation deal with conflict?

It is also important to know whom to ask. Answers are almost always determined by one's point of reference. For instance, you will probably get a different answer from a person who has been in the congregation most of his or her life than from a person who has been a part of the church for a year. You may get a different answer from a staff person than from a lay person.

Be aware of signals of health and of disfunction. Indications of health include

- vital and contextual worship,
- small groups for faith formation and outreach,

For information on federal grant programs available to faith-based groups, see [www.hhs.gov/fbci/topics](http://www.hhs.gov/fbci/topics).

For additional information on seeking grants, see "Seeking Grants: An Internet Bibliography" on the Resources page of [www.gbod.org/hpmc](http://www.gbod.org/hpmc).

Read Paragraphs 212 and 213 (pp. 128-129) of *The Book of Discipline* for further help in developing an assessment plan.

- a wide-ranging prayer life that includes community concerns,
- membership including those who live in the church's immediate area,
- community outreach ministries based on congregational strengths.

Signals that may indicate disfunction include

- an inability to deal with conflict,
- rapid and continuous turnover of clergy and staff,
- a fortress mentality that seeks to insulate the church from the community,
- failure to seek God's leading.

Second, you need to help high-potential metro congregations adequately and openly evaluate themselves. Paragraph 213 of the *Discipline* suggests an assessment process for local churches in changing population areas. This process includes assessing

- the unique missional opportunities and needs of the community,
- the present ministries of the congregation,
- the number of leaders and style of leadership,
- the growth potential of the surrounding community,
- the financial and facility needs,
- other items that may impact the church's ability to fulfill its mission.

In a thorough assessment of an urban congregation, it is crucial to have community demographic information. Much helpful information can be obtained from the Research Office of the General Board of Global Ministries.

Assessment and discernment go hand in hand. Remind congregations to listen for God's voice as they look at who they are and who God is calling them to be.

## Networking

Another especially crucial skill for superintendents of urban churches is networking. Three kinds of networking are needed. First, because of the difficulty of urban work, it is important for a superintendent to help connect pastors and congregations with others who are doing similar work, both in the same city as well as in other places. These can include pastors and congregations, social service agencies, governmental leaders, and so forth. Such connections can provide encouragement, learning, and support. Particularly for pastors new to the urban setting, you may need to help the person get into or create support networks. Encourage visits to successful urban churches, even ones in other conferences, by example, word, and financial assistance.

The second kind of networking is with church agencies and networks that resource urban churches. The Office of Urban Ministries of the General Board of Global Ministries helps to coordinate jurisdictional networks of urban congregations. This office can also assist in providing technical assistance in areas such as

- urban theology,
- congregational development,
- eradication of racism,
- leadership development,
- community economic development,
- strengthening multicultural relationships,
- wholeness, healing, and health ministries.

The Office of Research of the General Board of Global Ministries can provide a Church and Community Profile that gives statistical information for the congregation over the past ten years, plus past and projected demographic information for the community. See [gbgm-umc.org/researchoffice](http://gbgm-umc.org/researchoffice).

The General Board of Discipleship maintains a website that includes information on training, resources, city congregations, and other things helpful to high-potential metro churches. See [www.gbod.org/hpmmc](http://www.gbod.org/hpmmc).

The Community Developers Program and the Communities of Shalom are two other ministries coordinated by the General Board of Global Ministries to which high-potential metro churches in your district may need to be directed.

In addition, some seminaries have departments in urban work. The Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE) is an inter-denominational resource ([www.scupe.com](http://www.scupe.com)).

The third kind of networking is mutual partnerships between high-potential metro congregations and other congregations. The word *mutual* is key. Because there are real and significant needs in high-potential metro communities, partnerships are sometimes established that are perceived by all involved as the affluent non-urban church ministering to the less-affluent city church. Non-urban churches have much to learn from their city counterparts. God's grace does not flow in just one direction. Mutual partnerships recognize that all bring gifts of value, that we are all beloved children of God, and that we are all in need of God's redeeming love. As a district superintendent, you can be instrumental in initiating healthy partnerships between congregations in and beyond your district.

## Advocating

High-potential metro church pastors want their superintendents to be advocates for city ministry in the cabinet, district, conference, and beyond.

