

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.

Bridging the Gaps

Sometimes we lose people during transitions. St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Oklahoma City created a new staffing strategy to facilitate the transitions of childhood. When St. Luke's began searching for a Children's Director, they selected two, Charlie Ludden and Brittany Stanley. They were given the opportunity to be in ministry together as a team, Charlie as the Director of Older Children's Ministry and Brittany as the Director of Younger Children's Ministry. The church purposefully created two jobs that overlapped in responsibilities related to the major transitions children experience while growing up at St. Luke's.

Brittany Stanley reports that, "by working together as a team, we cover the gaps many churches have between ministry areas. We envision our programs as a lifelong process, and we have implemented a smooth Christian education plan that ensures relationships are formed with people of all ages. As children experience change, they will always know at least one person in their group. If we neglect to work together, the children could get lost in the gaps."

Throughout the year the children of St. Luke's have opportunities to bond with the older congregational members through their Women's Senior Adult Prayer Group that prays for families expecting a new baby and continues the relationship as the child grows. Older adults are also invited to participate in the Christmas program, and close bonds are created during rehearsals.

"It's all about relationships," says Charlie Ludden. "If we create opportunities for people of all ages to be together and supported during transitions, there will be no gaps to fall through. We all contribute to the growth of our children and youth."

Some Questions for Discussion

- Where are the gaps between your ministries? How do your volunteer and paid staffing patterns help bridge those gaps?
- What strategies does your congregation have in place to help people of all ages as they move through life transitions?
- Are there existing ministries in your congregation that might be modified to increase the opportunities for people of various ages to form healthy relationships and share their faith?

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