

# Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

## A Congregation and Camp Connection

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.

Nolan United Methodist Church in Nolan, Texas, a small church with a dwindling membership, and nearby [Butman Methodist Camp and Retreat Center](#) in Merkel have discovered the strength of The United Methodist Connection.

Nolan United Methodist Church faced dynamics typical of many churches in small West Texas towns. The local school, cotton gin, and other businesses had closed in response to population shifts. Church attendance had dwindled to eight to ten people. No children and youth attended unless they were visiting grandparents or attending holiday festivities. The members of Nolan never lost their Christian spirit, however. In the words of the pastor Richard Petree, “Nolan UMC is what a church should be about. We constantly look for ways to help others financially, spiritually, or physically.”

When Brad and Carolyn Street from nearby Butman United Methodist Camp and Retreat Center began to attend Nolan, people in the church grew interested in the ministry at Butman. They began to see a vision that the church could make it possible for children, youth, and adults to attend camp and retreat experiences that they might not otherwise be able to afford. Nolan UMC began to sponsor children and youth of friends, neighbors, area schools, nieces and nephews, grandkids and great grandkids, and sometimes complete strangers. Adults received support to attend Butman as well. Those who participated in the camp-retreat ministry wrote thank-you notes to church members, and some showed up to tell the congregation stories about their experiences. The pastor advocated for the camp-retreat ministry and inspired the community with sermons and stories about the power of Christian camp and retreat experiences.

Soon, parents, relatives, and friends of those blessed with the gift of camping started coming to church. As a result, attendance at Nolan has almost tripled, and the excitement can be felt when people walk in the door. Two rooms at the back of the church building were cleaned, painted, and furnished specifically for children. Today, six to twelve children participate weekly in new programs for children at Nolan UMC. The camp experiences sparked a desire to continue learning and growing in faith year round.

Last spring, during camp registration time, the church members stepped up once again. They asked, “How much money do we have? Can we send more folks to camp or on retreat?” The oldest member of the church reflected, “Sending people to camp is the best investment we ever made.”

The church and camp/retreat ministry collaboration has members feeling “blessed to be a blessing.”

### Questions for Discussion

1. What kinds of collaborations with local United Methodist camp and retreat ministry could open new avenues for nurturing people in their relationship with God and their growth in Christian discipleship?
2. How could collaborations with connectional ministries become a catalyst for outreach and transforming Christian experiences for others beyond the congregation as part of your church's outreach and mission?

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