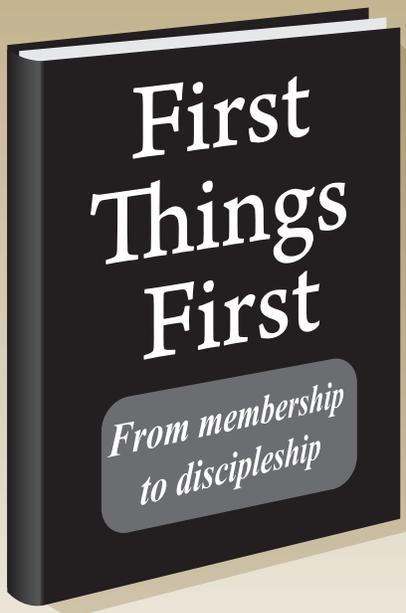


THE FIRST EPISCOPAL DISTRICT
AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL

“First Things First Vision and Strategic Plan” **Founder’s Day**

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First District Plaza
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Preface

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am pleased to write this preface to this Membership and Discipleship Manual, one of the guideposts and cornerstones, for the First Episcopal District. From its very inception the Church has been engaged in a constant struggle to fulfill its core mission of expanding the Kingdom and winning lost souls for Christ.

In 2012, the First District initiated a special emphasis to make “**First Things First,**” and launched an extensive campaign which charted a course to achieve the goals that had been set out. During this Quadrennial we have set goals and objectives to guide our energies, however chief among them will be to purposefully attempt to lead as many people as we can into God's eternal Kingdom. Whether we call it "spreading the gospel, evangelizing the world, or preaching present truth" our core business is to **Tell The Jesus Story** with the intention that people will accept him as Lord and Savior and become disciples, and engage in making other disciples.

This manual has been developed as a resource to help local churches foster and facilitate an atmosphere for church growth and development in which discipleship is established as a core priority. It is my hope that we will continue to move from membership to discipleship.

A depth of gratitude is expressed to Revs. Nicholas Genevieve-Tweed and Lesly Devereaux, who have worked tirelessly to bring this manual to fruition. Thank you for your labors of love.

Keep Making a Difference!

Yours In His Service,
Bishop Gregory G.M. Ingram
Bishop - First Episcopal District
AME Church

A Discipleship Disclaimer

This handbook is not intended to replicate or replace the “New Member” process that many churches already use to train and prepare persons for membership. Rather it is the intention to call for a paradigm shift that makes “Discipleship” a core value and operating principle in our churches. When this happens “discipleship” and the “making of disciples” will become an imperative in the life and witness of our churches, and members will move from the periphery to the center of Christ and fulfill the “great commission.”

Introduction

The path to discipleship involves several stages. **First** is to hear the call of Jesus Christ, **second** is to respond to the call, **third** involves making a commitment to become like Christ, **fourth** is to submit to the teachings and ministry of Jesus; and the **fifth** is to go forth and make disciples.

While much has changed in the world over the course of history, The Great Commission of Jesus Christ remains the same, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (Matt 28:19). Arguably, Jesus’ mandate for discipleship is the most important objective of the Church. However, in many instances the Church’s work is curtailed because of the omission of a designated plan for outreach, as well as, training programs for members both old and new.

The First District Episcopal leadership has established a guide post which places emphasis on the importance of discipleship. The content of this handbook succinctly lays out the stages of true discipleship. The handbook is useful for equipping clergy and lay with training objectives for discipleship which can be used congruently with other resources that teach discipleship.

The Biblical Mandate for Discipleship

Discipleship is not an option but a mandate. The mandate to engage in discipleship is grounded in the biblical understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who follow Jesus Christ make a commitment that includes a commitment to make other disciples. The biblical basis for this is found in the Gospels in which Jesus calls disciples, prepares them for discipleship by teaching them about the Kingdom of God and models by his example a life of discipleship. This process culminates in Jesus commissioning the disciples to ‘go into all the world and “make” disciples.’ Jesus commissions disciples and bestows authority on them to go and make other disciples. This provides a directive for all Christians to follow. A mandate is a command or an order or injunction which charges those who follow Jesus to perform actions that produce disciples.

