

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.

Word, Water, Wind, and Grace

Armonk United Methodist Church in Armonk, New York has embraced an emergent style of worship. The pastor, Rev. Jennifer Pick, describes it in this way, “All of worship is proclamation. From the time people gather to the time they are sent forth, they participate in one message. All of the worship elements they will encounter when we gather, taken together, become the proclamation of the Word.”

The actual sermon tends to be shorter, ten to twelve minutes, creating space for what Rev. Pick calls a *participatory sermon*—where worshippers encounter the Word, experientially, in multi-sensory and multi-vocal ways. It is this participatory space that makes room for holy mystery, curiosity, and ambiguity. Participatory sermons remind us to take seriously the priesthood of all believers. All present are an essential part of the proclamation, not just the leaders.

Typically, Rev. Pick plans a three to four week worship series. Each series has a definite beginning, middle, and ending and contributes to the overall faith journey. Symbols and visual cues remind worshippers where they are in the series. Visual cues from previous weeks reappear to remind worshippers where they have been, and at the end of each worship service, forecasting is used to prepare the congregation for the next week.

Rev. Pick says, “The creative process takes time for both pastor and worship planners. The ultimate goal is reclaiming our story and our song through the use of rich worship symbols, by linking the ancient story with our story in ways appropriate for each worship setting, and by inviting worshippers to participate in a journey that ultimately creates an awareness of the sacramental nature of life. All we ask of you is that you grow.”

Some Questions for Discussion

- What is the timeline and process for worship planning in your congregation? How might the process be modified to allow the incorporation of richer worship symbols and multi-sensory experiences?
- One of the goals of emergent-style worship is to accompany worshippers on the journey that leads to transformation and growth. How do your present worship experiences and preaching accomplish similar goals?

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