

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.

Shaped by Identity

Salem United Methodist Church in Covington, Georgia dates its history to 1824. It has seen periods of ups and downs, and in the past few years has plateaued in growth and vitality. Most recently it is seeing growth in the community with many younger people and families moving in. The mostly traditional worship style, while comfortable and vital for many of the established members, did not attract many newcomers, and the decision was made to offer a second worship service and music in a more contemporary style.

The church's attendance has grown 30% in the past year to about 160. The new praise band and its leader and worship coordinator exist as a complement to the church's traditional musicians and worship service. Rather than competing and dividing, the church strives to work together to serve and minister in worship.

The newer praise team offers a mix of contemporary, praise and worship, bluegrass, gospel, spirituals, and other music along with some traditional hymns, while the traditional choir offers the more traditional repertoire. The congregation has grown and reflects an inclusive range of ages and ethnicities. Occasionally the two groups of musicians and worshipping bodies have come together in one joint service such as for Easter Sunday.

The growth has not come without some tension, but the church and its musicians work hard to serve in unity of spirit and mission as they minister out of a sense of congregational and community identity. *Who* they are determines *what* they do and *how* they serve. An understanding of congregational identity precedes the church's choice of program and ministry.

Some Questions for Discussion

- What words would you use to describe your congregation's identity? What hymn or song captures the essence of its identity?
- How would people in the congregation complete the blanks in this sentence, "Because we are _____, we do _____ in the following way: _____"?
- Does your identity shape your ministry in worship and music, or the other way around?
- How is your church's worship and music an expression of who your people are?

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