

Basics of Faith Formation




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“We cannot disciple people that we are not in relationship with. Discipleship begins with relationship.”

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This booklet is a companion piece to:

Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations

by Rev. Junius B. Dotson

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Introduction

Jesus came near and spoke to them, “I’ve received all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I’ve commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age.”

– MATTHEW 28:18-20, CEB

“Go and make disciples...” Famous words of Jesus. Similarly, the mission of The United Methodist Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” More than a commandment the church follows, disciple making is at the heart of who the church is. Churches equip Christians to discover their “why” of discipleship through providing opportunities for growth. Church staff and ministry leaders, or faith formation leaders, are on the front lines of discipleship formation. This booklet, in conjunction with other intentional discipleship system resources, seeks to offer faith formation leaders guidance in this task of making disciples.

Going back to our opening words, let's explore them more deeply. First, is the word "go." Often, "go" is taken to mean, "not here" or "away from here." Hence, make disciples, people may think there is a need to "go" somewhere else or to be different. Interestingly, a more literal translation of the original word could be, "as you are going." That's a slight but meaningful shift. "As you are going" about the life you already have, "make disciples." We don't have to go somewhere else or be someone other than who we are. God is inviting us to be disciple makers, right where we are, with the people we are already in relationship with, and perhaps a few more.

Second, consider the phrase "make disciples." Actually, we don't make disciples. That's God's role. Our role as church leaders is to help equip, shape, and form disciples. The local church and extension ministry settings form disciples in many ways. Being intentional about the formation of disciples is not another program the church needs to add to an already full calendar. Often, forming disciples is about being intentional about what we are already doing.

This booklet (and corresponding online course) aims to help church leaders gain more clarity about discipleship and the role of the church and extension ministry settings in forming disciples. As we'll see, discipleship is not an individual activity. By virtue of our baptism, we are called into a community of believers. Thus, being a disciple includes personal responsibilities and the invitation into the wider world that God loves.

Everything Is Formational

Another point of emphasis will be the importance and formational role of habits for spiritual growth. Throughout this booklet (and course), we'll be using the word "form" in various ways (form, formative, formational, transform). The aim is to name how God, through the church and other ministry settings, transforms us into maturing disciples.

We use the term "form" to explain God's mission of molding us, shaping us, or fashioning us as individuals and as the church to be what God would have us be. We might liken this transformational process to a baker baking a cake. The baker carefully mixes the ingredients, molds the dough, and cooks it into the appropriate shapes. Then arranging the cake, the baker decorates the cake with colorful icing. What starts out as raw ingredients turns into a delight for the eyes and taste buds. So, God seeks to take the raw ingredients of our lives and, by God's grace, including the church and other ministry settings, transforms us into growing, maturing disciples and communities that reflect God's glory.

The reality is we are being formed (and de-formed) all the time. Thus, the question for disciples of Jesus Christ is, "What will we give our attention to?" Our attention determines the inputs or messages we receive. These form our thoughts, character, habits, desires, and soul.

The task for churches is to equip those in our care to be formed in the image of Christ (Galatians 4:19). Everything

the church does is formational. Worship grounds us in a new way of being and focuses our attention on God who is worthy of our worship. (To explore this further, see our resource—*Forming Disciples Through Worship*.) Opportunities to grow in our faith equip us to recognize God’s grace more clearly and to live more intentionally as part of God’s on-going mission of reconciling the world.

Purpose of Faith Formation

Faith formation, then, has a purpose, a goal. Said simply, the goal of faith formation is to instruct and equip Christians in becoming mature disciples of Jesus Christ. This is a lifelong endeavor. And to repeat, it is not an individual activity. The formation of faith develops through participation in local churches and other ministry settings.

When done intentionally, being formed in Christian faith enables individuals and communities to understand their place and role in God’s story. More specifically, faith formation guides individuals and communities to receive their identity (as God’s beloved), know their purpose (love God and neighbor), and experience belonging (within the community of faith).

