

**School of Congregational Development
Multiply 08 – Ministry Centers**

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As an alternative to discontinuing a local church and selling the property, ministry centers provide an alternative where the church can continue to serve the community. We will share three different examples of ministry centers that are currently operating in Southern California.

Christ United Methodist Church in San Diego was at one time the largest EUB Church west of the Rockies with 700 members. When Pastor Bill Jenkins arrived in 1999, attendance averaged 70. Six years later, the membership had dwindled to 40. With a 26,000 square foot building in the heart of San Diego, Bill challenged the congregation to “Rethink Church”. For the next six years the congregation settled upon the “Ministry Center Model” in Matthew 25. In the same resolution to close Christ UMC in 2011, Cal Pac Conference created Christ United Methodist Ministry Center that welcomes over 1200 people a week seeking food for their bodies and souls. CMC is a “7-days-a-week” urban ministry center with food and clothing ministries, two free clinics and dental lab, home to a dozen congregations, and ministers to immigrants and asylum seekers in detention. CMC’s Safe Harbors Network has provided shelter for over 6,0000 immigrants in the last two years and operated the only immigrant welcome shelter in Southern California, according to the UN High Commissioner on Refugees and Church World Service. And for good measure, CMC has a co-working hub for social entrepreneurs working for the social, cultural and environmental good of the San Diego area.

After seventy years of ministry that was marked by the constant struggle to grow membership and the necessary finances, the Imperial Beach United Methodist Church voted to surrender its charter and with the vote of the Annual Conference, the church was designated a "missional congregation" and given the blessing to transition its existing corporation into the Imperial Beach Outreach Center. This new Outreach Center with a new 13-member board of directors made up of community and congregation members, continues the vital work begun by the church that includes food distribution, nutrition classes, community garden, free counseling services, Spanish language classes, homeless showers and participation the Interfaith Shelter. The Imperial Beach Outreach Center is now poised to provide a space for physical, spiritual, religious, emotional and mental health and growth for the people of Imperial Beach, especially those who are low-income, homeless, aging or marginalized in other ways. Through direct service, collaboration and networking with other groups, the Center aims to build a vibrant and peaceful community where all can share their gifts empowering those who are struggling and in need of care. This Center offers another example of a real option to maintain the Gospel in a community rather than closing a church that ends the worship and fellowship of a congregation and selling the property.

In 2017, El Cajon First UMC was identified as a candidate to become a ministry center via merger with another local church. Although membership had declined to critical levels, the church continued to actively serve a poor, urban neighborhood with its outreach ministries. These included a volunteer-run food and clothing ministry and providing space for transitional kindergarten classes and a naturopathic clinic. Its merger partner, Foothills UMC in La Mesa, is located only three miles away in a suburban, upper-middle class community. Foothills formed an exploratory committee comprised of clergy and lay leadership to analyze the viability of a

merger. This included an audit of the physical facilities and finances. Most importantly, the committee considered the positive impact on the community versus the negative impact of eliminating them. Based upon the recommendations of the exploratory committee and the leadership of the churches, each congregation voted to merge in October 2018. The site was renamed the Good Shepherd Ministry Center and is managed by a special council elected by the Church Conference of Foothills UMC. Repairs and upgrades have been made to the facilities and ministries are being added, including a new clothing ministry and hosting a documented refugee family.