You need to know the life and needs of high-potential metro churches in your district and be an advocate at every level, including

- helping educate other superintendents about urban churches, their leadership needs, and God's presence in the city,
- speaking up for urban churches around the allocation of resources, especially leadership,
- lifting up and celebrating the successes and victories (including the small ones) of urban ministries in the district, conference, cabinet, and wherever else possible,
- helping pastors, the conference leadership team, and the annual conference as a whole claim God's vision for ministry in the city,
- finding ways to help the connectional system work for urban churches, such as advocating apportionment funding justice.

Advocacy may include

- treating city churches in a similar manner to new-church starts relative to resources and excitement,
- establishing awards at the district and annual conference level that recognize the contributions high-potential metro churches make to God's mission, the church, and the community,
- encouraging the allocation of annual conference continuing education resources for training pastors in urban ministries.

You play a crucial role in advocating for high-potential metro churches through your actions in the cabinet. Knowing the pastoral skills needed in a particular church as well as the history, vision, cultural situation, gifts and talents of that church will help you facilitate the appointment of effective leaders. Unfortunately, high-potential areas have sometimes been considered as prime spots for new, inexperienced pastors or for those who have not been successful in other settings. Be especially cognizant of

For programs and services of the General Board of Global Ministries, see [gbgm-umc.org/mission\\_programs/cim](http://gbgm-umc.org/mission_programs/cim).

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working to move out ineffective, disinterested, and unhappy pastors as well as advocating that the best pastors to be moved into these often difficult situations where Christ's ministry is so deeply needed. Careful selection of talented people who have the passion and skills for city ministry is critical.

Again and again the importance of long tenure is mentioned as a needed ingredient for effective city pastors. It simply takes time for the pastor and congregation to develop trust and to build and support effective ministry. Longer tenure can be helped by seeing that the salaries and benefits in urban churches are good, even if the conference has to participate in that support in some way.

Some congregations need assistance in knowing what they need to do to keep a pastor for a longer time and the partnership of the district superintendent to make that happen. Even if the congregation cannot financially reward longevity, there are other ways to affirm and encourage longer tenure. These might include sabbatical leaves, encouragement to serve in positions of leadership in the annual conference or general church that use and broaden the pastor's gifts, allocated time for writing and teaching beyond the local congregation, and so forth. The congregation can support the pastor by allowing and encouraging the use of time and space to do these types of things, and the district superintendent can through advocacy ensure that high-potential metro church pastors are considered for various opportunities beyond the local congregation.

Pastors may also need assistance in understanding their high-potential metro church appointments as a long-term venture, not as just a short stay until a "good" appointment becomes available. A wise superintendent will encourage long tenure of effective urban pastors.

It is also important to advocate for urban issues beyond the church. What is good for city churches is good for the city. Know and be a clear advocate for those things. For example, mass transit is good for the city and therefore good for city churches. Programs to feed the poor are good for city churches and therefore good for the city. There is a direct correlation between a healthy downtown or inner city and healthy city churches. This form of advocacy might be expressed by going with a pastor or congregation to public meetings, speaking out against injustices, supporting public health and education, and so forth.

## **Empowering**

The empowering of people and congregations is a key theme for high-potential metro ministry. This area of skills includes attending to the training and equipping of pastors and laity. A superintendent does not necessarily need to be the one who trains, but the superintendent does need to be able to point to places where people can get resources and assistance. Sometimes this will mean making available training opportunities or learning experiences. Sometimes it will mean informing clergy and lay leadership of possibilities such as networks, events, mentoring relationships and how to create peer learning situations. It is vital that the pastors and laity be able to get the training they need.

Several other kinds of empowerment are also important. One is helping church people learn how to advocate for themselves; another is helping them know what their God-given gifts and passions are. Emphasize the

importance of partnering with other churches and pastors for mutual support, learning, and affirmation. Learn from what others do well.

## Discerning

Another important skill is that of discerning God's presence in the life of the congregation and helping them improve their ability to see where God is at work and to join in. A congregation cannot be effective without this ability. These skills can also come in handy when there are big decisions to be made, such as relocation, merger, and the need to dissolve.

## Multicultural Skills

Many high-potential metro churches are either in multicultural areas or in neighborhoods where the ethnic makeup is changing. In these situations, it is helpful for the superintendent to have knowledge and understanding about the cultural groups present. Learning a few words of the language and/or participating in cultural celebrations can indicate positive interest.