Baptism

The specific way the Methodist movement has spoken about the journey of discipleship is toward holiness of heart and life. Baptism, then, is the foundation of our life as disci-

ples. As a result of our baptism, Christians are called to live differently, to be holy in the sense of set apart for God, to love God and love others in radical freedom.

Scripture uses many images to stress the enormity of this transformative work displayed in baptism. 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that we are a new creation. Titus 3:5 proclaims we are reborn through the waters. Galatians 3:27 announces that we are clothed with Christ. Colossians 2:12 reveals that we have been buried and raised with Christ. Ephesians 4:4-6 states that we are part of the one body of Christ.

In its introductory sentence about baptism in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, we read, “The Baptismal Covenant is God’s word to us, proclaiming our adoption by grace, and our word to God promising our response of faith and love” (*UM Hymnal*, p. 32). From this sentence, we see a twofold understanding of the grace encountered in baptism. On the one hand is God’s work of adoption. On the other is our response of faith.

The introduction from *The United Methodist Hymnal* also observes that baptism takes place within the worshiping community of believers. We are baptized into the body of Christ. The body of Christ prays over and takes vows to nurture and form the baptized individuals into lifelong disciples. (See “Congregational Pledge 2,” *UM Hymnal*, p. 44.) To grow, Christians need the support, accountability, and nurture of the faith community. To be a more effective witness, faith communities need disciples who are actively responding to and growing in God’s grace through spiritu-

al practices (Bible reading, prayer, fasting, worship, and so on). Our baptismal vows establish an anchor for our identity and create a culture of discipleship formation for our church communities.

Discipleship

The church calls our response to God Christian discipleship. Discipleship focuses on living out our baptismal vows, belonging to and participating in the body of Christ, and becoming who God desires us to be. As disciples, we are not passive spectators but energetic participants in God's activity in the world. Because of what God has done for us, we offer our lives back to God. Christians pattern their lives in ways that embody Christ's ministry in our families, workplaces, communities, and the world. Thus, the Christian faith is grounded in the love and grace of God, experienced through Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Being a disciple is a lot like being an apprentice. Like an apprentice, we watch what the master does. We trust the master and the ways of the master. We seek to emulate the master. With the help from the master (and those who are already closer to being like the master), we try, fail, learn, and are equipped to do the work of the master. When we become disciples or apprentices to Jesus, we also take on other apprentices. (1 Corinthians 11:1) Apprenticeship to Jesus will naturally lead to the desire to invite others to be more like the master as well.

Habits

When we are apprenticed to a master, we become involved in training, routines, and habits. In music, musicians often learn scales to advance. Many fields have routines, practices, and habits that must be formed for growth to happen. In sports, athletes practice the fundamentals. Being formed in the faith—or spiritual growth—is no different. Learning to discern God’s presence and will takes time, focused attention, and being part of the community. Mature Christian mothers and fathers of the faith teach us that spiritual habits or spiritual disciplines are paths to growth (2 Timothy 2:1–6).

Beliefs

Being a Christian is more than knowing or believing certain ideas. The heart of Christianity is a relationship with the Triune God. That is not to say that what we believe is unimportant. Beliefs are important. Good doctrine heals; bad theology harms.

To say that “God is love” is a theological statement about the nature and character of God. Christians, specifically those within the Methodist movement, affirm historic beliefs that are the framework for our ideas about God, others, and the world. Our beliefs should shape our decisions and actions.

Readers are encouraged to review Paragraph 104 of the *Book of Discipline*, especially “The Articles of Religion” and

“The Confession of Faith.” These offer a summation of basic United Methodist understandings of the faith. These are in no way exhaustive, but help begin to name our beliefs.

So, while it is important to be formed intellectually, that alone is not enough for growth. Having the right thoughts alone will not form our desires and habits into being more like Christ. It is often our habits that affect our thinking. It is important, then, for the work of formation to focus beyond conveying right ideas toward equipping disciples with the habits and spiritual practices that enable Christians to grow in grace.

