

DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

Why do we need a discipleship process?

Jesus gave the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:19

The Mission of The United Methodist Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.”

The Desert Southwest Conference believes -

“God is calling us to be a Courageous Church:
Loving like Jesus
Acting for justice
United in hope

As followers of Jesus, we believe his life and teachings give hope and purpose to our lives. We want to share it with others who might be searching for the same things.

What is a disciple of Jesus?

A disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ who is committed to:

1. Being part of the Body of Christ
2. Becoming more like Jesus
3. Joining Jesus in ministry *(Phil Maynard in “Shift 2.0”)*

What are the phases of discipleship?

The “phases of discipleship” can be categorized as:

1. Searching
2. Exploring
3. Beginning
4. Growing
5. Maturing *(Junius B. Dotson, “SeeAllThePeople”)*

What pathway do you need to create in your ministry context that will help disciples move through the phases?

It's been said that disciples build churches, but not all churches build disciples. The churches that do, are the ones who have intentionally created a pathway. Below are the minimum pieces to a pathway:

Invitational

Are you creating a congregational culture of sharing and learning with those outside the faith community?

Does the church believe an "outsider" brings gifts to the faith community or is it a one-way street?

Do the church members believe they have an experience of the Divine that gives them purpose, hope and helps them be more compassionate?

Do they believe it's worth sharing?

If so, then what is that message?

Welcoming

Do people prepare to receive guests at the church as well as they prepare to receive guests in their own home?

Are new people authentically welcomed or does the church just see them as potential donors?

Do you need to be an insider to understand what is happening in the church?

Is the church ready to deal with conflict that comes with new people and new ideas?

Instructional

Is there a safe place that allows new people to share their honest hopes, dreams, concerns and doubts?

What is there about Jesus and the Church that is central to share with new disciples?

What do you have for persons in each phase of discipleship that offers a new and exciting experience of God?

Relational

What opportunities are there to help people connect to others, and to learn, support and enjoy one another?

Are mentors used?

Does the church give people the opportunity to be a part of a small group?

Is there a culture of accountability?

Service

How do you help people identify their passion, and then give them assistance to express it?

How do we help each other understand that the circle of inclusion usually needs to be larger than we have drawn it?

Would the community weep if your church disappeared?

Visuals – People learn differently. For some, it is very helpful to have an image of your discipleship system. Here are a few:

1. Ocean – Stages of discipleship go from standing on the sand, testing the waters, going into the water deeper and deeper.
2. River – From standing at the edge of the river, getting into the boat, launching onto the river, calm waters, rougher waters.
3. Rocket – stages of a rocket
4. Baseball diamond
5. Pyramid
6. Circle

Discipleship is a life-long process. This resource is to help church leaders be intentional about developing a system that will give people opportunities to deepen their walk with Christ. This document is not a system. It simply points to elements that should be present in whatever system you create. Your ministry context has its own uniqueness. You will want to create a system that is sensitive to the context you are in.

Below are resources that go much deeper into discipleship. You can also receive additional assistance from your Conference staff.

Resources:

“Shift 2.0: Helping Congregations Back into the Game of Effective Ministry”, Phil Maynard

“Deepening Your Effectiveness: Restructuring the Local Church for Life Transformation”
Dan Glover & Claudia Lavy

“Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations”, Junius B. Dobson, Free download at <https://www.seeallthepeople.org/resources-downloads/>