Particularly in high-potential metro churches, it is not uncommon for a primarily English-speaking congregation and a primarily non-English-speaking congregation to share space. This can be a rich experience for both congregations, and can also be a source of friction.

Six common areas of cross-cultural misunderstandings are related to time, space, communication style, materialism, power, self-awareness, and work ethic. An understanding of how these are usually understood in the cultures found in your district is extremely helpful.

## Ways to Know

If you have read this far, you may be feeling overwhelmed. The good news is you do not need to be the expert. Clergy and lay leaders need your assistance in pointing them to other places that will help them to learn and to grow. You do not need to be the person who has all the answers.

You can help them by

- always looking for new books, ideas, conferences, and so forth to recommend;
- bringing in resource people with urban expertise to lead training for your district;
- making it possible for urban church leaders (clergy and lay) to attend conferences, training, and other events that focus on various aspects of high-potential metro ministry, and then learning from them when they return.

Here are several suggestions to increase your knowledge and skills:

- As a district superintendent, you will attend innumerable meetings. No matter what the topic of the meeting, use informal networking opportunities to ask: "Who can I talk to here who is involved in high-potential metro ministry?" Seek out experienced and inexperienced people. Listen to their stories. Ask them to recommend other people to talk to.
- Visit thriving city churches, even if they are not United Methodist. Read the downtown and metro sections of the newspaper. Look for mention of church activities. Whenever possible, visit churches in other cities. Talk to the people in those congregations about their vision and how that is expressed.

*Rules of the Game: Global Business Protocol*, by Nan Leaptrott (Thomson Executive Press, 1996) provides a practical methodology for understanding cross-cultural interaction.

- As part of your continuing education plan, attend training events related to ministry in the city and invite a pastor from your district to attend with you. Check the events section of the General Board of Discipleship High-Potential Metro Church Initiative website ([www.gbod.org/hpmc](http://www.gbod.org/hpmc)) for a list of events.

## **Print and Electronic Resources**

There are a wide variety of print and electronic resources that will assist you in developing the knowledge and skills you need to be an effective district superintendent in high-potential metro areas. A few key resources are listed here.

### **Understanding the Urban Context**

*American Metropolitcs: The New Suburban Reality*, by Myron Orfield (Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

*Deeply Woven Roots: Improving the Quality of Life in Your Community*, by Gary Gunderson (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1997).

*Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, by Andres Duany (North Point Press, 2001).

*The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, by Walter Wink (Doubleday Books, 1999).

*To Live in Peace: Biblical Faith and the Changing Inner City*, by Mark R. Gornik (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002).

### **Congregational Health**

*Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*, by Edwin H. Friedman (Guilford Press, 1985).

*Kicking Habits: Welcome Relief for Addicted Churches*, by Thomas G. Bandy (Abingdon Press, 1997).

### **Congregational Assessment**

*Congregations in Transition: A Guide for Analyzing, Assessing, and Adapting in Changing Communities*, by Carl S. Dudley and Nancy T. Ammerman (Jossey-Bass, 2002).

*Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, by Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (Abingdon Press, 1998).

*The Power of Asset Mapping: How Your Congregation Can Act on Its Gifts*, by Luther K. Snow (Alban Institute, 2004).

### **Multicultural Skills**

*Building Cross-Cultural Competence: How to Create Wealth From Conflicting Values*, by Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Trompenaars (Yale University Press, 2000).

*Culture Clash: Managing in a Multicultural World*, by H. Ned Seelye and Alan Seelye-James (McGraw-Hill, 1994).

## Electronic Resources

General Board of Discipleship, High-Potential Metro Church Initiative website, [www.gbod.org/hpmc](http://www.gbod.org/hpmc)

Association for Metro/Urban Ministry, [www.amum.net](http://www.amum.net)

## A Final Word

The prophet Jeremiah told God's people in Babylon that they should seek the welfare of the city, and that they should pray to the Lord on behalf of the city, for in the welfare of the city they would find their own welfare (Jeremiah 29:7). The prophet's message holds true for us today. May you be a prophetic voice in your district as you pray for the city and empower congregations and pastors to seek its welfare.

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