

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.

We Work It Out!

Congregational life is not always easy for congregations that are intentionally forming disciples. Many of the churches in the original Romans 12 research have gone through tough times and rough patches. What distinguishes these churches is not the absence of difficulties, but the ability to learn from set-backs and experience God's presence in the midst of what might be considered a failure.

Rather than avoid conflict, these congregations find healthy ways to deal with differences. As one person said, "I sense potential and possibility here that I've not seen anywhere before. Folks here seldom doubt and pout, but when they do, we work it out!"

Another said, "People here are patient and there is a spirit of deep, sincere faith and trust in God. Obviously, we are not perfect and we have occasional upsets, but we work through them and don't resort to immature or unhealthy responses. As long as they understand the need, people are willing to try new things."

In reflecting on the congregation's past, present, and future, another person said, "When we moved to our urban location, a lot of people refused to come along, some of them were long-time leaders. For a little while, our future seemed a little bleak. However, it seems that little by little, great things are happening all around us! A local library that closed in our neighborhood will probably reopen, a former small Sunday school class now has at least 20 kids a week, sometimes up to 40. There are times when we seem very unfocused and that our spirit is waning. But those times are fewer and farther between each other. I think that we will continue to grow, becoming more diverse and stronger in our walk with Christ. I think that we may become what the future general church needs to become if it is to be relevant in our changing society."

Some Questions for Discussion

- Who are the people in your congregation who recognize God's presence in the midst of difficult times and help others to do the same?
- How is the congregation equipping its leaders to help them deal with conflict in mature and healthy ways?
- Is your congregation currently in a place where the future seems a little bleak or where great things are happening all around? How can you help others see potential and possibility in the bleak times?

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