

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.

Risk-Taking Mission and Service

In a southeast Asian country with young United Methodist congregations, Christians are sometimes persecuted. The form of persecution often involves jail and sometimes torture and death threats, not just for pastors, but for their congregations as well. The charge that leads to the arrest may vary. Sometimes it is “illegal meeting.” Sometimes other things are cited.

In one case while the pastor and a number of congregation members were being jailed, a guard held a gun to the pastor's head, cocked it in front of the others, and said, “Unless you renounce your Christian faith now, your congregants will watch you being shot to death.” He refused to renounce. The guard, for whatever reason, did not make good on his threat.

During the same jailing, there was an evening where the pastor and the congregation were praying, praising, and singing together. One of the guards ordered them to stop. They did not. Another guard said it was all right for them to continue. The first guard then turned on the other guard and the two continued to fight among themselves about whether the singing and praying could continue, while in fact it did.

In another jailing, things were getting bleak for the pastor and the congregation. It appeared they might all be tortured or killed the next morning. That night they decided they needed to pray together for deliverance, not just for themselves, but for everyone in the jail. Early the next morning, a guard told every prisoner to leave in a hurry. They were all set free. Somehow word had gotten out to the international media that they were being held and persecuted. That led to a decision by the government to investigate that jail the next day. When the investigators arrived they found no one in jail at all.

This congregation has no wealth nor building. What they have is faith, prayer, love, and each other. And with just that, look what God has done!

Some Questions for Discussion

- How do these stories help you reflect on the resources you have as a congregation, and how you might use them more effectively where you are?
- What would enable your congregation to display the level of faith, hope, and love that these United Methodists have? What will you do to help the people of your congregation grow in faith, hope, and love like theirs?

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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 #77 © 2011 GBOD. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy this page for use in United Methodist congregations.