

Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

Bread and Community

Produced by the Discipleship Ministries 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.

White Bear Lake United Methodist Church in White Bear Lake, Minnesota is taking seriously its identity as the body of Christ. Building on the image of Jesus as the “bread of life,” they built a community bread oven in 2010. This project emerged out a passion of the senior pastor, Rev. Bryce Johnson, who is an avid baker. Through study and practice he learned that baking bread was historically a communal activity, bringing people together, building community, and feeding hungry people.

The White Bear Lake UMC's community bread oven is open to the public monthly. People from the neighborhood are welcome to come and bake bread together. Rev. Johnson and others occasionally lead bread baking classes. All are welcome.

Rev. Johnson says, “The oven has helped the church see that discipleship is a communal endeavor. Forty volunteers participated in building the oven. Intergenerational teams regularly gather to make bread for the community or serve pizza dinners baked in the wood-fired oven. As they work together, connections are made, and the spirit moves anew.”

On the first Sunday of the month, bread from the oven is blessed, broken, and given in the Lord's Supper. Johnson says, “When we are at our best, our hearts break open for the community where we live. We give ourselves so that all have a taste of God's banquet feast.”

White Bear Lake UMC is now known as the church that bakes bread for the community. They are the body of Christ that provides the bread of life for all people. Rev. Johnson says, “The oven gives greater visibility to our congregation. It has helped us redefine our purpose. Our mission is ‘providing nourishment for the hungers of life.’ While we make very satisfying bread, it is really a metaphor for what we are about. Pointing towards Jesus, the community oven has inscribed in the stone the words: ‘bread of life.’ We strive to live that out in a holistic way, nourishing body, soul, and spirit.”

Questions for Reflection

1. How does your congregation provide food for hungry people in the neighborhood?
2. How does your congregation live as Christ's body, as the “bread of life” for the world?

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