

Cultivating a Spirit of Innovation

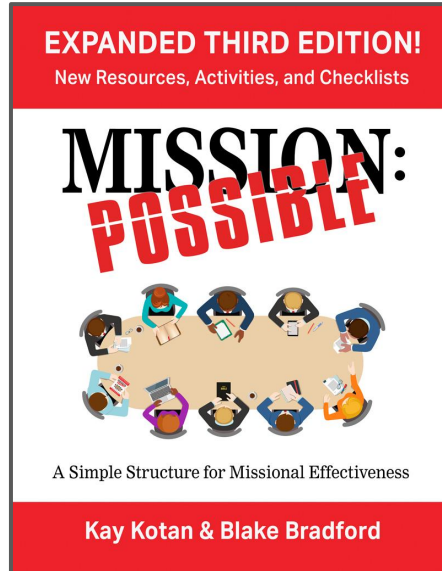
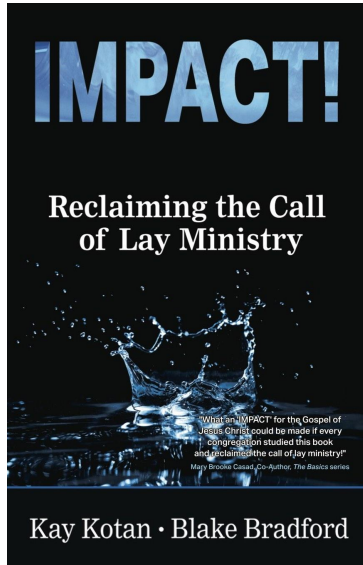


**Blake Bradford, D.Min.
Arkansas Conference**

Downloadable Resources at:
www.blakebradford.org



Blake Bradford, D.Min.
District Superintendent
Arkansas Conference
blake.bradford@arumc.org



Coming in Fall 2021



Consider Conference responses to the challenges of this last year....

- Ministering and making Disciples of Jesus in the wake of the COVID pandemic and its resulting traumatic emotional, spiritual, and economic consequences
- Dismantling the sin of racism
- Navigating political polarization that is reflected in the church and culture

Most institutions, particularly conference offices, were not designed to innovate and adapt to this level of fast cultural change and cascading challenges.

Innovation lies in nexus of leveraging existing assets and a willingness to identify and engage the incoming reality



The Spirit of Innovation

Innovation in the Post Pandemic World

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- Encourage
- Equip
- Leverage

Cultivating Innovation: DCM as Gardener



Innovation in the Post-COVID World

- COVID “sped up the clock” on trends that were already challenging congregations
- Congregations experienced the last 18 months in disparate ways, so conference responses must be tuned to differing experiences
- The Conference Connectional Ministries and Bishop can offer local congregations the gift of a reality check through visioning and communication
- The multiple ongoing crises of 2020 have created opportunities and appetite for innovation
- Nostalgia for 2019 is real - leverage the RELAUNCH moment before churches forget what they learned and return to the Egypt of pre-COVID ministry, but with $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ less people



A Conference Approach to Innovation

- Encourage
- Equip
- Leverage

Your “innovation toolbox” as a DCM is very different than that of a congregational pastor.

The DCM and Connectional Ministries can become cultivators of innovation that happens in local churches.



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- **Storytelling: Use Social Media and Conference Communications to share ideas that stir up grassroots innovation to make Disciples of Jesus**
 - An **impact-focused** communications plan
 - Use your stewardship campaign toolbox in communications with congregational leaders



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- **Support Innovation: Fund ministry experiments instead of ministry maintenance**
 - Conference or District Innovation Grants
 - **Emphasize *creativity* instead of subsidies**
 - Use grant reporting as a public-facing opportunity to equip others, encourage more creativity, and affirm fruitfulness



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- **Equipping Churches for a post-COVID world**

- Example: **Teaching *Both/And* Worship**
- Leveraging our Foundations for technology grants for cameras and equipment
- Providing Conference Staff and Bishop-led worship services for pastors to deploy. This offers a respite for clergy, teaches expectations by example, and encourages connectionalism



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- **Rethinking Conference-wide events that don't equip or encourage innovation in local congregations**
 - Example: **Repurposing** the Conference Mission Day which was “killed by COVID”
 - Shifting from a gathering of a few hundred deeply invested UM members in a central location into a vision of encouraging & highlighting local innovation



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

- **Focus on Metrics that support Innovation**
 - Many of our metrics were inherited from an attractional model perspective, not a missional model
 - COVID may have finally killed “busy-ness” as a congregational goal
 - AWA needs to be used carefully
 - **Help congregations refocus on *engagement***