Grace

You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of. Instead, we are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

– EPHESIANS 2:8-10

In church, we hear, sing, and read about grace. Very simply, grace means God's loving concern for every person. There is nothing we can do to earn God's love; God simply loves us. Grace is the overwhelming, undeserved blessing of God's love. Grace surrounds us, supports us, and enables us to glorify God.

Grace grounds our story in God's story. God's story, which we find in Scripture, begins in God's gracious act of creation. Yet God's creation has been marred and disordered. We call that disordering sin. Sin keeps us from living abundantly and has disordered our thinking, habits, and desires. It is by the grace of God through Jesus Christ that we are empowered to live as God desired—in proper relationship with God and others.

More than merely a gift, God's grace is empowerment to lead a new life. By God's grace, we are freed to serve and love God and our neighbors.

Twofold Dimension of Grace

There is a twofold dimension to grace. The first is that grace is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8–9). Second, it is the power of God working to draw us closer to God, guiding us toward holiness, and growing our capacity to love others. The work of God's grace through the Holy Spirit is a continual work of transformation. We can speak about this transformation in many ways: maturity, reordering our desires toward love, holiness, or sanctification.

Activity

Think about a time when you have experienced God's love and grace in your life. Describe that time in the space provided at the end of this book, or in a notebook.

Prevenient Grace

Wesley understood grace as God's active presence in our lives. This presence is not dependent on human actions or human response. It is a gift—a gift that is always available, but that can be refused.

God's grace stirs up within us a desire to know God and empowers us to respond to God's invitation to be in relationship with God. God's grace enables us to discern dif-

ferences between good and evil and makes it possible for us to choose good.

We do not have to beg and plead for God's love and grace. God actively seeks us! God desires that we live in freedom and in holiness. God's grace takes the initiative in relating to humanity and in the redemption of the world (John 1:4-5, 9-14, 16).

Justifying Grace

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: "God was reconciling the world to himself through Christ, by not counting people's sins against them" (2 Corinthians 5:19). To the Roman Christians, Paul wrote: " But God shows his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

These verses display the justifying grace of God. They point to reconciliation, pardon, and restoration. Through the work of God in Christ, our sins are forgiven, and our relationship with God is restored. According to John Wesley, founder of the Methodist movement, the image of God—which has been distorted (deformed) by sin—is renewed within us through Christ's death. Justifying grace begins the process of new birth, where a growing Christian begins to live by trust, grace, and a freedom to serve others and God in love.

Again, this dimension of God's grace is a gift. God's grace alone brings us into relationship with God. God has acted in Jesus Christ. We need only to respond in faith.

Through faith in Christ, Christians can begin to live in a new freedom. Christians are freed from sin and freed to love God and one another. Christians desire to reorient their lives to be patterned after God's love and not out of selfishness.

Sanctifying Grace

Salvation is not a static, one-time event in our lives. It is the ongoing experience of God's gracious presence transforming us into whom God intends us to be. John Wesley described this dimension of God's grace as sanctification, or Christian perfection.

Through God's sanctifying grace, we grow and mature in our ability to live as Jesus lived. In fact, we are called to do more (John 14:12). As we pray, study the Scriptures, fast, worship, and share in fellowship with other Christians, we deepen our knowledge of and love for God. As we respond with compassion to human need and work for justice in our communities, we strengthen our capacity to love our neighbors. Our inner thoughts and motives, as well as our outer actions and behavior, are aligned with God's will and testify to our union with God.

Activity

How does understanding prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace support or challenge your understanding of salvation? Write down your response.

Formational Community

By its nature, the church is a formational community. The formational aspect of the church may be compared with a hospital or gym. Much like a hospital offers healing to the sick, the church as the body of Christ offers healing through the Holy Spirit to all in the process of sanctification. As a gym provides classes, weights, coaches, and machines to help our bodies develop, so the church provides accountability, support, and nurture to help us grow in God's grace.

