

Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

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 of 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.

Transitioning to the Tweens

When children leave elementary school and move into middle school, they experience a profound transition in their lives. While not quite teenagers, these “tweens” are entering a period of rapid growth, both physically and socially.

The Discipleship Team at Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church in Birmingham, Alabama is committed to making that transition as smooth as possible, at least in terms of the young people's church experience.

In May members of the ministry team meet with parents of fifth graders who will be moving into sixth grade the next fall. During this meeting, parents learn about confirmation and other aspects of the congregation's youth ministry.

On the Sunday before new classes begin, the church holds an open house. Rising sixth graders meet their Sunday School teachers and participate in their first youth group meeting that evening.

The new middle-schoolers also participate in a Discovery Weekend, which is a spiritual life retreat. Designed for sixth through eighth graders, this weekend retreat is led by the high school youth of the church (with appropriate adult help). This helps older teens develop leadership skills, and it provides the younger participants with an opportunity for spiritual growth and positive role models.

Since the Discovery Weekend retreats began a few years ago, participation in Vestavia Hills' youth ministry has doubled. The new sixth graders do not feel as overwhelmed, and parents are excited about their young people's participation.

Some Questions for Discussion

- How does your congregation intentionally plan for the transition from elementary-aged ministry to youth ministry?
- How are older youth engaged with younger youth in appropriate ways?
- How does your congregation support families as members of the family face age-level transitions?

Carol Krau is Director of Adult Formation and Discipleship at the General Board of Discipleship. She can be reached at ckrau@gbod.org. To learn more about Discovery Weekends see www.northalabamaumc.org/news/detail/852.



Romans 12 Newsletter. Issue #126. © 2012 GBOD. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to copy this newsletter for use in United Methodist congregations. This newsletter is provided as a service of the General Board of Discipleship and is funded through World Service apportionment giving by local United Methodist congregations.