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.

Extending a Welcome

Asbury UMC in Madison, AL intentionally prepares to welcome people who may have little or no church experience. One of the first items you see on their web site is a box labeled "Welcome Visitors." There you find basic information about the congregation, including directions to the church, a diagram of the facilities, an invitation to participate in one of the Discover Asbury sessions, and a description of what to expect if you visit one of Asbury's worship services.

The description of traditional worship provides an explanation of each part of the worship experience. The description of the contemporary worship includes a video clip from one of the services, as well as photographs of the praise band and some of the worship visuals. This section also informs people that the congregation has a Visitor Information Center, as well as individuals in the parking lot who can answer questions and provide directions.

Under "Welcome Visitors" is a box labeled "Are You Searching for God?" This link moves you to another page that includes the congregation's understanding of Jesus Christ and how one might begin a relationship with him, as well as links for contacting church staff. Also available is information about Asbury Next, a series of four classes to familiarize visitors and new members with the congregation's mission, vision, core values, and opportunities for involvement.

In worship senior pastor Alan Weatherly announces that "other than the Holy Spirit, you (visitors) are the most important people here." He and other staff members talk to people about making a commitment to Christ every week. They have between 50 and 100 visitors weekly, and so far this year 90 people have made professions of faith. In a time when many congregations have no professions of faith in any given year, Asbury UMC reminds us that it can be different.

Some Questions for Discussion

- What is your congregational plan for welcoming visitors?
- If someone unfamiliar with your congregation visited your web-site, what would they learn about you? What would their impression be? Who would they think would be welcome?

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EQUIPPING WORLD-CHANGING DISCIPLES

In 2007 church leaders throughout The United Methodist Church in the U.S. were invited to identify churches that demonstrated the vision of discipleship described in the twelfth chapter of Romans. Over 200 churches were surveyed or visited. Issue #25. © 2009 GBOD. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy this page for use in United Methodist congregations.