Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

Produced by the General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church to communicate effective principles and practices demonstrated by congregations that are actively making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

These congregations are marked by:

- Clarity around the mission and vision of the congregation.
- Practice of spiritual disciplines, both corporately and individually.
- Nurture of growth in discipleship through mutual support and accountability.
- Cultivation of intentional and mutual relationships with the most vulnerable—the poor, children, the imprisoned, the powerless.
- Consistent concern for inviting people into relationship with Jesus Christ, combined with wise practices for initiating them into the Body of Christ.
- Connectional relationships that facilitate participation in God's mission of global transformation.
- Shared clergy and lay leadership.

Everyone Is an Advocate for Children

John Wesley United Methodist Church in Baltimore, MD is situated in an economically depressed part of Baltimore City, with one of the highest crimes rates in the US. The church is vitally engaged in the community, particularly focusing on the Christian education and formation of the church and neighborhood children and youth. The members at John Wesley are committed to ensuring that anyone whose lives they touch have every opportunity to grow into faithful, responsible, productive disciples.

A hallmark of their ministry is the several-tiered approach to learning and Christian formation. As one member said, "Everyone here is an advocate for children." She might have added, "for youth, and adults" as well. They demonstrate that mission through the Sunday school, VBS, scouting, camps, confirmation (with youth selecting their own mentor), and other Christian formation experiences at varying levels that would be expected in any healthy congregation. Yet their efforts far exceed that; children and youth, many of them poor, can take GED classes, participate in the Cultural Academic Saturday Academy (schooling instruction), or the college tour for high school seniors.

Adults are certainly not ignored. In addition to several levels of Bible study, adults have an array of entry points to the church and to the faith—a luncheon ministry, UMW, lay speaking, and DISCIPLE Bible Study, for example. Adults who teach are expected to continue in their own spiritual growth and be a model or mentor for the younger ones, attend their own Bible study, receive training, and to do a yearly learning plan for their class or group that is approved by the Christian education committee and then by the church council.

In a community familiar with crime and violence, John Wesley UMC is supporting and advocating for their members and community. One of their biblical/theological foundations is knowing and sharing the good news that God loves us all, just as we are.

Some Questions for Discussion

- In what ways is your congregation an advocate for children and youth in your community?
- How might the idea of developing a yearly learning plan for every class and small group in your congregation be received by the teachers and leaders in your congregation?

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