

General Board of Discipleship of
The United Methodist Church
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THE GENERAL BOARD OF DISCIPLESHIP

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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*This is a periodic newsletter to resource
FaithQuest congregational leaders.*

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How Accountable?, continued from page 3

(Gayle Turner Watson, *Guide for
Covenant Discipleship Groups*, p. 42). A
written covenant helps the group see
where their strengths and weaknesses
lie so they can make any needed
“course corrections.”

When there is a written
covenant, it is important to remember
that the covenant is a means to an
end. Such covenants are agree-
ments of *intent*. They must not
become rigid, restrictive, or
legalistic. The covenant is the
means (a rule of life) to the end
of “having the mind that was in



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Christ” (Phil. 2:5-11). The purpose of
a covenant is to liberate the group so
it can be a channel of grace for the
world. The covenant serves the role
of teacher/coach, encouraging and
helping the group grow in holiness
of heart and life.

New Address?

Help us keep you in the FaithQuest network. Send your new email
or ground mail address to jnewell@gbod.org. Share your experiences
and discoveries as we build FaithQuest knowledge! We welcome
email reflections, book reviews, and suggested website
addresses that relate to FaithQuest.

Previous issues of
FaithQuest News & Notes
are available at
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800/672-1789



Are you currently
leading FaithQuest
Bible study?

For additional lesson helps,
go to www.faithquest.net or
www.gbod.org and click on the
appropriate links.

We welcome your feedback
and suggestions.

What resources and methods
have you used to make the les-
sons come alive and relevant in
your congregation?

FQ NEWS & NOTES FOR FAITH QUEST

TOPICS

THEME:
Faith-Forming
Church Committees
(add to Tab C, Leadership,
in your revised
Leader Notebook)

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Committees on the Way to Discipleship

Note from Betsy . . .

The architectural focal point of the Upper Room Chapel is an 8' x 7' wood carving of da Vinci's Last Supper. On Wednesdays, I gather with colleagues for worship in the chapel. There have been many opportunities to meditate on this interpretation of Jesus and the disciples. I've wondered about these men: their personalities, their diverse backgrounds, and the tensions among their understandings of why they were together. Other times, I study the picture and wonder which disciple I would be if I had been there. In this portrayal, Jesus is gazing ahead, not focusing on any one of the disciples, and I've imagined all sorts of thoughts he might be thinking. I often think of the picture as a church committee.

In church groups—committees, study groups, mission groups, prayer and worship groups, and others—we usually invite Jesus to be part of the group with our opening prayer. Then, like the disciples in the picture, we participate in our own conversations, attend to our own needs and desires, and leave Jesus to gaze ahead. Da Vinci has painted a story of the human condition. Our good intention is to have Jesus participate. Our good intention is to work with Jesus to transform the world.

Jesus describes the work his “committee” will do in Matthew 10. The original disciples didn't grasp the whole mission, and modern-day disciples continue to struggle to understand. Each of us does a small part of the ‘big picture’ as we are gifted and able. Disciples through the ages have worked with Jesus toward the transformation of the world and the full coming of the reign of God.

In Luke 10, Jesus widens the circle to seventy others.



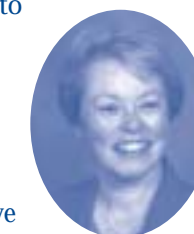
He gives the instructions (vv. 1-12), sends them out to do the task, gathers them to hear reports (vv. 17-20), then rejoices over their work (vv. 21-24). There is no indication Jesus ever met with this group again. They completed their task, Jesus blessed them, and they disbanded.

It takes great courage for faith communities to change the way they work in committees. Many congregations are eliminating ineffective and outdated committees. Some have the courage to form task groups to do a project, then disband the group after a few months. And increasing numbers of congregations are paying attention to the spiritual lives of committee members so that the meetings and the work form faith and increase discipleship. The United

Methodist *Discipline* lists a few committees that are required for legal and structure purposes. Old organizational charts are gone; congregations should organize in

a way that moves people toward the mission of transforming the world.

The February issue of this newsletter included practical suggestions and book reviews to help you in the administration of church life. This newsletter invites you to reflect on the way you carry out the mission of making disciples for the transformation of the world.



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IN THIS ISSUE

Bible Reflection

Being Accountable

The Bookshelf

Web Tools

How Are We Accountable?

The effectiveness of all small groups depends on how clearly they understand their purpose, then hold themselves accountable for that purpose. An overriding purpose of church groups is growth in faithful discipleship. Each group needs to decide what members will hold each other accountable for. One way of saying this is “setting ground rules” as the group begins. Many groups set ground rules at the beginning; the challenge comes as we try to hold ourselves accountable to the ground rules.

Accountability may take many forms. The group needs to decide how and how often they will practice accountability for their corporate mission and their personal growth in faith and love.

First, how will we hold each other

accountable? What will our ground rules be? Groups may begin with a study of Wesley's General Rules (see box on page 3) and use the Rule to guide their shared and personal lives. For example, administrative committees (Finance, Trustees, Staff/Pastor Parish Relations, Administrative Council/ Board) and program groups (Education, Mission, Evangelism, Membership Care, etc.) may set aside time to evaluate their work in light of the General Rules. They can ask themselves how they have contributed to building the body of Christ and serving Christ in the world by doing no harm, *doing good, and practicing the means of grace together*. Such corporate accountability would serve to keep the groups' work

A small group is any group in the church smaller than the total congregation.