Grace can be encountered in various places. The primary place grace can be received is through the church and connected ministry settings. We encounter God's transforming work of grace through participating in the sacraments, means of grace (see next section below), serving in mission together, and being in fellowship with other Christians. Participating in a local church (along with other ministry settings) is vital to formation as a disciple.

As we see again, there is a personal and social nature to being a well-formed Christian. Small groups, Emmaus communities, retreats, camps, worship services, mission projects, and other activities provide needed fellowship and accountability. Sometimes these activities are long-term, as with a small group. Other times, such as in a camp or retreat setting, the interactions are short-term but might offer more intense opportunities for growth.

Formational Activities: Intentional Discipleship Systems

Being intentional about discipleship formation, whether for children, youth, young adults, mid-life adults, or older adults does not require the addition of more activities to the church calendar. Rather, it will likely mean that we become more intentional with the activities that we are already doing.

This might mean planning and coordinating with the worship committee specific aspects of the worship services to highlight formational parts of the service: baptism, Communion, music, prayers, and so on. It might mean developing a strategic plan with the education committee for confirmation classes and a wide variety of small groups, accountability groups, and classes for adults. It could mean adjusting the small-group ministry to incorporate accountability or nurture as primary aspects of their purpose. It might mean re-evaluating the children and youth activities so that they are purposefully including fellowship and study. Additionally, it might mean involving Emmaus communities or retreat settings, so that the congregation expands beyond intellectual studies.

At Discipleship Ministries, we strongly encourage every congregation and ministry setting to develop an intentional discipleship system. An intentional discipleship system serves many functions including: providing clarity about what a maturing disciple looks like, helping

evaluate existing ministries and potential gaps in ministries that are currently offered, and equipping disciples to know what next steps are needed for discipleship formation. To learn more about intentional discipleship system, including books and online classes, go to www.SeeAllThePeople.org.

Means of Grace

[Jesus] responded, “You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

– LUKE 10:27

Spiritual practices (means of grace) help disciples to hear from God, grow in relationship with God, grow in compassion for others, and be reshaped in the image of Christ. Through these formational activities, as individuals and as a church, Christians are transformed by God’s grace.

Sacraments

The United Methodist Church recognizes two sacraments: baptism (see above for how baptism is formative) and Communion (or Lord’s Supper). In part, United Methodists name these acts as sacraments because we think sacramentally about the world. Said differently, the physical world and what we might term the spiritual world overlap. Thus, God is present to us through the sacraments and participating in the sacraments prepare disciples to en-

counter and see God's presence in all areas of their lives. United Methodists do not believe the bread and juice in Communion are the actual body and blood of Christ. We do, however, believe that Christ is really present to us in the partaking of these elements. There is more to this world than what we can observe (Ephesians 6:12).

United Methodists place value on baptism and the Lord's Supper and on how formative these practices are. If baptism is our entrance into the family of God, then the Lord's Supper is the sustaining meal. Just as baptism is an identity marker of the community to which we belong, the Lord's Supper is a reminder of whose image we are being made into. In both sacramental acts, God's grace is communicated through the use of physical objects (water and laying on of hands in baptism; bread and juice in Communion).

Lord's Supper

Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper is a formative act that shapes our past, present, and future. It reminds us what God has done for us in Christ. We are invited to be nourished by Christ's presence among us. And we gaze into the future to the great banquet that awaits the church when the kingdom comes in fullness. This formative character of Communion may be seen throughout the liturgy. As one small example, in the invitation to the Table, we read, "Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another."

Notice that we are invited to approach Christ's Table in a specific posture. We come in love, in repentance, and in an attitude of seeking reconciliation and peace with those with whom we come in contact and beyond. We are to be the beloved community that radiates God glory to one another and to the world.

Communion sustains and propels us to live so that others see God's love in us.

Because of the formative nature of Communion, we affirm that the Lord's Supper should be offered often (at least weekly), much as John Wesley advised.

