

# Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

## Out of the Box

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.

Southwestern Virginia is a difficult place to be in ministry. According to Ronnie Collins, pastor of Out of the Box United Methodist Church in Hillsdale, most folks have "pretty clear notions about what a church should look like and how church should be done." So when First United Methodist Church of Hillsdale decided to do something different and plant a "downtown" church in a storefront located in the center of town, Collins knew that the challenges would be great. But the congregation had a vision: they would start a church where everybody was welcome and where everyone could be open and honest.

The church particularly hoped to reach those from their community who were in recovery. By recovery, they meant recovery from anything that was getting in the way of a relationship with Jesus Christ. Recovery might be from substance abuse, harmful behaviors, or situations that needed healing, such as divorce, grief, and dealing with illness. Their goal was to support and love people no matter who they were or what challenges they faced.

They don't apologize for doing things differently at Out of the Box. Instead, they work to endear themselves to their community by providing members lots of opportunities to engage in ministry with those around them. For example, members regularly volunteer on cleanup and recovery crews after storms, chop firewood for those who heat their homes with woodstoves, and host free cookouts in low-income areas of their community. They encourage every member to be an active evangelist for Jesus Christ, not only by serving their neighbors, but also by inviting those neighbors into the congregation and making sure they feel welcomed and loved.

In four years the church has grown to worship an average of over 200 people every week, and regularly welcomes between five and ten visitors each Sunday. You can learn more about their ministry at <http://ootbwc.com>. By doing things differently they are building something new and transforming a community in a place where traditions run as deep as the veins of coal that run under the mountains. And they are learning to love people, just as they are, in the name of Jesus Christ.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

1. What needs in your community are not being met by other communities of faith?
2. How are you seeking and welcoming new people for Christ?

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