ENCOURAGE • EQUIP • LEVERAGE

A Conference Approach to Innovation

• Staff for Purpose instead of Constituencies

- Congregations are re-staffing for a post-COVID world by beefing up technology and communications, and reducing staffing in areas that are not mission-critical for today's ministry
- Using the same benchmark, conference DCMs and CFAs should **leverage the moment** to re-think staffing



The Spirit of Innovation

Blake Bradford - DCM 2021

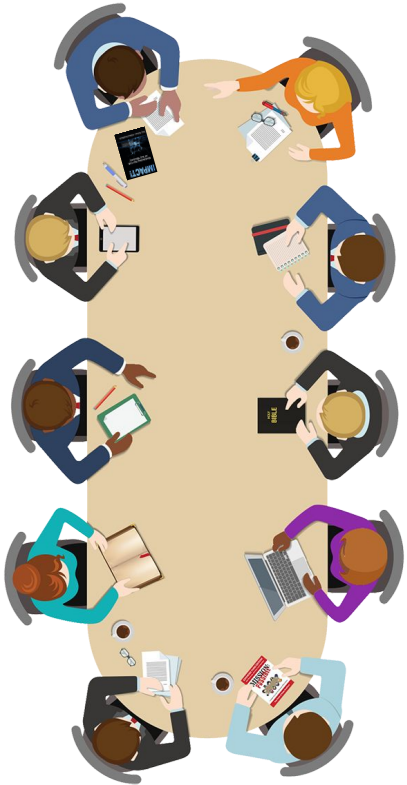


TABLE TALK

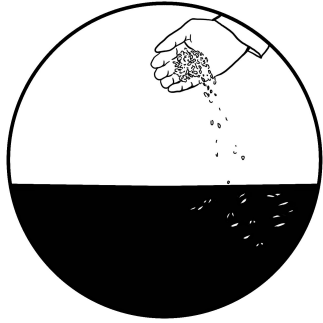
The role of DCM and the potential levers for innovation are very different from ministry in the local church (and every AC is unique, too!)

What are the levers you are already identifying in your conference system that could be used to cultivate innovation?

Cultivating Innovation: Directors of Connectional Ministry as Gardeners

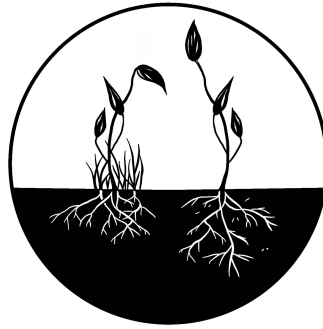


DCM as Gardener



New Seeds

- Equipping for a Post-Covid Future
- Funding local Experiments



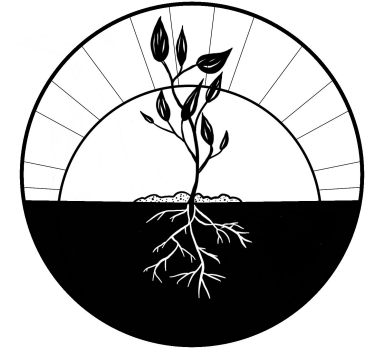
Weeding

- Leveraging the crises of this year to shift conference resources
- Prune programs; refocus on encouraging & equipping
- Clarify expectations to help congregation focus on engagement, not AWA



Nutritious Soil

- Funding for Innovation instead of Maintenance
- Utilize outcome-based action planning



Sunlight

- Communicate the Post-Covid reality & opportunity
- Highlight grassroots innovation

The Spirit of Innovation

Blake Bradford - DCM 2021

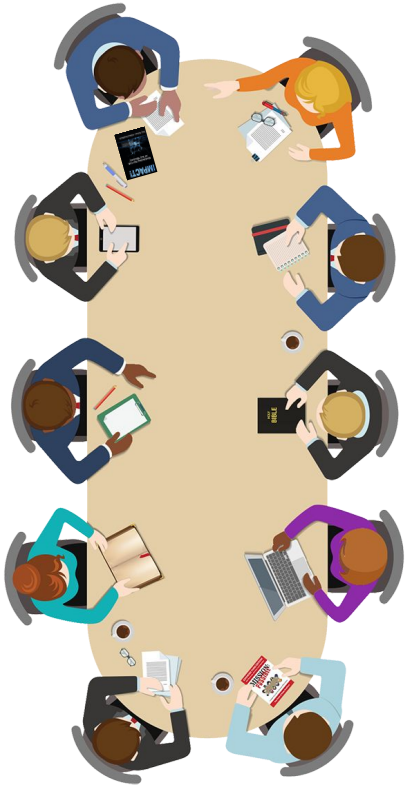


TABLE TALK

As you begin your work
as a new DCM in your conference,
which cultivation practice
*(new seeds, weeding,
fresh soil, sunlight)*
do you see as most important
in your new ministry?