Activity

Ask people in your congregation or ministry setting, "How do you encounter God in Communion?" Chart all the answers. Report your findings to the appropriate teams or committees.

Worship

Although not a sacrament, worship is also formative because it occurs in the presence of God. Disciples attend weekly worship to offer themselves as a sacrifice of "praise and thanksgiving." In worship, we remember who(se) we are and offer ourselves to be shaped by God's grace. When we are clear about why Christians worship and how Christians are formed in worship, worship becomes naturally connected to discipleship.

More than spectators, disciples are called to be participants in offering worship to God. Worship is formative, as Christians give attention to and ascribe worth to (worship) God. In worship, Christians are shaped by the God we encounter in the message and in Communion. Additionally, the worshipping congregation is challenged and transformed by the grace of God encountered in worship that sends them in mission to the world.

Our understanding of grace influences how we understand and approach worship. Worshipers do not approach worship to be entertained (through music that we prefer, sermons that itch our scratchy ears). Rather, Christians come expecting to encounter the transforming grace of God.

Activity

Ask people in your congregation, “What is the purpose of worship?” Chart all the answers. Don’t debate; just listen and chart. Report your findings to the appropriate teams or committees.

Means of Grace: Ordinary Ways of Encounter

You may encounter the term *means of grace*. This phrase refers to an action or practice that is a channel for God’s grace. Means of grace are practices Christians do that are the means or the average or ordinary ways we can expect to encounter God’s grace. They channel in the sense that they are ultimately conveying something else—in this

case, the healing presence of God. These disciplines help us to pay attention to the work of God in our lives and in the world.

Means of grace can be likened to the reception needed for a satellite dish. To receive a signal, the satellite dish must be facing the appropriate direction. Means of grace direct us to hearing from and experiencing the grace of God. God, through prevenient grace, is reaching out to us and desires to shape us and form us into the image of God. While the work of transformation is ultimately God's work, it takes us putting ourselves in the right posture to receive it. That's the value of the means of grace.

The three-chief means of grace are prayer, Scripture, and the Lord's Supper. John Wesley felt that each Christian (especially leaders) should be involved in these practices to produce "holy tempers." The means of grace are formative practices offered by the church. They include (but are not limited to):

- prayer
- Bible Study
- worship
- Holy Communion
- fasting
- Christian conferencing (talking together about our faith)
- acts of service and compassion.

Scripture

More than a collection of sixty-six books and more than history or a source of devotional thoughts, Scripture recounts the story of God's covenantal relationship with the people of God. Through our interaction with Scripture (in worship, in devotional and meditational reading, and study), we discover the nature of God's love for the world and our place and identity within that story.

While personal study of Scripture is important, it is equally important that we read Scripture with others. Other people have insights and experiences we need to hear.

Scripture should be our guide for living in the world. It is not just us as readers who interpret Scripture; rather, Scripture should interpret our world and our lives in light of who God is and who God is calling us to be—the holy people of God.

Activity

What are images of Scripture that you've heard before? Love letter from God? Map or compass? History book? How might each image be helpful? How are they incomplete?

Prayer

More than talking with God, prayer is being attentive to the presence of God. Prayer is the posture of the heart and life that shape us in ways of which we are not always conscious. Prayer involves listening, interceding for oth-

ers in need, lifting up the needs of friends, family, and even enemies.

We have been advised to pray that which is within us, not that which we think should be within us. Boldly before God through Jesus Christ our mediator, we name our weaknesses, our longings, our cries for others we know and for God's world. The Lord's Prayer invites us to pray, "Your kingdom come!" (Matthew 6:10 and Luke 11:2).

Prayer is formational in that our longings and desires become reshaped. That's one of the values of using prayers of the church—to help us find the words and articulate our deepest yearnings.

Prayer should be practiced individually (Matthew 6:5–6) and with others (Acts 2:42).

Activity

Ask at least three people about their prayer practices. What did you learn? What would be helpful for your congregation or ministry setting to learn about prayer?

