



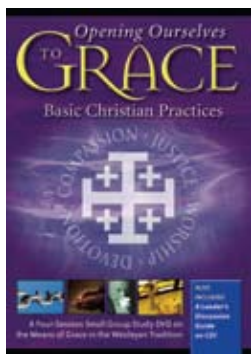
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Four Session Small Group Study on the Means of Grace in the Wesleyan Tradition Help your congregation understand the transforming power of grace!

Opening Ourselves to Grace explores the basic practices of Christian faith and life from a Wesleyan tradition.

Containing both a DVD and a CD-

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Video presenters include Tom Albin, Kenda Creasy Dean, Hilly Hicks, Scott Kisker, Steve Manskar, Peter Storey and Lacey Warner. Produced by Mark V. Purushotham.

Available from Discipleship Resources (800-972-0433) and from Cokesbury. Only \$24!



To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP QUARTERLY

Winter 2007 • Vol. 22 No. 4

The United Methodist Way

By Steven W. Manskar



This is a passage John Wesley frequently cites in his journal. Given his life-long quest for holiness of heart and life it is no surprise that he would be drawn to this verse. As we begin a new year and move toward another General Conference Hebrews 12:14 is a valuable guide for The United Methodist Church.

*Pursue peace with everyone,
and the holiness without
which no one will see the Lord.
Hebrews 12:14*

The United Methodist Way is the pursuit of peace with all people and, most important, holiness of heart and life. Our tradition is too often said to be defined by particular beliefs, programs or polity. However, according to Wesley, the distinguishing mark of the people called Methodists was holiness of heart and life. Beliefs, programs and polity exist to move the people toward the goal of holiness.

Wesley's definition of holiness is: "the loving God with all our heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves. It is love governing the heart and life, running through all our tempers, words, and actions." The purpose of the societies, class meetings, bands and corresponding "rules" was to form communities of social and personal holiness.

In their striving after holiness the Methodist societies became channels of grace for the world. They pursued peace, the shalom of God, as they followed Christ in their world by feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the strangers, caring for the sick, and visiting the prisoners.

As we engage in the practices of holiness it is important to always remember that they are only the means to a goal. Too often we focus on what we are doing for Christ and end up taking our eye

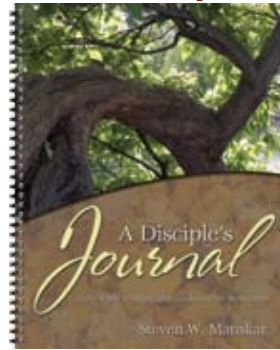
off of Christ. We end up confusing the means (works of piety and works of mercy) with the ends (holiness of heart and life). The emphasis shifts from witnessing to Jesus Christ in the world to the blessings we receive.

Therefore, we need to always remember that the General Rule of Discipleship and Covenant Discipleship groups exist to form communities of holiness. They do not exist for the personal benefit of individual members. The Rule and the groups are designed to equip congregations to participate in Christ's mission in, with, and for the world.

In the United Methodist Way Covenant Discipleship groups are a means that lead congregations to "pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

John Wesley, A Plain Account of Christian Perfection (London: Epworth Press, 1952), 42.

A Disciple's Journal



A Disciple's Journal offers guidance for personal reflection and helps individuals connect works of mercy and works of piety, private acts of compassion and devotion with public acts of justice and worship. The book includes scripture readings for each day of the year and space for notes

and prayer concerns. In addition to this material, each week includes words from the vast expanse of hymns by Charles Wesley and a pertinent quotation from the works of John Wesley. This volume follows Year A of the Revised Common Lectionary and begins with the first Sunday of Advent.

Available from Discipleship Resources at (800) 972-0433 and www.UpperRoom.org/bookstore. Also available at Cokesbury. Only \$12.



Go and Do

By Rev. Michelle Hargrave



Jesus said to the lawyer, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 10:37). The lawyer asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus turned the question back to him and the lawyer responded, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Then he asked for clarification and Jesus told the parable about the Good Samaritan.

