

Family Ministry G.I.F.T. Newsletter Articles

Discipleship Pathway

February 2024:

A Mission to Make Disciples

Disciple and Discipleship are words that have come up in many conversations among our church leadership recently, beginning with the October all-church 3R (Reflect, Realign, Renew) planning/visioning meetings. If you attended any of those meetings, then you may remember that there was much talk regarding the idea of alignment around a common goal or mission. In other words, Hudson UMC will be most effective in achieving what we set out to do if we're all paddling in the same direction. The question then becomes, "What are we setting out to do?" or "What is our purpose?"

An answer to this question has already been provided for us by Jesus in his Great Commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

The United Methodist Church has aligned its own mission statement with the Great Commission: *To make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.* (Book of Discipline). The Discipline further goes on to state that *Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.*

In light of this, we came away from the 3R meetings with a commitment to align our own purpose as a local Methodist church around the UMC mission and The Great Commission. We are about making disciples. This is the direction in which we have chosen to face.

Before we take our first step, however, it's important that we pause to define our terminology. What exactly **is** a disciple? Here is my short answer: A disciple is one who not only knows about God's will but is conducting one's life according to God's standards. This person is in the process of discovering their own place in fulfilling God's purposes and is seeking ways to live it uniquely and authentically in the world. There is both choice and personal responsibility associated with growing oneself as a disciple.

In making disciples, the church carries a responsibility as well. Through its resources, the church may help to define a pathway to discipleship and inspire all encountered to pursue their own journeys. It is the church's role to provide invitations and opportunities for those seeking to grow in their spiritual walk. In practice, this covers everything from visitor hospitality and fellowship to education and discovery to leadership, service, and mission. Removing any obstacles that might block the development or pursuit of this pathway is a crucial step.

Because discipleship often begins with education, the CEC (Christian Education Committee) team has taken on the task of discernment around creating a discipleship plan for Hudson UMC. As we know, however, pursuing discipleship involves deeds in response to knowledge, so we expect that this effort will grow to become church-wide, involving multiple committees, teams, and leaders.

We, as a church, are at the cusp of creating a culture at HUMC that enables personal spiritual transformation and intentional action for all ages and stages. We work in expectation that lives will be changed. It's challenging. It's exciting. And it's no less than what we are here to do.

God Bless,

Elizabeth

March 2024:

How Will We Make Disciples?

Last month in this space, I shared the mission of Hudson United Methodist Church that was adopted at last October's all-church 3R (Reflect, Realign, Renew) planning/visioning meetings: **To make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.** We share this statement with The United Methodist Church, and it reflects Jesus' Great Commission to *go and make disciples...* (Matthew 28:18-20).

Each Methodist church will accomplish this mission in ways that reflect its own unique culture and values. So, identifying who we are and what we value here at Hudson UMC is central to discerning how we will make disciples here.

At our initial Reflection evening in October, a group of both long and short-term members and friends shared stories of inspiration and pride regarding their individual experiences with Hudson UMC. Through a group exercise, recurring themes were then distilled down to three core values that define who we are at our strongest and best: **At Hudson UMC, we value growing spiritually, serving others, and nurturing relationships.**

Growing spiritually and serving others are hallmarks of an intentional pathway to discipleship, so discipleship is a mission already at our core. And because it is important to us to cultivate strong and meaningful relationships within our community, we will find it natural and fulfilling to continue to make disciples of one another.

Having identified our core values as a church, our next step is to define the particulars of how we will accomplish our mission to make and mature disciples of Christ both on an individual level and as part of our wider communities. This will be an ongoing process, but at this stage, I can offer a few possibilities.

Because we value growing spiritually, we will continue to encourage participation in Sunday school classes and Bible studies. We will also look for more short-term classes to offer, covering special topics and Faith 101-type subjects.

Because we value serving others, we will continue to encourage faith in action through our many service opportunities and mission partners. We will further offer resources that will guide participants in understanding the unique God-given gifts they possess and how they may offer these gifts in service to their world.

And finally, because we value nurturing relationships, we will continue to encourage participation in small group activities and discussions, and even micro-groups of 3 or 4, all of which are designed to be faith-nurturing and life-affirming and to provide companionship and a soft place to land while navigating life's winding paths together.

I pray that this brief picture continues to grow and develop into something like what Jesus had in mind when he told his disciples to go make more disciples. You pray too, and then together we'll work, plan, and watch expectantly just what God will accomplish in and through our church family.

God Bless,

Elizabeth

August 2024:

It's a Journey

Some of you may be familiar with the first phrase that appears below, but I wonder if you've heard Max Lucado's contribution at the end:

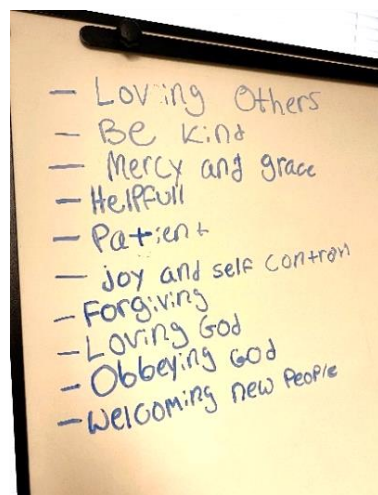
"God loves you just the way you are, but refuses to leave you that way. God wants you to be just like Jesus."

Max Lucado is in good company with the apostle Paul, who urged the Phillipians, "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus..." Rev. Bruce described this in a recent message as turning our mind's "default setting" toward that of Christ's.

When I asked the kids during that morning's Children's Sermon to describe the mind of Christ, they generated this list to the right.

To recall Rev. Bruce's illustration, unlike resetting a microwave oven, a mind reset is a process that takes time, intention, and a bit of guidance.

In previous articles offered in this space, I've asked you to wait and watch for details to be shared on a plan for how Hudson UMC will offer an intentional, guided path that its members and friends may follow toward such a mind and action "reset." We're calling this our **Discipleship Pathway**, and it represents the deliberate way that Hudson UMC will work to carry out its mission *To make and mature disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*



For those seeking to pursue this path, Hudson UMC aims to offer opportunities that serve growing disciples in multiple areas:

1. Meaningful and accessible ways of worshiping God.
2. Fellowship, ministry, service, and learning alongside others.

3. Guidance and support in practices that foster knowledge of and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
4. Encouragement in transformational work within the body of Christ and in the world.

Recognizing that a faith journey is a lifelong process and that individuals will naturally find themselves at different stages along this path, our intent is to accommodate a variety of needs within each area while always encouraging growth through the next step.

Here are just a few examples of the ways this might take shape at Hudson UMC:

For those still exploring or in the early stages of their discipleship journey, we will offer opportunities...to worship in new ways or online from a safe and familiar space; to begin to form relationships within a casual setting; to learn about ways to be of service in areas that resonate with the heart; to begin to consider the potential impacts of a life of faith.

For those growing and maturing disciples, we will offer opportunities...to take part in various aspects of worship that lead others to a deeper experience of God's presence; to nurture relationships through small groups and minister to one another through stages of faith and life; to serve others in need or to conceive of new ways to use one's gifts in service; to find support in the study and sharing of God's Word and in the growing awareness of God's continual presence and guidance in our lives.



This model of a carefully conceived pathway to discipleship represents a fundamentally new way of looking at and being the church. Rather than using people to build the church, we are using the church to build people who will change the world around them through their Christian witness.

I hope that you will continually seek opportunities for growth and will actively pursue your first and next steps along this pathway. Inevitably and most assuredly, you will find that at a certain place in your journey, you too have become a builder. Keep walking!

May God bless all of our efforts.

Elizabeth