Habits

As creatures of habit, bad habits deform us; whereas, life-giving habits (or means of grace) help form us into the image of Christ. Habits help us overcome motivational inertia. They help us transcend fleeting emotions. It has been said that we don't have habits; we are habits.

That's why attending to the means of grace should be a habit that shapes and orders our lives. There will be times (like being new parents) when new rhythms need to be established and expectations should be different than at other times of life (like retirement). Nevertheless, it is important for disciples to find habits that organically fit in their schedule and that orient them to growing in grace.

Activity

Ask at least five people in your congregation or ministry setting which habits are most helpful for their spiritual growth? What did you learn? What might be helpful for your congregation to introduce ways to develop spiritual habits?

Shape of the Christian Life

God has given us the gifts and practices needed to live the way of Jesus. For well-rounded discipleship formation, it is important that Christians grow through acts that are both public and private toward God and others. This concept is explained well in the article "Shape of Discipleship" on the Discipleship Ministries' website (UMCdiscipleship.org).

Context

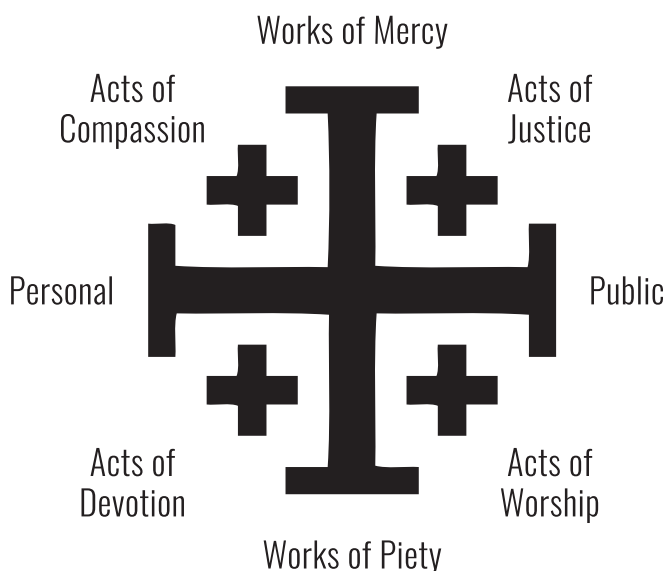
So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

– ROMANS 12:1-2

“As you are going, make disciples.” Whether in a local congregation or a camp and retreat setting, the mission is the same—form disciples. The context or setting where Christian formational activities occur can and should vary. This is true, even while the purpose of faith formation is the same and Christian practices might be similar. Serving Communion might look different in a camp setting than it does in a large-church setting. The experience of prayer will be different in a Korean church than in a predominantly Caucasian church or a historically black congregation.

Personal and Social

As we've learned, discipleship has both personal and social components. Discipleship is more than our ticket to heaven. Discipleship is growing in holiness or love for God and neighbor. Thus, discipleship includes social dimensions of being part of a local faith community and taking responsibility for personal growth through devotion and acts of compassion. As John Wesley famously said, "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness." The chart below outlines elements of balanced discipleship.



Engage Your Community

Your community is more than the people in your church. It extends into relationships and networks within the local area and extends far beyond. We remember the risen Jesus' charge to the disciples in Acts 1:8, "You be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria, and to the end of the earth." As John Wesley advised, "The world is our parish!" These relationships give us an opportunity to extend compassion and advocacy. These relationships will also challenge our formational activities. As we continue to learn about the needs in our community, we will often need to adjust our activities. To explore this deeper, see the book, *Engaging Your Community: A Guide to Seeing All the People* by Junius Dotson (Discipleship Ministries, see www.seeallthepeople.org/resources-downloads).