This interchange helps me understand the General Rule of Discipleship: To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Here is the pattern of sharing about our acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion in Covenant Discipleship. In it I hear the words of the lawyer echoed. They all blend together in some ways, but “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind” covers worship and devotion pretty well. “Love your neighbor as yourself” directs us to compassion and justice.

“Go and do likewise.” In Jesus’ parable we don’t hear much about what the Good Samaritan felt, or thought. He was “moved by pity” but otherwise all the words are active: saw, went, bandaged, poured, put, brought, took care, took and gave. So we should not be surprised by Jesus’ commandment: “Go and do likewise.” Jesus didn’t say, “Study this, reflect on it, analyze this.” He prompted the lawyer to action.

As we work with the Covenant process we are challenged to do the same. We are actually supposed to do something compassionate, take an action of justice, do something devotional, and participate in worship. Focusing on this week after week helps us grow in knowing how our beliefs can lead to action. Sharing with one another helps us learn new ways to respond.

When the massacre at the Amish school house happened last year I remember my CD group struggling to respond. We said we felt compassion, but we realized our covenant prompted us to do something. We decided to pray.

We United Methodists are, at heart, a people of action. We take the joy of salvation – of claiming our relationship with God – and work consistently to help it unfold in the world through actions of love and hope. “Go and do likewise,” Jesus said. Like the lawyer, our questions and answers are not enough – we are called to put them into action for the world.

(Rev. Michelle M. Hargrave is pastor of Fairmount Avenue United Methodist Church in St. Paul, MN. You may read her blog at <http://33namesofgrace.blogspot.com/>.)

SEEING THE FACE OF GOD

By Edie Genung Harris

In the foreword to Robert J. Miller’s *Fire in the Deep: Lectio Divina Series, Cycle A*, Graz Marcheschi cites a scientific study that shows that people who looked at photos of persons they loved experienced feelings of happiness.

What if we had a photo of God to look at every day?

In fact we do have a “picture” of God; we have Jesus. We don’t have a picture of what Jesus looked like, though thousands of artists have tried to depict him. But we certainly know what Jesus said and did. We know what was important to him and how he treated people.

As we practice acts of devotion and worship we encounter women and men who have seen God face to face. Moses recognized God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-12). Paul saw God on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-19). Peter, James and John recognized God in their encounter with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8). We witness the face of God in

Christian community when we gather as members of the body of Christ.

Through the practice of spiritual disciplines we learn to see God’s face in acts of kindness and justice. Mother Teresa wrote of seeing the face of Jesus in the dying and the poor. Jesus tells us that when we do acts of kindness to people who are hungry, thirsty, ill-clad, strangers, sick, and in prison we will meet him face to face (Matthew 25:31-46).

It is not a matter of searching for a “photo” of God.

It is a matter of recognizing the face of God in our midst. What a blessing Sprouts children will experience when they learn to identify and gaze into the face of God every day. I encourage Sprouts leaders to teach them using scripture, prayer, art/icons, liturgy and nature to guide the children into seeing God’s presence in the world, in their peers, and in themselves.

If we seek the face of God everyday we will grow in holiness of heart and life; and we will be happier.



Staying open to new avenues of grace

By Andrew Thompson



When I left my last church to return to graduate school, I had to say good-bye to more than my congregation. I also had to say good-bye to my Covenant Discipleship Group!

That was not an easy thing to do. We were only together for a little over two years, but the guys in that group went through a lot together. We had also reached that critical point in the life of a CD Group when true accountability was starting to happen. And that is a rare and precious thing in the church today.

My first year as a doctoral student at Duke Divinity School was wonderful in many ways. In my studies, I delved more deeply than I ever had into our Wesleyan tradition. And I found an accountability partner. We met weekly for prayer and conversation about important issues in our lives. But I did not find a CD Group.

That changed this fall, when a number of people who had experienced small group accountability in the past came together in the hopes of starting a new Covenant Discipleship Group. We ended up with two – a group of five men and a group of five women. With ministry on the horizon, these seminarians realized the need to go deeper into their own discipleship as they prepare to lead congregations toward doing the same. Mr. Wesley would be proud.

