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.

The Discipleship Diamond

John Wesley had this to say in a sermon based upon Matthew 5:13-16:

… Christianity is essentially a social religion, and that to turn it into a solitary religion is indeed to destroy it. By Christianity I mean that method of worshipping God which is here revealed to [humankind] by Jesus Christ. When I say this is essentially a social religion, I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other [people].

He is saying that Christians need to be in community with each other. And that community must be organized in a way that prepares its members to be "salt and light for the world." This is why a system of inter-related small groups developed within the early Methodist societies in Britain and America. It is also why every Methodist was required to be part of a small group that met weekly. The purpose of the system of groups was to form the Methodists to serve as missionaries whose lives reflected the good news of Jesus Christ for the world.

First United Methodist Church in Tuscaloosa, AL understands that "Christianity is a social religion." They have developed an integrated system of small groups that work together to help seekers grow into mature disciples of Jesus Christ. A good example of this system is "The Discipleship Diamond."

The Discipleship Diamond is a four-step curriculum of Christian initiation and formation. Based on a baseball diamond, the process moves participants from membership (first base) to maturity (second base) to ministry (third base) to the home plate that is mission. Each "base" is a small group that focuses on a different part of the diamond and prepares the members to move on to the next base. This four-part process provides a means for new Christians to live into the baptismal covenant and grow in holiness of heart and life.

Some Questions for Discussion

- How does your congregation help members understand that Christianity is essentially social, that one cannot be a faithful follower of Jesus Christ alone?
- How are the small groups in your congregations integrated to help members grow in faith, hope, and love?

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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 #33. © 2009 GBOD. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy this page for use in United Methodist congregations.