

Preparing for the Community Interviews

Getting to know the community...personally! While demographic studies are a very valuable tool, nothing beats 'boots on the ground' when it comes to understanding the community you have been called to serve. Interviews with community leaders are an excellent way to do uncover where the congregation can build bridges into the community.

Who might be helpful to interview? Think of persons who would be able to give you insights into community trends and needs. Such persons in your community might include:

- Mayor
- Councilmen or women
- Police Chief
- Fire Chief
- Home Owner's Association
- Realtors
- School principals
- Hospital administrator
- Social Service agencies
- Pastors of other congregations
- Chamber of Commerce
- Neighbors in your community

Who should lead the interviews? Involve people in the interviews who will represent the congregation well and who will be at ease speaking with community leaders. It also needs to be people who are able to ask leading questions and then listen and learn from what they hear.

Keep the interviews simple: The purpose of the interview is to listen. After greetings, give a simple explanation that your congregation is conducting a series of community leader interviews to discover ways in which they can be of greater service to others. Then ask the community leader some of the following open-ended questions and let them talk. The first question is designed to be an easy ice breaker:

- What do you like most about living in this community?
- Tell me about the people who live in the community?

Preparing the Community Interviews Summary Report: This report will be presented to the participants during the proposed Vision Retreat. Since this is a summary report, please keep it to no more than one or two pages and try to group the main ideas and themes together. After listing who was interviewed and by whom, briefly share key discoveries around the following four questions:

- Who lives in the community?
- How is the church perceived in the community?
- What are the greatest unmet needs in our community?
- Where might our congregation be a blessing to the community?

Interview Questions and Responses:

Community Leader Interviewed: _____

Questions:

1. How would you describe the community?
2. Who lives in the community?
3. How has the community changed over the years?
4. How would you describe the United Methodist Church?
5. Who attends the United Methodist Church?
6. What are the greatest needs that you see in our community?
7. What is the community doing to help those in need?
8. How might the church be of service to you and/or the community?