But a funny thing happened as the other four men and I began to write our covenant. We agreed on many of the acts of devotion,

worship, compassion, and justice that we wanted to focus upon. But in other areas, single individuals brought up issues that the rest of the group was not really thinking about.

One guy mentioned fasting. Another wanted us to pray about the daily headlines in the newspaper. And things only got more complicated from there. One wanted to make sure we focused on measurable acts of compassion with the poor each week. Another insisted that we record our prayer concerns in a journal.

We had a dilemma on our hands. How could we reconcile such different desires for our covenant?

One option would have been to water everything down and make our covenant clauses as vague as possible. Then each member of the CD Group could interpret them as he saw fit.

But the other option – the one we decided to follow – was for all the members to accept clauses from each individual. And by each of us submitting to another's idea of disciplined spiritual practice, we realized that we can all learn something about the real character of discipleship. It's not just about "me" and "my desires" for the covenant.

It is, rather, about learning to grow in faith together under a common rule. And though it might not be my idea to fast or to keep a prayer journal, I am also opening myself up to the possibility that God will transform me through those very practices.

(Rev. Andrew Thompson is a doctoral student at Duke University Divinity School in Durham, NC. You can read his blog at <http://www.genxrising.com/>.)



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One Church's Journey Into Covenant Discipleship

By Mark Deshon



Newark United Methodist Church's journey into Covenant Discipleship began some eight years ago. At that time several of us attended a district Covenant Discipleship (CD) workshop in Wilmington, DE. This workshop got me excited about the possibilities for CD. Two groups began meeting in 2000. The members' experiences were

good, but the groups eventually dissolved. In hindsight, there had not been nearly enough preparation/education, publicity, and support to give CD the beginning it needed. We needed a different approach.

In the summer of 2006 I felt a personal calling to 1) become a more authentic disciple and 2) commit myself to bring CD into the life of Newark United Methodist Church. I knew I would need organizational help and proper support. I spoke with our senior pastor, Rev. David Palmer. He was very supportive and told me that another member of our congregation had expressed similar feelings and suggested that I contact him.

In the fall of 2006 we laid the groundwork for the formation of a pilot group. We conducted an introductory meeting for prospective pilot group members. The response was better than we had anticipated. We formed two pilot groups. One of the groups included Rev. Palmer. The groups began meeting in January of 2007.

To prepare the congregation to respond to opening the groups, we wrote articles on discipleship for our monthly newsletter. In the spring, I formed a kickoff event planning committee. We contacted the General Board of Discipleship and invited Rev. Steven Manskar to participate in our September 22–23, 2007 kickoff weekend. The planning team met throughout the summer. One of the most important ideas we implemented was for pilot group members to speak about their experiences with CD during worship services in the eight weeks leading up to the kickoff weekend.

Our kickoff weekend included a Saturday evening pot-luck dinner followed by presentations by Rev. Manskar and me with testimonies. Rev. Manskar preached at our three worship services that Sunday morning. Sign-up tables were located throughout the church building.

The newly formed groups began meeting in October. Our initial four groups include 17 people (6 men and 11 women), including six of the eight pilot group members. We plan a few times

throughout the year for new sign-ups to encourage participation in the groups. We hope that these new Covenant Discipleship groups will help us radiate God's love to a world in need as we take seriously our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. We're off to a great start. Thanks be to God!

NEWARK UMC, NEWARK, DE

The Pastor's Perspective

By Rev. David M. Palmer



As the newly appointed senior pastor of Newark UMC in July 2005, I knew I was going to a strong church. It had gifted lay leadership who desired to find ways of strengthening the church. One group took the church into the Natural Church Development (NCD) materials. Out of the eight NCD evaluates, it was not surprising to most of us that "need-oriented evangelism" was our characteristic of lowest health. What was surprising was that "passionate spirituality" was right down at the bottom also. Newark UMC has a strong history in Disciple Bible Study and other small groups.

When Mark Deshon came to me with an interest in starting Covenant Discipleship groups, I was quick to support him. I agreed because I firmly believe that CD groups would deepen the spiritual life of participants, thereby helping Newark UMC improve in "passionate spirituality." I also agreed because of my personal experience in CD groups.