As Christians we believe that the Bible is the text which informs our understanding of our mission and purpose and guides our witness. This means that it is essential that Christians understand how the Bible informs the practice of our faith. The focal point of our understanding is the life, teaching, and ministry of Jesus the Christ who models for Christians what discipleship looks like. In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus “calls” Simon Peter and his brother Andrew to “follow him.” The invitation to follow Jesus, if accepted, requires that Simon and Andrew make a commitment to leave the everyday world and its values and embrace an alternative vision of themselves and the world, with the Kingdom of God as its center, Jesus as the guide and God as the source of authority. Jesus not only calls them into fellowship but Jesus announces that they must be transformed, “I will make you,” into “fishers of men” for the purpose of “fishing” for people (Mat. 4:19; Mar. 1:16-18). The necessity to leave one’s normal or familiar lifestyle and commitments is further emphasized when Jesus “calls” James and John who are in the boat with their father Zebedee, and upon hearing the “call” of Jesus, James and John leave their father in the boat and proceed to follow Jesus- to make a commitment to become like him (Mat. 4:21-22; Mar. 1:19-20).

The call narratives not only establish Jesus as the one who calls, but they also demonstrate that responding to the call involves giving up one way of life and committing to an alternative life that embodied by Jesus. Once a commitment to follow Jesus is made, an individual must then submit to being “transformed” or “made” to become like Jesus Christ. This is a process of teaching and training at the feet of Jesus, or in the case of church members, submitting to the teachings of Jesus contained in the Bible. The core teachings of Jesus are contained in the gospels and take the form of sayings, parables, and illustrations.

Moreover, the most comprehensive collection of the teachings of Jesus is contained in what is commonly referred to as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28). The Sermon on the Mount is structured around a set of core values contained in the “Beatitudes” (Mat. 5:1-12) followed by a series of parables and sayings which serve to provide an understanding of the Kingdom of God and to demonstrate how the core values should be practiced in the life of the disciple. The Bible, more specifically, the Sermon on the Mount provides a biblically based process for training church members so that they can be transformed from members to disciples.

Furthermore, the biblical mandate calls disciples not only to submit to the call of Jesus, and to be trained in the core values of Jesus, but it also involves understanding that as disciples, we are commissioned to go and make other disciples. The “great commission” establishes the goal of disciples as the making of other disciples for the purpose of building the Kingdom of God. This means that disciples cannot be separated from the mandate to MAKE other disciples. Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew issues the classic commission for the disciples to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Mat 28:19, RSV). This text establishes and affirms the making of disciples as the goal of Christian discipleship.

Preparation for Discipleship

Preparation is a process in which people are actively engaged through prayer, study, devotional life, and worship to become like Christ. This section is focused upon what it means to make a commitment to follow Christ, and submit to the teachings of Christ.

Prayer

The essence of prayer, whether public or private is communication with God. At the heart of discipleship is the ability to communicate with God. Communication must be cultivated and practiced so that it is honest and open. Honest communication begins by acknowledging who God is and speaking to God without pretense. This involves some risk because the culture in which we live cultivates habits which cause us to hide, conceal, and negate our true feelings. The norm in which we function is one in which we are not accustomed to letting our guard down and being transparent. This culture of concealment makes it difficult for us to approach God honestly because in order to communicate with God, we must function in a way that is contrary to how we have been conditioned. This means that we must find a space in which we challenge ourselves to embrace the discomfort of letting our guard down and being completely honest and open with God and ourselves- this is the space in which honest communication is born.

Open communication involves being able to give voice to our feelings, emotions and thoughts without holding back. Openness means that we must speak beyond feelings of guilt or shame, and beyond the brokenness of our emotional reactions to our feelings. Openness also means being honest with ourselves about how we think and how we express our feelings and emotions. Often if people have thoughts, feelings, and emotions about which they feel guilt, embarrassment, or shame, they feel that not expressing them negates them. Open communication entails acknowledging that we have feelings, emotions, and thoughts. No matter how distasteful or uncomfortable they make us feel, we need to make them the subject of our communication with God. Openness in communication is a process that we must engage in; we must daily practice placing ourselves before God honestly and openly.

