

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 in 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.

A Comforting Hug

As you drive north in New Hampshire on I-93, you pass through an area where the four lane highway becomes two lanes for a short stretch. This is known to local residents as the Notch. Life below the Notch offers lots of opportunities for employment, above the Notch, not as many. For communities above the Notch, it is even more important that residents look out for one another.

Littleton is one of those communities above the Notch. Everyone who sat in the congregation of Littleton First United Methodist Church knew what was going on in town. Their local high school was having a tough time. The school board was unable to find a principal and the morale at the school was low. So when the pastor stepped to the pulpit one Sunday morning and preached a sermon titled “What If?” that suggested their church had the ability to lift the spirits of those who worked at the high school, a spark was ignited!

The congregation is well known for its chowder lunches that are held on Fridays throughout Lent as a fundraiser for the small congregation. They know how to plan and carry out a community meal. Capitalizing on those skills, a plan began to take shape. In what became referred to as the “comforting hug,” the church decided to prepare and serve a lunch for the entire school staff as a way of saying, “We are here with you.”

The date that was chosen fell on Holy Thursday. On a day when churches all around the world celebrate Holy Communion and remember Jesus' example of washing his disciples' feet, the members of Littleton First UMC ladled soup and distributed sandwiches to school teachers. In this simple act of caring, they reminded the community that there is still hope above the Notch, and they experienced for themselves that not all holy meals happen in the church.

Questions for Discussion

- What are the things that your church knows how to do? How might you use those competencies to bring a comforting hug to your community?
- What unique opportunities does living in the rhythm of the church year provide for your congregation to reach out to the community?
- In what ways does congregational worship propel the members of your church into community service?

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