Ever since college in the early 1970s, I had participated in a variety of small groups. In seminary, three of us formed an accountability group and met weekly for prayer, study, and accountability. It was this personal experience with the value of such groups that led me to agree to lead one of the pilot groups at NUMC. Being a morning person, finding four people willing to meet at 6:00 a.m. every Thursday was a gift.

I know it will take some time to nurture and grow a strong Covenant Discipleship ministry in Newark UMC. I know we will have to continue to recruit new leaders and new group members. But I also know that we have already strengthened our "passionate spirituality" as a congregation. I can hear it in the stories that come out of our Covenant Discipleship groups. I look forward to continuing my own participation and being a witness for the value of these groups.

ACTS OF COMPASSION

United Methodist Global AIDS Fund

The AIDS pandemic is affecting the lives of millions around the world. (Sources: UNAIDS and Centers for Disease Control)

- Approximately 40 million have the virus
- 25,800,000 infected persons live in sub-Saharan Africa
- Outside the United States, almost half of all those infected are women
- Worldwide, 8,000 persons die daily of the virus
- Approximately 600,000 children each year are infected; 14 million children have been orphaned
- Approximately 930,000 persons with AIDS reside in the United States

The UMC Global AIDS Fund will:

- Assist local congregations and conferences in identifying and creating global partnerships for mutual HIV/AIDS ministry
- Provide support for projects sponsored by local congregations or organizations related to the UMC, autonomous Methodist churches and churches of other denominations
- Advocate for increased governmental and non-governmental funding
- Explore partnerships with government funding initiative as well as the Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria
- Develop appropriate promotional materials and funding guidelines

Funding will be distributed to existing and new projects around the globe. This fund is an Advance Special, which is second-mile giving. One hundred percent goes directly to projects! The number of this Advance Special is #982345.

Of the total money raised in each annual conference, 25% will be retained by the annual conference, and 75% will be sent to the Advance.

Questions?

Contact Bishop Fritz and Etta Mae Mutti, Coordinators of the Fund at fritzmutter@kc.rr.com or Dr. Cherian Thomas at cthomas@gbgm-umc.org

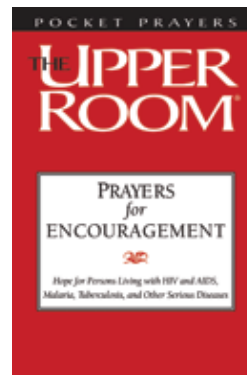
For on-line fund information, please visit www.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/health/

What you can do in your local community to address AIDS:

- Educate your congregation about the disease
- Sell candles and AIDS pins (made by those infected with HIV) to raise funds and awareness about the disease. Contact Church World Service at (888) 297- 2767 or www.churchworldservice.org for pins, or call (615) 297- 8764 to order candles.
- Pray each day for HIV/AIDS victims and their caregivers.
- Recognize World AIDS Day on December 1. Online, visit umc-gbcs.org or gbgm-umc.org for resources.
- Create an AIDS Task Force in your local congregation.
- Place information about HIV/AIDS on your church web site.
- Encourage individuals in your congregation to write their members of Congress urging increased U.S. support for funding for AIDS. Visit www.umpower.org for current ways to take action on specific legislation.
- Ensure that HIV/AIDS information is included in the congregation's youth group curriculum.
- Organize creative fundraisers.
- Reach out personally to an HIV infected person and provide support and loving care.

Prayers for Encouragement:

Hope for People Living with HIV & AIDS, Malaria, Tuberculosis, and Other Serious Diseases



In Jesus' time, lepers were the most stigmatized of patients. Yet he demonstrated great compassion toward them. Today, HIV/AIDS patients suffer many of the same discriminations and rejections that first century lepers did.

As the near-clichéd saying goes: What Would Jesus Do? And how willing are you to do likewise?

Like its predecessors in the Pocket Prayer Series, Prayers for Encouragement is a 32-page booklet of comforting meditations developed for a specific need — in this case serious diseases affecting many of the world's poor.

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