If the essence of prayer is communication with God, it must be honest and open, then it follows that “prayer time,” must be a priority in the life of discipleship. The biblical mandate for this is found in the life and ministry of Jesus. Whenever Jesus made a decision or was wrestling with a decision Jesus retreated to pray. (Mar. 1:35; Luk. 6:12; Mat. 14:23; Mat. 26:39)

Study

Preparation for discipleship also involves study. Study can be defined as the dedication of time to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. To contextualize this for the purposes of discipleship, study is the dedication of time to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding about the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

Arguably, one of the most challenging parts of the Christian life is exercising stewardship over time. The demands upon the time of people in contemporary society are great and varied and often leave people feeling that they do not have enough time. Learning how to manage time is a key element to being successful not only in professional life but more importantly in one's spiritual life as well. Managing time successfully involves planning, discipline, and commitment. Disciplined time management requires being committed to schedules and routines in which we set goals and tasks. In the context of discipleship it means setting aside and sticking to specific times which are dedicated to studying the teachings of Jesus. There are numerous ways to create and structure daily routines, and individuals should experiment to find one that works for them. What follows is an illustration for structuring a basic daily routine.

Sample daily routine

6:00-6:05am: Begin with a moment of silence and then prayer.

6:05-6:10am: Select an appropriate devotional reading, this can be taken directly from scripture or an alternative devotional source may be used.

6:10-6:20am: Take a few moments to contemplate and reflect upon what has been read.

6:20-6:30am: Record your thoughts and reflections in a journal and close with prayer.

In addition to developing a daily routine, individuals should also be committed to attending Bible study on a regular basis, participate in church school, and take advantage of opportunities provided by the Christian Education department, and other sources for continued growth and enrichment.

Once a system of disciplined time management has been established, some attention must be given to the purpose for setting aside time, which is the acquisition of knowledge. A common adage says "practice makes perfect," but sometimes people practice perfecting the wrong things and in the wrong way, so this adage has been emended to say "perfect practice makes perfect." In other words, how we do things is as important as what we do. The acquisition of knowledge focuses on cultivating good study habits, identifying proper material, and seeking necessary guidance to ensure proper understanding. The biblical model for this is found in the life and ministry of Jesus. Once Jesus called disciples, it was necessary for them to be taught by Jesus so that they could understand more fully what they were being called to do. Likewise once individuals have accepted the call into Christian service and witness it is necessary for Christians to undergo a period of training to prepare for the work of Kingdom building. This training period involves being equipped with the knowledge that provides the principles to guide one's personal life and communal witness.

The primary source for the acquisition of knowledge is the Bible, but in particular the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus. The key to understanding the teachings of Jesus can be found in the Sermon on the Mount which is comprised of the beatitudes (Matt. 5:1-12), and a series of

parables and sayings (Matt. 5:13-7:28) which illustrate important principles for understanding our mission and purpose as Disciples of Christ. It should be remembered that the acquisition of knowledge is a process and knowledge and understanding is cumulative. That means that principles must be learnt and practiced repeatedly so that they become a way of life. People must be unceasing in their prayer and study habits in order to unite knowledge and understanding which is expressed through witness.

Devotional Life

Devotional life refers to the process by which individuals commit to growing in relationship with God and Christ through the cultivation of spiritual disciplines: prayer, study, meditation, contemplation, fasting. Just as the body needs the right food for nutrition, and exercise to stay strong and healthy, so too do Christians need to cultivate a devotional life to remain spiritually healthy, strong and focused in witness. The devotional life involves setting aside time in order to reflect and contemplate in communion with God so as to facilitate our continual transformation to become like Christ. The devotional life is one in which priority is given to growing in our relationship with God, and Christ through prayer, study, meditation, and contemplation.

Worship

There are many definitions of worship but the purpose of this section is not to present a definitive definition but rather to provide a working definition in order to illustrate the role of worship in the context of cultivating discipleship. The English word “worship” traces its origins to the Old English word “*weorþscipe*,” a compound word comprised of “*weorþ*” from which we get “worth” and “ship,” and means to be deserving of dignity, reverence, and honor. Thus, worship is to express reverence and honor toward God through acts of prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. In the context of preparation for discipleship, communal worship refers to ceremonies and or rituals in which worshipers express their love and reverence for God through acts of praise, prayer, and thanksgiving.

Worship plays a vital role in the process of discipleship because worship is the setting in which new disciples are born, and worship serves to replenish, inspire and encourage existing disciples to remain committed and focused on fulfilling their obligations to God through the church. Because worship is so critical to discipleship worship should be well planned, prepared for and executed.