Role

It may be helpful to think of the following three words to describe your role as a leader in faith formation:

- model
- formation
- information

Model

A disciple models the Christian faith to the best of his or her ability. People learn by watching others' actions and words (as an apprentice observes a master). What we do is

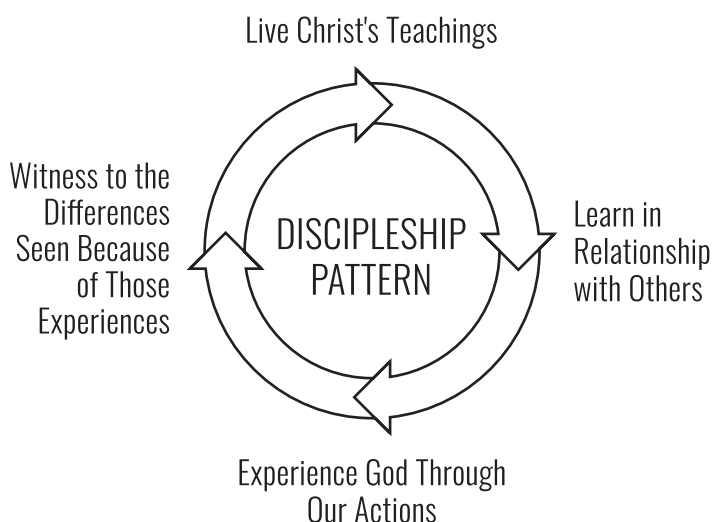
more powerful than what we say. A disciple is one who not only recites, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31 NIV), but also practices it. An influential disciple is one whose faith is evidenced in actions in the congregation and community.

God does not wait until we reach perfection to work through us. In fact, God seems to delight in using imperfect people to do God’s greatest work of transformation. As a disciple in the Wesleyan way, there is, however, the responsibility to continue seeking to grow into the likeness of Christ. A model disciple should be growing in his or her own knowledge of the Bible, learning to pray, attending worship, expanding in love and compassion for others, and setting the example of a follower of Christ.

Formation

While knowledge of basic Christian doctrine is important, there is much more to discipleship formation than knowing and passing on information or facts. As a church and as leaders in faith formation, we help people be formed as disciples of Christ and transformed into the people God has created them to be (Romans 12:2).

As the faith community and faith formation leaders, we support the disciples in our care by equipping them to live a pattern of discipleship. The graphic on the following page shows one way to think about the personal pattern of discipleship that helps inform the work of the church.



Sometimes, transformation is a slow process, like water rushing over rocks for years and slowly changing their shapes. Other times, transformation happens much more quickly, like a river flooding over its banks and radically altering the shape of the land. In either instance, transformation is the work of God in our lives that changes us from our current state of being into the people God wants us to be.

The good news for faith formation leaders is that we are not responsible for this transformation—God is! We trust God to do the heavy lifting of transformation. Our role is to create places and times where people can learn about God, hear the stories of the faith, experience Christian community, explore ways God might be inviting them to live, and find ways to serve as disciples.

Information

Jesus' Great Commandment (Mark 12:28–31) must inform all that disciples say and do. Jesus' life shows us how to live this way. Jesus lived in a rhythm of prayerful attentiveness to God for guidance and awareness of the people he encountered in his life. Jesus lived in right relationship with God and people.

In God's world, people are more important than facts or methods or curriculum. Our identity as a baptized disciple of Jesus Christ is of primary importance. Many disciples feel insecure about the knowledge they think they lack. While it is important for disciples to be growing in Christian knowledge and spiritual disciplines, your life as a disciple of Jesus Christ will influence others intentionally or unintentionally. The influence of role models is powerful and often occurs unconsciously. Our habits and choices reveal our Christian character and form us into model disciples for others.

Disciples Disciple

It is inevitable. By nature, a disciple discipled. Disciples help form other disciples as we coach and mentor, or just through our causal relationships with other people.

