

Effective Small Membership Churches



OVERVIEW: The Mississippi Annual Conference has undertaken a bold initiative to strengthen churches of small membership. “Effective Small Membership Churches” is a training opportunity for pastor-lay teams to equip their congregations to become more effective in what God calls each church to become. Churches with average worship attendance of 100 or fewer are invited to apply.

A five-member team (four laypersons and the pastor) will be chosen by each church applying. A charge-wide team may have more than five on the team. Fifteen teams will be selected from applications for the training at Wood Institute.

The teams selected will attend five 24-hour sessions (4 P.M. Friday through 4 P.M. Saturday) over a nine-month period at Wood. Each team must have the endorsement and support of its church council, to which the team will present the plans the team designs for its own church/charge.

The projected dates for 2007 are January 5-6; February 16-17; March 16-17; May 25-26; and

August 24-25. The dates are subject to change.

The sessions will each center around a group of issues facing churches of small membership, such as:

- Our Call to Evangelism and Mission
- Celebration and Self-Esteem
- The Spiritual Life of the Church
- Stewardship and Organizing to Beat the Devil
- Children, Youth and Stronger Sunday Schools

Each session will have a combination of authors, teachers and leaders in small membership church ministry from across the country. However, a special component of each weekend will feature persons from strong, effective churches of small membership from within Mississippi, telling their stories. Resources for continued growth for the teams and churches will also be available.

SPONSORS: “Effective Small Membership Churches” is a joint effort of several groups in the Mississippi Conference: Parish and Community Ministries, Ethnic Local Church Concerns, Rural Life Ministries, UM Rural Fellowship, Strengthening the Black Church for

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the 21st Century, Bishop Hope Morgan Ward, Connectional Ministries, and Wood Institute. Their representatives have participated in the planning and have agreed to provide funding for the training except for team lodging and meals.

“We start with the conviction that there are persons in every church, regardless of size, who want their church to grow in all the ways a church should grow,” said Ron Barham, director of Wood Institute, charged with presenting this initiative for the Mississippi Conference. “Small Membership Churches ‘R’ Us. That’s who we are in Mississippi. We are in almost every village and community in the state. God put us here.”

Barham is also pastor of Sturgis and Big Creek United Methodist churches in Oktibbeha County.

The A2 Indicators Congregational Wellness Assessment is not related to this training but certainly will fit closely with all parts of the training.

TRAINING SITE: All sessions will be held on the Wood Institute campus in Mathiston. Accommodations at Wood are college dorms. Most rooms are double occupancy. Participants will provide their own bed linens and towels.

Mathiston is located just off Hwy. 82, 18 miles west of Starkville and 60 miles east of Winona. To get to Wood, go to the only 4-way stop in Mathiston, turn north and go 1/4 mile. Wood is on the left.

From the **Natchez Trace**, take the Mathiston exit and go east about 1 mile to the 4-way stop. From **Meridian/Philadelphia/Hattiesburg/Laurel**, connect

with Hwy. 15 at Louisville and continue to the 4-way stop. From points **north** and **east**, come to Hwy. 82 and then go north at the 4-way stop.

COST: The cost for lodging and meals is \$45 per team member per session, payable one month before the session. Individuals may pay their own way or churches may choose to pay for their teams.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST: To apply for Effective Small Membership Churches, submit the following items in the same envelope to Wood Institute, P.O. Box 289, Mathiston, MS 39752 by **November 21**. All items must be included for your application to be considered.

- Church/Charge Commitment, dated and signed
- Signed Team Member Covenant for each team member including pastor
- One-paragraph letter from pastor stating consent for church/charge participation
- Name and address(es) of team contact person

Your contact person will be notified by November 27 if your church/charge team is selected to participate.

MORE INFORMATION: For additional information please contact Ron Barham at (662) 263-7001 or rbarham@woodinstitute.org.

For additional helps for churches of small membership, check the Web sites of the General Board of Discipleship, www.gbod.org/smallchurch, and Hinton Rural Life Center, www.hintoncenter.org.

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Small Membership Church Congregational Development Training

CHURCH/CHARGE COMMITMENT

We, the Council of _____ United Methodist Church in the _____ District, on this date, _____, recommend the team members from this church to participate in “Effective Small Membership Churches” training at Wood Institute in 2007, sponsored by agencies of the Mississippi Annual Conference.

We further pledge our prayerful support during their participation and representation in our behalf and in behalf of God’s call upon this church. We also commit ourselves to receive and consider the plans which they create and design for this church and to use their insight and inspiration as we grow in mission and ministry for Christ.

Council Chair _____

Council Secretary _____

Pastor _____

Other members may sign below:

Team Contact Person
(Please Print)

Name _____

Mailing address _____

_____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Name and mailing address of church(es):

_____ Zip _____

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TEAM MEMBER COVENANT

(ONE FOR EACH TEAM MEMBER)

As a member of the team from _____ United Methodist Church/Charge in the _____ District, I willingly covenant and agree to:

- Pray regularly for our church and each member of the team
- Make every effort to attend and participate in all of the training sessions
- Prepare assignments for upcoming sessions at least one week in advance
- Help report our team's plans to our home church/charge

Signed _____ Date _____

1. What I hope to gain by my participation with the team from my church/charge at the Effective Small Membership Churches training sessions: (50 or fewer words)

2. SEVEN things about my church I want the training leaders to know:

(Please Print)

Name _____

Mailing address _____

_____ Zip _____

Phone (_____) _____

E-mail _____

Any special needs while at Wood Institute? Please list: