**Follow Jesus Make Disciples Transform the World**

**The mission statement of the Western North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church.**

**The WNCC Office of Church Development presents:**

**The Church Transformation Journey**

***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God---what is good and acceptable, and perfect.” (Romans 12:2)***

The Church Transformation Journey is a two to three-year journey of discovery for local churches where they will engage with scripture, partner with a Navigator and Guides, and together live into God’s calling for their church and their role in transforming the world.

Churches are invited to host a Discovery Weekend where church leaders and members come together to hear about the Church Transformation Journey and discuss and pray about its potential for their church. They will name up to five challenge areas they want to emphasize. If they decide to move forward, they propose to their church for approval to become participants in the Church Transformation Journey. If approved, a Navigator and Guides will be assigned to work closely with their pastor/s and church leaders over the next two to three years to implement their Transformation Journey initiatives.

To prepare for a Discovery Weekend, the church names a team of church leaders who are willing to spend thirty days in preparation for the Discovery Weekend by studying scripture and praying for their church and community and for the Discovery Weekend. They will meet for four guided sessions while engaging in strategic prayer throughout the month. These are designed for one-hour sessions. They could be a Sunday School lesson, weeknight sessions, or used in another learning context.

**30 Days of Preparation for the Church Transformation Journey Discovery Weekend Bible Study Curriculum:**

**Session One: Why Does the Church Exist and What Should it Be Doing?** (Rom. 12: 1-2; Matt. 22:37-39; Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 25:35-40)

**Session Two: We Function as a Body Endowed with Wonderful Gifts** (Rom. 12: 3-8)

**Session Three: Living Like Jesus** (Rom. 12:9-18)

**Session Four:**  **Praying for Transformation** (Romans 12: 1-2) (Sharing about the month of strategic praying; sharing of hopes and dreams for the upcoming Transformation Discovery Weekend; optional to conclude with Holy Communion).

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**Session One: Why Does the Church Exist and What Should it Be Doing?**

**Romans 12:1-18 Have the group read the passage aloud asking people to volunteer reading two verses each until the passage is completed.**

Paul appeals to the Romans to ***“present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God which is your spiritual worship.”***

Why did he ask that they present their bodies rather than their heart or soul or mind?

The body speaks of wholeness; it would include the heart, mind, and soul. It is the body that carries out the bidding of the mind and heart and soul. Hands can soothe or strike; legs can take us to places of service or places of vice. Eyes can look at another with love or with hatred.

What kinds of things are we doing as individuals that God would consider, “holy and acceptable?”

What then are the implications of this for when we say the church is the body of Christ? How are we the hands. legs, heart, mind and soul of Christ? When Christ acted what are some of the things he did? He healed people of their afflictions; he preached the word of God; he called and taught the disciples; he advocated for the poor, the widow, the orphan. He called out people who acted unjustly.

What kinds of things are we doing as God’s church that God would consider, “holy and acceptable?” When has our church acted like Jesus did?

***“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God---what is good and acceptable and perfect.”***

Transformation is “a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance.” We all know how human beings tend to dread change and resist it at all costs. Transformation is more than change and leaps from our abilities to the realm of Divine Intervention because thorough and dramatic change is beyond human capability. Transformation is only possible in concert with God. This is where Paul singles out the mind because the body does the mind’s bidding. He understood that transformation is the outcome of renewal. The “so that,” in his phrase is important. Why go through the challenge and stress of change, much less transformation except to please God? And because we are Christians we want to please God. We pray for the renewal of our minds **so that** we can discern what is the will of God. What does God want us to do? And to be clear, Paul says we are looking for what is **good and acceptable, and perfect,”** in God’s eyes.

And we know from our scriptures many examples of what God considers good, acceptable, and perfect: (Here the group could do some Concordance research approached like a scavenger hunt).

Some questions for the group to ponder individually and then share in pairs:

(What would be a good change for me to make; my church to make; and both would impact the world in a better way?)

Have volunteers read Matt. 22:37-39; Matt. 28:19-20; Matt. 25:35-40. Divide them into 3 groups and assign each one of these passages. Ask them to ponder how these scriptures represent “non-negotiables” in the Christian faith. Then ask, what does a church look like that lives out these scriptures? Have them place their answers on newsprint and then share from each group to the total group.

Talk about how important prayer is in preparation for their Transformation Challenge Discovery Weekend. Ask the group to name ways they want to pray in the coming week: a certain time of day each day? What kinds of things do they want to ask God for: to be open to God’s leading? That we would be willing to hear different viewpoints with respect and openness? That we would ask God to take away our fears about the changes that might be needed for us to become a healthier church? Ask for their commitment to intentionally pray in the week to come for the things they have discussed as their prayer foci.

**Session Two: We Function as a Body Endowed with Wonderful Gifts**

**(Romans 12:3-8) Read the passage aloud with volunteers reading two verses each until the passage is completed.**

Verse 3 begins as though there will be an admonition to be humble but rather following, “I say to everyone among you not to think of y ourselves more highly than you ought---” Paul says, rather than, “be humble,” instead says, “but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” And Paul recognizes that even as we strive to discern with “sober judgment,” we come at that task from a variety of stages of faith. His emphasis on variety is centered in his theme of unity of the body. Paul Achtemeier in his commentary on Romans says:

“That unity cannot be reduced to sheer uniformity, ---“Indeed, that analogy of the body not only allows for, but even emphasizes the necessity of, diversity, a diversity based on the multifaceted abundance of God’s grace itself.” (Interpretation Series, Romans, Achtemeier, page 196).

The list of spiritual gifts in this passage, prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, generosity, diligent leadership, compassion, and cheerfulness, is not an exhaustive list of the spiritual gifts. Other lists of spiritual gifts occur in I Corinthians 12:1-31; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1Peter 4:10-11.

Spiritual gifts are not something that we earn or that we have because one of us is superior to another. They are not really for us but are to be used to glorify God and to edify others. God gives believers spiritual gifts as an act of His grace. These gifts are not your natural talents like the ability to sing or be a good athlete. Using your spiritual gifts may employ some of your natural talents but the gifts are clearly for honoring God and not about advancing your fame or improving your score.

And Paul in the I Corinthian text makes the point that not only do we have differing spiritual gifts; we are joined together in an interdependence that makes the body function and thrive. An eye may not look like a hand, but one needs the other never the less.

**Have the group share in groups of 3-4 what they may know about their own spiritual giftedness. Then have them name others in their congregation that they have seen evidence of their spiritual gifts being used to serve God and their community. Ask them to imagine the loss to their body of Christ, their church, if any one of them no longer shared their spiritual gifts. Imagine together about the people their congregation has yet to welcome into their midst and what sorts of gifts they would bring to their body, their church. (Provide participants with a Spiritual Gifts Inventory if they have not taken one before).**

Using our spiritual gifts may not be the primary way we earn a living as some of us may teach Sunday School, but we earn our living in finance or retail. But Paul is stressing that all of our lives, both professional and within the church, are of importance to God and can be used by God for the building of His Kingdom. And Paul notes that we are different people saying, *“For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so, we who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.”*

**Talk together in your groups of 3-4 about how the unity of the Christian Community redefines what we normally think of as “family.” Name some ways we can help more of our congregation feel like they belong here. How do we help new people feel welcome among us? What could we do better in living as an interdependent body of Christ, his church? Share your answers with the whole group.**

**Our prayer focus for this week will be on asking God to help us use our spiritual gifts for his glory and to help others. Let us pray to be more welcoming and intentional about honoring all the members of our congregation as valuable and vital to our body of Christ. Let us pray for the people in our parish God is calling us to make our friends and thereby introduce them to our Savior, Jesus Christ.**

**Session Three: Living Like Jesus**

**(Romans 12:9-18) This week have one volunteer read the passage slowly. Ask the other participants to listen and note what phrase most challenges them. Have them share their challenge briefly with the group.**

We have heard many times that the mission of the church is to “Make Disciples of Jesus Christ.” But what exactly is a disciple? A dictionary definition is that a disciple is “a personal follower of Jesus during his life, especially one of the twelve Apostles. And a disciple is “a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher.” Or, “someone who adheres to the teachings of another.” A basic definition is that a disciple is a learner. A longer definition is that a “disciple of Christ is one who believes his doctrine, rests on his sacrifice, imbibes his spirit, and imitates his example (Matthew 10:24; Luke 14:26; Luke 14:27; Luke 14:33; John 6:69). (Easton’s Bible Dictionary).

