

One of my favorite shows on the Food Network is Chopped! Ted Allen hosts as chefs compete and use baskets of mystery ingredients to “make” a three-course meal. So I’ve brought my Chopped basket filled with mystery ingredients. To “make” a disciple, what might the mystery ingredients be?

Phil Maynard reminds us that: “Discipleship is not just learning about Jesus. It is about becoming like Jesus. Discipleship is not just about education. It is about transformation. Discipleship is not just about knowledge. It is about behaviors.”

Discipleship always begins with relationship. So how might your local church create a four-course meal that makes disciples who value being in relationships with others and with God? Let’s think about the four courses: appetizers, salad, entree, and dessert.

If you’ve attended a fancy wedding or seen one on television, you know the appetizer is always taken to the people. The appetizer in your disciple-making recipe is ENGAGE! How is your congregation moving beyond your church and caring for people in your community who are hanging on by a thread?

As you ENGAGE, please do not do it with a goal of getting people to come back to your church building. The goal is to love well so that those who don’t know they are loved by God, will hear and experience God’s extravagant love. So, ENGAGE!

Let’s look for a mystery ingredient here in my Chopped basket to ENGAGE people to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” What about paying attention to new people moving into the community? You may get the cue from a realtor sign in The front yard signifying “SOLD,” or you may see a moving truck unloading. Drop off a case of water bottles with a note that says, “The people of our United Methodist Church are praying for you during this transition. Moving can be stressful and unsettling, leaving all that you’ve known. Welcome! Know that you belong to God and to this community!” Your first course, the appetizer, is to ENGAGE.

Or what about dropping by the neighborhood laundromat or washeteria and leave a few pods tightly protected in a ziplock bag with a note, “As you wash today, know that the people of the United Methodist Church around the corner want to lighten the load. May these pods be a reminder that we care and God cares.”

Our second course is salad. At the fancy wedding, the second course is the opportunity to find your place card with your name, and join people at a table who you don’t know, but you begin to learn their names and their stories. So the second course - the salad - is to CONNECT.

In what ways is your church creating opportunities to CONNECT and learn new people’s names and their stories. Our second course mystery ingredient could be a book club. What New York Best Seller could CONNECT people from the broader community to spend 4 or 5 weeks

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together to share thoughts about a book. There around a shared love of reading, you can learn people's names and stories. So your churches second course salad is to CONNECT.

Or what about grief support - having a grief support group? Please have leaders who are licensed professional counselor or social workers who are trained to do grief work. Pastors, you can partner with them for the group, but professionals need to lead through the deep waters of grief. Discern new ways God is inviting your Church to CONNECT to build relationships with new people who have not experienced Jesus' love.

The third course is the entree. The entree in your disciple making process is to EQUIP. Once we've ENGAGED and CONNECTED, we EQUIP through worship, sacraments (outward signs of God's grace), reading scripture, and listening for the Holy Spirit. And even better, read scripture alongside and in relationship with people living on the edge. We hear in fresh ways God's word when we attend it alongside people who are vulnerable, voiceless, ostracized, and shut out. Our third course - the entree - is to EQUIP, is also the practice of prayer that wraps up EQUIPPING.

So, here's my iPad, so that I remind you. I trust you've downloaded the app "Pray As You Go", the app that we are offering every church and every person in the NC Conference, to practice prayer every day. Don't just learn about it, but practice prayer.

Our fourth course is dessert. Mmmmm! And in our fourth course as churches, the fourth course is to SEND. When we create a system in each church to make disciples, we come to know that God SENDS us and we SEND one another into the world to serve others. One we've encountered the grace and love of Jesus, we can do no other than to go join where God is present with all who suffer, those who are oppressed.

We are sent to join a Habitat Build. We're sent to tutor students at under-resourced schools where under-resourced students need a layer of your support. The fourth course of dessert is the sweet SENDING of the church to join Jesus' mission to those hanging on by a thread.

I'm asking every church across our North Carolina conference to intentionally create their four-course meal of mystery ingredients to MAKE disciples. So will you lead your church into this kind of intentionality in making disciples? Where together, clergy and laity, identify how you, as a church, ENGAGE, CONNECT, EQUIP, and SEND? That becomes your "Chopped" basket mystery ingredients four-course meal, used to intentionally MAKE DISCIPLES of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.