“Accountability” is to give an explanation of one’s conduct, duties, spiritual practices, etc. The Christian practice of accountability aims for support and mutual growth in faith, not on judgment.

and the personal relationships focused on the mission of serving Christ in the world and contributing to the entire congregation's life and mission. The key is to work together to keep Christ at the center.

Second, how often will the group hold themselves accountable? Many groups self-evaluate each time they meet. Some groups evaluate on one aspect of the General Rule each

Wesley's General Rules

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced:

Secondly, by doing good, by being merciful at all times, as they are able; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all people.

Thirdly, by regular participation in the means of grace. They are, the public worship of God; reading and study, alone and with others; the Lord's supper; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting or abstinence. (From *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2000*, pp. 72-74. Used by permission.)

time until, over a series of meetings, they have examined the whole Rule. Sometimes, a group devotes a full meeting to accountability, then moves to new tasks and new forms of accountability. Ongoing accountability is a challenge that must be shared by everyone in the group.

In conclusion, the General Rules may be used for accountability in “traditional” small groups which have

a more explicit goal of Christian formation for their members. Groups for prayer, Bible study, support, and nurture may adopt the General Rules as the guiding principle for their life together. Such practice will help keep the group focused on their common purpose and assure that Christ is at the center.

A written covenant simplifies accountability and keeps the group

focused. The group simply checks their actions and decisions against their covenant. Groups often post a copy of their ground rules in their meeting space or include them at the top of their printed agenda. The group can reflect on the meaning of the General Rule to write a covenant in contemporary language. “While the Holy Spirit may increasingly empower us in our discipleship, the structure of a written covenant provides the form of how we live it out in the world. It is a framework within which we deepen our relationship with Christ while holding fast to the priorities of our obligations to Christ”

Continued on page 4



Order FaithQuest materials toll-free: 877-899-2780, Ext. 7674, or email jnewell@gbod.org

The Bookshelf

The following titles are available from Cokesbury, 800/672-1789, www.cokesbury.com.

The Christian Small Group Leader

By Thomas R. Hawkins

Reviewed by Tim Moss,

former Director, Lay Leadership Development, General Board of Discipleship, now retired.

You've been elected to chair a committee in your church or you're leading a Bible study, a FaithQuest group, a Sunday school class, a covenant group . . . and you're looking for some help. Let me recommend a new book by Tom Hawkins, *The Christian Small-Group Leader*. It will be invaluable to you for any small-group leadership in your congregation and, I suspect, out in the world, as well. It has been selected as the basic text for the *Lay Speakers Lead Small Groups: Advanced Course*. The study guide by that title facilitates its use for a small group study.

Relationships connected with

God and with others is likened to heaven. Partnership in small groups is what we seek. On the other hand, loneliness and disconnectedness from God are likened to hell. The small group leader has a priestly role in bringing others together to become partners around the common table. *The Christian Small-Group Leader* tells us what this leader must be—a person who practices the means of grace, with an emphasis on Christian conferencing. It also tells us the characteristics that make for pseudo-leaders.

The importance of spiritual gifts, particularly hospitality, is stressed. The meeting setting must be comfortable and the atmosphere one of inclusiveness, safety, and acceptance. Dr. Hawkins goes to some lengths to describe how this can happen. He



stresses the importance of listening and explains how it can be facilitated in a group setting. He also discusses the power of shared vision and how to develop one. Finally he explains working through resistance and dealing with conflict.

The Christian Small-Group Leader and

Lay Speakers Lead Small Groups are available from Discipleship Resources, 800-685-4370, www.discipleshipresources.org, or Cokesbury, 800-672-1789, www.cokesbury.com.

SYNAGO Light in the Dark

By Karen Trogdon Kluever

Reviewed by Betsey Heavner

Synago, from the Greek for “come together,” is the root word of *synagogue* and *synergy*. This curriculum is designed to bring individuals together to talk about their lives in the light of God's good news. *Synago* equips senior high youth to lead small groups of peers; adult leaders of small groups will find the leader guide very helpful as well.

The first 29 pages contain specific, concrete suggestions for bringing new energy and life to adult groups.



STAYING FOCUSED Building Ministry Teams for Christian Formation

By M. Anne Burnette Hook and Shirley F. Clement

Staying Focused helps ministry teams understand themselves as spiritual leaders and their meetings as places of spiritual formation. Church leaders are invited to engage committees and ministry teams in worship, prayer, Scripture

study, and other means of grace as an ongoing part of their work. Included are suggestions and helps for doing this in specific groups, e.g., worship, stewardship, evangelism, etc. (Discipleship Resources, 2002) ISBN 0-88177-295-X

Available from Discipleship Resources, 800-685-4370, www.discipleshipresources.org, or Cokesbury, 800-672-1789, www.cokesbury.com.

There are sections for preparing to lead, discussion tips, and how to close in prayer. One page outlines the development of a group “purpose statement.” (This is what the above article calls the *ground rules* or *covenant*.) (Abingdon, 2002) ISBN 0687049733

Available from Cokesbury, 800-672-1789, www.cokesbury.com.