**In groups of 3-4 have participants share with one another about someone who helped them know Jesus, who influenced their decision to become a believer and strove to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. What do they most remember about that person’s witness? Share briefly with the total group the attributes of the persons who most helped them know Jesus.**

**Read over the passage again silently.**

So often in the church we ask people to serve on committees or task forces whose work happens most often within the walls of the church. But to be a follower of Jesus we are to live and act like Jesus, much like the list of admonitions in our passage. More of our influence as a disciple of Jesus will occur beyond the walls of our church buildings. Our witness as a disciple should be evident in our homes, in how we treat our family members. It should be evident in our work places, our school rooms and playgrounds, in our leisure activities, and among friends, acquaintances, and even strangers.

**In groups of 3-4 talk about how your congregation prepares people to live like Jesus beyond our church’s walls. Which of the admonitions listed by Paul in our passage do we do well as a church? Where do we need more emphasis? What might our influence as a church be enhanced if we spent more energy on which admonition?**

For the prayer focus this week commit to praying that God would work within you to help you live more like Jesus. Pray for God’s guidance to improve your witness for Christ in how you relate to others. Pray for your congregation to so positively impact its community that people will know we are disciples of Jesus Christ. Pray for the upcoming Discovery Weekend of your church’s Transformation Journey.

**Session Four: Praying for Transformation**

**(Romans 12:1-2) Have one volunteer read the passage.**

As a reminder from Session One:

Transformation is “a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance.” We all know how human beings tend to dread change and resist it at all costs. Transformation is more than change and leaps from our abilities to the realm of Divine Intervention because thorough and dramatic change is beyond human capability. Transformation is only possible in concert with God. This is where Paul singles out the mind because the body does the mind’s bidding. He understood that transformation is the outcome of renewal. The “so that,” in his phrase is important. Why go through the challenge and stress of change, much less transformation except to please God? And because we are Christians we want to please God. We pray for the renewal of our minds **so that** we can discern what is the will of God. What does God want us to do? And to be clear, Paul says we are looking for what is **good and acceptable, and perfect,”** in God’s eyes.

Asking your church to consider going through a Transformation Journey is an act of faith. It is a step toward allowing the power of God’s Holy Spirit to lead us where God wants us to be as a community of faith. We live in challenging times. What we did in the past as churches does not seem to connect with people like it did before. Yet, we know people still need God as revealed through his son, Jesus Christ. There are still people in pain and despair; people lost in their own sinful choices; people without hope and who are desperate. Some of them are complete strangers to us and others live in our own homes. It is the love and sacrifice of Jesus that can transform their lives and our lives as well. This Transformation Journey is not about having a program in a box that will instantly make the changes we need without any of the pain change can bring. It is, instead, an opening of our hearts and minds to the leading of God’s Holy Spirit so that we can discern what is “the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect,” for such a time as this, for our congregations and for ourselves.

You will not take this journey alone. Your Conference will be sending financial resources and human resources to walk along side you. Clergy and lay Guides have agreed to come and help you with each of the areas you identify that God is challenging you to step toward. You and your congregation will decide through your 30 Days of Prayer and Preparation and during your Discovery Weekend what your plan of action will be. These Guides will sojourn with you along with your Church Vitality Specialist, your District Superintendent, and the Office of Church Development. We will be joining with you to help, as you ask of us, and together we pray we will be faithful to what the Lord requires of us all.

**Share together some of your experiences of praying intentionally for your church, your community, and for yourselves over these last three weeks. What insights have you gained? What has inspired you the most? What pictures come to your mind about what your church could become in this Transformation Journey?**

**Pray together giving thanks for those people who discipled you and for those people who will one day name you as a person who discipled them as a follower of Jesus.**

**Close with your pastor leading the group in the sacrament of Holy Communion. Pray for your upcoming Discovery Weekend. Give thanks for how this passage from Romans has touched your life these last few weeks.**