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 corporate-ly 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.

Romans 12
We who are many are one body in Christ.

Parish Nurse Ministry
Mrs. B faced a difficult dilemma. Having fallen and fractured a hip, she required partial hip replacement surgery. Following the surgery, Mrs. B spent several weeks in a rehabilitation hospital. In order to return home, her house needed several physical adjustments (handrails in the bathroom and shower stall, and a ramp for her front steps). The parish nurse was able to assess the needs and seek the help necessary to allow Mrs. B to return to her own home.

Scenes like this are taking place in a growing number of United Methodist congregations. Parish nurses at churches like Matthews United Methodist Church in Matthews, North Carolina are ministering in the realm where medical science and spirituality meet.

The parish nurse ministry mission statement at Matthews UMC reads: “With the love and guidance of Christ, the Parish Nurse Ministry will serve the needs of the individual, congregation and community to achieve optimum wellness of the mind, body and spirit.”

Parish nurse ministry is a link between the healthcare and faith communities. The parish nurse serves as a health counselor, health educator, advocate, teacher of volunteers, coordinator for support groups and liaison between individuals and the church and community resources, all within a framework that links spirituality and health.

With the aging of the U.S. population, changes in family structure and mobility, and rising healthcare costs, parish nursing helps bring a more holistic approach to treating medical problems and to educating congregations about wellness.

Some Questions for Discussion
• In what ways is your congregation helping people understand the connection between spiritual health and physical health?
• How does your congregation encourage and equip those who have skills in medical related areas to use those gifts as an expression of their discipleship?
• As ministry areas within the congregation plan and carry out their various ministries, how are they being intentional about encouraging healthy living? (For example, are doughnuts a part of many meetings?)

You can read more about the Matthews UMC parish nurse ministry at www.matthewsumc.org. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. is the Director of the Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministry. He can be reached at rgentzler@gbod.org

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 #45. © 2009 GBOD. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy this page for use in United Methodist congregations.