Congregations are, by nature, formational. Thus, the primary task of every congregation is

- to reach out to welcome people where they are and to receive them as they are;

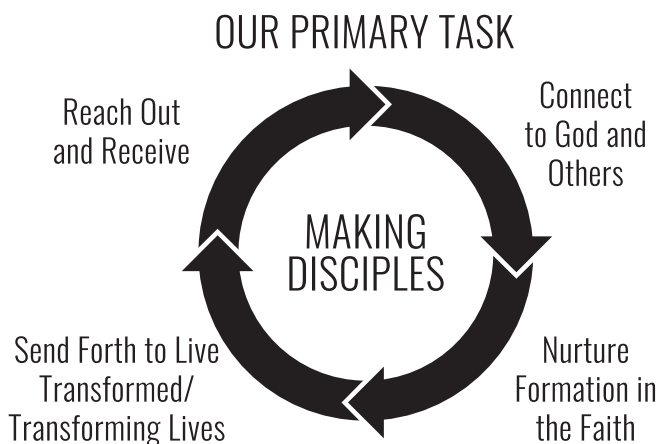
- to connect people to God and their community through Jesus Christ;
- to nurture their formation in faith;
- to send them into the world to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

As a faith formation leader, you can pay attention to the same things by

- creating a hospitable and welcoming atmosphere;
- helping group members come to know God and Jesus Christ by creating a safe place for them to talk about issues of faith and life;
- encouraging your group members to grow and mature in faith through Bible study, spiritual practices, learning activities, service, and worship;
- sending your group members forth to live as Christian disciples to make the world more loving and just.
- Churches should develop and continually adjust their intentional discipleship systems to help the church assess ministries and offer opportunities for disciples to grow in their faith.

Week after week, you and your ministry setting plan to equip disciples so that they can experience God's grace, reflect on how they live out their faith in the world, and are sent out in ministry. This process repeats itself in ministry settings across the church.

This may sound complicated, but it can be as simple as calling a person by name or extending a word of encouragement; creating settings for reminding one another of the stories about God and Jesus Christ; creating small groups for children, youth, and adults to discuss, encourage, and hold one another accountable for following Christ; and then praying as you are all sent to reflect God's love to others in the name of Jesus to form disciples.



For Further Study

A Blueprint for Discipleship: Wesley's General Rules as a Guide for Christian Living (2009) by Kevin Watson

Apprenticed to Jesus: Discipleship Practices for Growing Christians (2013) by Thomas R. Hawkins

Reimagining Faith Formation for the 21st Century: Engaging All Ages & Generations (2015) by John Roberto

An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry by, with, and for Older Adults (2018) by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr.

Disciples Making Disciples (2016) by Steven W. Manskar

Supplemental resources for this booklet can be found at:
www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/teaching

About the Authors

Scott Hughes is married to Casey. They have two boys, AJ and Evan. Scott is the Executive Director of Congregational Vitality and Intentional Discipleship at Discipleship Ministries. Scott holds an M. Div. from Asbury Theological Seminary, a D. Min. from Southern Methodist University, is the creator of the Courageous Conversations project, and facilitates several online Teachable courses including How to Start Small groups.

Kevin Johnson is the Director of Children's Ministries at Discipleship Ministries. Kevin's hero, Fred Rogers, suggests that we, "listen to the children, learn about them, learn from them. Think of the children first." Kevin is an ordained elder in the Kentucky Conference with over 15 years of ministry experience. He received his MDiv. from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and is currently a D. Min. student at Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Kevin married his wife Jennifer over twenty five years ago. They are the proud parents of three children, Braden, JonMarie, and Will. Prior to ministry, Kevin worked with children in the hospital setting and in group homes for emotionally and physically abused children.

Chris Wilterdink is the Director of Young People's Ministries at Discipleship Ministries. As a lay person, he has over 15 years of experience in youth ministry at different organizational levels of the church. Chris is married to Emily, has two children, Graham and Lulu, and a geriatric, sausage-shaped beagle named Phurbatashi. Chris has a BA in English Education from Colorado State University, and an MS in Organizational Leadership from Regis Jesuit University. Chris is the author of "Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth" and "Building Spiritual Muscle."

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