

# 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.

## When the Opportunity Comes

In early spring, the town council in Vinton, Virginia voted to end the operation of the community's municipal swimming pool. The tough economy meant the town could not subsidize the pool for its upcoming season.

Thrasher Memorial United Methodist Church saw the need in the community for safe enriching summer activities. They wanted to connect with the community in a practical way that would meet these needs. As their pastor Rev. Lynne Alley-Grant says, "When the opportunity comes, you have to go to the ball—don't wait for it to come to you."

So Thrasher Memorial entered into a unique partnership with the town. According to county ordinance, the town continued as operator of the pool, overseeing safety, health standards, and maintenance. The church provided volunteers for concessions and other areas, produced special Wednesday evening free family-themed dinners and entertainment, and expanded the community center by operating a "craft shack" on the site. With volunteers from the church, the pool hours were extended into summer evenings for family swim time.

The town's special programs director says, "Thrasher saw the need for the community to continue to have this resource for our children, our youth, and families, and they stepped forward to offer programming opportunities, volunteers, and food for promotions. This is a very different kind of partnership we're entering into."

By August pool attendance was up 73% over the previous summer. The local news media credits the "guardian angels at Thrasher" with saving the pool's sixty-first season.

Thrasher has also benefited from the partnership. New relationships have been built, and there is new vitality in a church that took on what seemed an impossible task.

## Some Questions for Discussion

- How does your congregation "go to the ball" rather than waiting for it to come to you?
- Have there been times that your congregation faced a seemingly impossible task with creative solutions? Are there lessons from those experiences that could inform your current situation?

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