

Scriptural Literacy & Imagination Church of Excellence Award Criteria

The following is a list of practices and resources believed to help a United Methodist congregation make disciples and experience transformation in Christ, specifically through **Scriptural Literacy & Imagination**. The North Georgia Conference of the UMC has set these criteria in the form of an invitational challenge: congregations who engage these practices at one of three levels within an appointment year can make application, and be recognized publicly at Annual Conference as a Church of Excellence in this area of ministry focus. Level 1 is for churches just beginning to engage this focus. Level 2 is for churches who have practical experience in this area and seek to deepen their engagement further. Level 3 is for churches who wish to make **Scriptural Literacy & Imagination** a defining focus of congregational life.

LEVEL 1:

Literacy - Complete 3 of 5

Interpretation - Complete 2 of 4

Imagination - Complete 1 of 3

LEVEL 2:

Literacy - Complete 4 of 5

Interpretation - Complete 3 of 4

Imagination - Complete 2 of 3

LEVEL 3:

Complete all components, 12/12

LITERACY, Reading As A Practice Component. *How do we practice Biblical literacy as a basic skill, and assist our neighbors in attaining literacy as an educational milestone?*

- Demonstrate that 30% of active church participants are involved in Biblical study through a small group, in person or online. *(Ex. If you average 100 people for weekly worship, demonstrate that a minimum of 30 people gather weekly for Bible study as well.)*
- Offer a 4-6 week Intergenerational, Church-Wide Bible Study, that also connects to the Worship themes and experiences during that same season.
- Encourage habits for reading scripture regularly, individually and together. Ex:
 - Offer a church-wide challenge to read scripture daily *(4 week minimum, 52 week maximum)*.
 - Incentivize attendees in bringing Bibles or accessing Bible apps during worship and study.
 - Provide affordable and equitable access to the Bible (recommend apps; have versions in large print, and versions in various languages).

CHURCH OF EXCELLENCE AWARDS

- Support/Create a ministry or program dedicated to improving literacy rates and access to education for children, adults, those learning English as a second language, and/or those with special needs. Report the measurable impact.
- Teach and promote Scripture memorization through standard memorization and repetition, memorization through music, journaling, recitation paired with American Sign Language, etc.

INTERPRETATION, *Interpretive Lenses Component:* *How do we intentionally read and encounter scripture through different interpretive lenses, contexts, and experiences?*

- Partner two or more generational groups, racial groups, churches, and/or faith communities for a short term Bible study (6 to 12 weeks).
- Offer at least 2 learning experiences using Lectio Divina and/or Visio Divina.
- Invite your District Fresh Expression Pioneer to lead a Prayer Walk experience for your church. Complete at least 2 Prayer Walks of your community with a group representing at least 5% of your average worship attendance.
- Complete a pilgrimage, abroad or locally, with the goal of witnessing scripture at work in modern context and culture. Allow pilgrims to then share about their experience through written reflection, via presentations to groups, spoken in worship, etc. *The total number of pilgrims plus those who attend reflection presentations should represent at least 5% of your average worship attendance.*

IMAGINATION, *Imaginative Practice and Engagement Component.* *How might a church engage scripture creatively for the sake of public witness?*

- *Worship Planning:* Demonstrate how Scripture drives long-range worship planning practices and design by creating a 3 to 6 month worship plan, including selected scriptural passages and themes. *Document any planning resources you used (lectionaries, UM Worship Planning Guide, etc), and your process for designing the worship plan.*
- *Scripture as a Public Witness:* Offer a public, interactive demonstration of scripture in the form of art, music, drama, craft, etc that includes opportunities for exploratory conversation with those who encounter it.
- *Developing Scripturally Literate and Imaginative Leaders:* Demonstrate how disciples (children, youth and adults) are being equipped to lead others in scriptural study, literacy, and imagination, with intentional focus on lowering fear and anxiety, and increasing confidence and competence.

To apply at any level, please complete the online application, including uploading documents and supplemental materials illustrating what your congregation did to satisfy each requirement, and narrative reflection regarding the transformation that took place. Questions? Please email blair.zant@ngumc.net.