In addition to this, individuals need to prepare themselves for worship. This means that time should be spent clearing one’s mind of distraction and potential impediments to experiencing God in worship. Although worship involves fellowship or communion with like minded

believers, it also more importantly involves fellowship with God. When individuals come to worship they should come with a mindset that anticipates entering into the presence of God and thus responding to God through prayer, praise, and thanksgiving honestly and openly. William Temple, in *The Hope of a New World* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1942), summarized the purpose worship as:

To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God
To feed the mind with the truth of God
To purge the imagination by the beauty of God
To open the heart to the love of God
To devote the will to the purpose of God. (p.30)

Worship, therefore, is not an event that is witnessed. It is an encounter in which individuals bear witness and testify through word, song, dance, music, liturgy with a view toward encouraging, inspiring, and transforming the lives of those who participate so as to compel them to make greater commitments to the mission and purpose of God through the Church.

The Commission

The final stage in preparing disciples involves the “commission.” Once persons have committed themselves to becoming like Jesus Christ, and have undergone a period of training and preparation, they are ready for the final stage which is to implement what has been learned by going and making other disciples. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go and make other disciples. Matthew 28:19 reads, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The “Commission” is the act of granting authority to carry out a particular task or duty. The authority from Jesus is the driving force behind disciples making disciples. As we continue to shape what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, we also have to illuminate what it means ‘to go make disciples.’ In the winning of disciples, the commission is made manifest.

Disciples are commissioned to “GO.” Go means to actively engage in the task of making disciples of others. Go is a simple yet significant word that defines the witness of the Church. Go is a verb that describes action. The Church must be actively engaged in spreading the good news and winning souls for Christ, then preparing and training them to become disciples. The commission is clear, disciples are charged to Go into the world and proclaim the good news.

The imperative to go contains within it the challenges to remain faithful to the commission of Jesus Christ and committed to making disciples of others. The challenge to “Go,” calls disciples beyond the walls of the Church and into communities where the good news must be proclaimed. Discipleship requires that we move beyond the comfortable sanctity of church buildings, driven by a passion and commitment to win souls for Jesus and enlist others in the work of Kingdom building. Discipleship creates in the disciple a consciousness that the work is not ours but belongs to him who sent us and the disciple is mindful that God will hold her/him accountable for what is done in God’s name (Mat. 7:17-20) .

Jesus has commissioned us to reach beyond our limited understanding of who God is to present an inclusive, transforming God that compels men, women, boys, and girls into right relationship with God. We must go make disciples with the understanding that we are disciples making disciples while being discipled. Our responsibility is to help members maintain a commitment to discipleship through ongoing Christian education. Making disciples is a mandate that is shared by all Christians.

There are three basic things that we must put in place to be effective in our discipleship efforts. First, we must actively pursue those who desire to be in right relationship with God. Secondly, we must extend ongoing Christian education to facilitate their spiritual maturity. Finally, we must make space for them to affirm their salvation through baptism.

The challenge that many churches face is to make the shift from being “church driven” to being “Kingdom driven.” Church-driven churches work from the inside out, while kingdom driven churches work from the outside in. The shift happens when churches take seriously the commission to “Go.” The motion of going must be undergirded with the love of God and the

empowering truth of the Holy Spirit. Investing in the training and preparation of others is a strong component of the commission. In other words the process is ongoing. It is never complete. Disciples need ongoing attention as they mature in the process of discipleship.

There are several steps that will facilitate the growth of discipleship in the church:

- 1. Pastors must incorporate ongoing discipleship teaching on all levels:** As Pastors continue to encourage active discipleship through their preaching and teaching, the congregants will begin to shift their thinking. The teaching must remove the "church mystique" by utilizing "how to" classes that teach - how to pray, how to meet The Lord, how to witness, and how to be a disciple.
- 2. Pastors must work with the leaders of the church to create effective outreach programs-** The encouragement for the creation of effective outreach programs will take the mandate out of the hands of the Pastor and place it in the hearts and minds of the people. Pastors must shift their thinking to a more inclusive leadership style that delegates responsibility. There must be close attention to detail so that this delegation is empowerment and not micromanagement. Pastors must provide outreach training including the importance of preparatory prayer and fasting. In addition, leadership must recognize and encourage the natural abilities of children. Discipleship teaching must begin as early as possible. Creative ways to engage children will undoubtedly draw adults as well. This can be accomplished through active biblical teachings through drama, song, dance, sports and other activities.
- 3. Encourage a strong Class Leader system-** Class leaders are in a pivotal position when it comes to discipleship. Class leaders must have clear goals and expectations in place so that no member falls through the cracks of the system. They are in place to keep members actively engaged and are very important in the shift from "church driven" discipleship to "kingdom driven" discipleship. An assessment of class leaders is necessary to determine gifts and graces, which are critical to engaging new members. Class leaders must solicit insight from new members as to what prompted them to join and incorporate what they learn into outreach thoughts.

Discipleship Implementation Team

A discipleship Team should be established at the District level whose sole responsibility would be to facilitate and coordinate the development of materials for teaching and training disciples. The Team would be appointed by the Bishop and would be comprised of representatives from Clergy, Board of Christian Education, Department of Evangelism, Missionary Society, YPD, Lay Organization, and Women in Ministry, Sons of Allen and the YAN.

The Team would be responsible for:

1. Monitoring the program throughout the district.
2. Training and certification of personnel at all levels.
3. Developing materials to be used for training.
4. Setting District goals and establishing target dates.

The Team would replicate itself at the Annual Conference level by training people at the Presiding Elder District level, and those trained will in turn train others at the local church level so that discipleship can be established as a priority for all levels of the church. To facilitate cohesiveness the same materials would be used at all levels, and taught only by persons certified by the District. At each level below the district there should be appointed one or two persons who would serve as coordinators/ facilitators to ensure effective communication between levels and efficient implementation of the program.

In addition, realistic discipleship goals should be set with specific target dates for attainment. Accurate records should be kept regarding the number of individuals who have been trained and these should be reported and tracked at the District level.

Because discipleship is an ongoing process, a tiered system of training should be developed so that individuals can receive ongoing training. Modules would be developed by the District committee and ongoing training would be provided at all levels.

Conclusion

Understanding the stages of discipleship in terms of hearing the call of Jesus Christ, responding to the call, committing to the call, submitting to the teachings of Jesus and going forth to make other disciples, means that discipleship is a process in which the life of the Christian is transformed. Members are encouraged to shift from the traditional mindset of church membership, which involves attending church on Sunday without fully committing their time, talent and treasure to the work of Kingdom building. The responsibility of the church is to equip its membership with an understanding that full and active membership means that members must be transformed from members to disciples.

Christian leaders, clergy and laity must be clear that our biblical mandate is to lead every new follower of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ into a meaningful and powerful realm of spiritual discipline and obedience to the Word of God. New “disciples” must not only learn how to pray and to consistently and intentionally read the Holy Bible, but must also learn “how” to put newly taught spiritual skills into “real-life” practice that will propel them into becoming disciples of Christ. It means as followers of Jesus Christ, we must ALL understand that we have been called to become like Jesus which means we must be committed to building the Kingdom of God through the making of disciples. Discipleship is not option but an opportunity for self-maturation and serving to expand the Kingdom of God. It’s a mandate.

Definitions of Terms used in this handbook

Biblical

This term refers to principles and teachings that are contained in the Bible.

Call

A call is a divinely inspired summons from God through Jesus Christ that challenges individuals to make a commitment to follow him and become like him.

Christian Discipleship

Christian Discipleship is a process in which a person practices the teachings of Jesus and is committed to building the Kingdom of God. The goal of Christian discipleship is to usher in the Kingdom of God through the spreading of the gospel and the winning of others to become disciples.

Commission

A Commission is an act of delegating or giving authority to an individual or to a group of individuals, to fulfill a mission or purpose.

Disciple

A Christian disciple is a person who accepts the call of Jesus Christ and is committed to become like Christ through the study of his life, ministry, and teachings.

Devotional Life

The process by which individuals commit to growing in relationship with God and Christ through the cultivation of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, study, meditation, contemplation, and fasting.

Mandate

A mandate is a command, an order, or injunction which charges those who follow Jesus to perform actions that produce disciples.

Membership

Refers to the active engagement of Kingdom-building by Christian individuals in a church.

Prayer

Prayer is communication with God.

Preparation

Preparation is the act of engaging in becoming like Christ through prayer, study, devotion, and worship centered upon the teachings of Christ.

Response

Response is when a person answers, or replies to the call of Jesus to become a disciple or follower.

Study

Study is the dedication of time to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding about the life and ministry of Jesus the Christ.

Submission

Submission is to surrender, or yield to Jesus Christ.

Worship

Worship is a ceremony or ritual, communal or private, in which a person or a group of people express their love and reverence toward God through acts of praise, prayer, and thanksgiving.