



New Faith Communities

North Carolina Conference

THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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30 Second Survey

How do you prefer to receive communications from New Room Society? Whether it's by mail, email, text message, phone or social media, we would like to know the best way to reach you. Please go to <https://nccumc.org/newfaithcommunities/30-second-survey/> and fill out this 30 Second Survey.

Please support our planters with your prayers for communion to be celebrated in new ways in their lives and in their communities.

Charles Albright	Annette Ethridge	Cleve May	Jamie Thompson
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Newsletter

May 2018

Imitation

By Rev. Greg Moore



Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models.” Philippians 3:17 CEB

Imitation gets a bad rap.

The word alone conjures up thoughts of inferiority. Images of imitation cheese, imitation butter and imitation Rolexes flash before our eyes as examples of, “not the real thing.” In the business world, the term “imitation product” is synonymous with “counterfeit product”.

We in the church see it differently.

For those who are following Jesus, imitation is one of the ways God is saving us.

We Christians are those who are seeking to imitate the life of Jesus in all that we say and do. When God takes flesh in the person of Jesus, the church mothers and fathers tell us, we are given an example worth imitating. When we see Jesus forgive his enemies, we imitate him when confronted with those who make enemies of us. When we see Jesus break bread with friends and strangers, we imitate by sharing what is on our table and giving thanks. When we see Jesus often withdraw for prayer and solitude with God, we imitate him, offering our prayers and solitude in union with Christ's offering for us.

Of course, this is nothing new. When Thomas à Kempis, the 15th-century imitator of Christ, wrote the beloved devotion, “*The Imitation of Christ*” he was highlighting the truth that Christians imitating Christ is not a substitute for Christ's absence. Imitation is the way that the world experiences Christ's presence in every generation. The body of Christ imitating the life of Christ is still the way that Jesus takes up room and moves in the world.

Naturally, Thomas learned from his holy friends, who were imitating the life of Jesus with him. They taught him how to love, heal, feed, and forgive like the One they imitated. They learned it from those who went before them. They sought to live out Paul's challenge to the church in Philippi, to imitate Him in order to become the real Presence they were called to be.

Here's the point: people learn how to follow Christ as they imitate the Christ they meet in each other. Imitation is the only real form of discipleship.

For the followers of Jesus called Methodist, we learn to imitate Jesus by creating and cultivating holy friendships. We call this, “relational discipleship.” Together, with our holy friends, we practice imitating Christ until all heaven breaks out.

In this newsletter, you will find stories of holy friendships where people are imitating each other and Christ. May their stories encourage, challenge and inspire us in our holy friendships. May we imitate what you see Christ doing in and through them. Through our shared imitation, may we experience the real presence of Christ.

New Room Society

An order of laity and clergy dedicated to embodying apostolic hospitality for new people to be gathered into communion with Jesus Christ

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category/newroomsociety](https://nccumc.org/newfaithcommunities/category/newroomsociety)

Featured Members



My name is: Brent Levy

Describe a Relational Discipleship moment:
At The Local Church, a new expression of Christ United Methodist putting down roots in Chatham County, our story is beginning in much the same way as that of the first followers of Jesus — around tables and in homes. We call our iteration Local Tables. Local Tables are small(ish) gathering of friends, family, neighbors, and strangers (who will quickly become friends), who meet to create space to listen, learn, love, and serve together. The gatherings are loosely structured, but informal. They’re planned, but with plenty of room for the Holy Spirit to do what she does best. It all happens around a table with a shared meal... and these gatherings matter. A recent survey from the health insurance company, Cigna, found that over half of Americans surveyed feel lonely or unknown. We don’t need a survey to tell us that. We feel it in our own lives each day. But those who embrace the awkward to show up to Local Tables quickly discover the beauty of belonging. They find common ground and discover that they’re not alone in their questions and doubts and hopes and fears. They learn how their faith comes alive each and every day. Through engaging questions, meaningful conversation, and a treasure trove of stories and backgrounds and experiences, we lean into the wisdom of sixth-century monk Dorotheus of Gaza who taught that as we draw closer together, we draw closer to the heart of God — and vice versa!



My name is: Tyler Williams

Describe a Relational Discipleship moment:
It’s always interesting when they get to me during the introduction portion of a Rolesville Chamber of Commerce event:

“Hi, I’m Justin with State Farm.”

“Hi, I’m Sandy. I’m a financial planner.”

“Hi. I’m Tyler. I’m a pastor at Village Church Rolesville.”



The reactions range from surprise, to puzzlement, to appreciation. I decided to join the Rolesville Chamber of Commerce soon after moving to Rolesville two years ago. I thought it would be a good way to get to know people in the community and begin to build relationships. Perhaps God might even accomplish something through those relationships. Soon, Sandy and Justin began coming to our B3 Community Group.

Two years later, both Justin and Sandy’s families have joined Village Church Rolesville. This is a testament to the power of relational discipleship-- intentionally invest in other people, become their friends, and see God’s grace work through that relationship to bring about communion. It’s friendship as sacrament—God using the fabric of our lives and the relationships we form as a channel for grace. I’m convinced that nothing tills the soil of someone’s heart for the gospel like a genuine relationship. It’s why Paul says to the Thessalonians, “We were glad to share not only God’s good news with you but also our very lives....” (1 Thess. 2:8). That’s relational discipleship.

Sandy wrote on her Facebook wall “After 26 years of living in Rolesville, I have finally found a church home.” Thanks be to God.



My name is: Cleve May

Describe a Relational Discipleship moment:
Life with Jesus always means life together because discipleship is always relational. From Jesus’ very first call, there was a community of disciples (remember that Jesus called two fishermen, not one). This is why at CityWell we define discipleship as: the intentional **and communal** formation of our lives in the way of Jesus. Discipleship is always relational.

Relational discipleship is always reciprocal. There is simply no way to walk in life together, receiving the ways of Jesus together, and for there to be a mere one-way exchange. Even those of us who may be further along in the journey will be changed as we walk with another disciple. I believe this was also true with Jesus. The scriptures say that Jesus was tempted in every way that we are and that he was made perfect through suffering. Surely this suffering included more than just the passion; surely it was also a matter of suffering to walk in relationship with stubborn, clumsy, and less than faith-full disciples. But when tempted, as we are, toward impatience, self-righteous comparison, or dismissal, Jesus overcame our bent towards sin on the path toward perfection. Disciples were made holy as Jesus was made perfect. Relational discipleship is always reciprocal.

A few months ago, a CityWeller stood before our church family to preach. In those moments I was overwhelmed at the way in which communal discipleship had transformed the relationship between me and that person, as well as both of our relationships with Jesus. A few years ago, it would have been inconceivable that this person would have become such a leader and powerful proclaimer of the gospel in our congregation. The relationship between me and that person was strained, neither of us trusting the other, and both of us being tempted toward impatience, self-righteous comparison, and dismissal. But thank God, Jesus has a hold of both of us, and we have walked together seeking to receive his ways as our way of life. Today, our relationship to one another is strong and growing, and we are both more like Jesus then we could have been apart from one another. This friend is now discerning call to pastoral ministry.

Discipleship is always relational, and relational discipleship is always reciprocal. And having been made perfect, Jesus is leading us on to perfection. Thanks be to God.

Relational Discipleship & Wesley’s Class Meeting

By Rev. Dr. Marty Cauley

“First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced. Second, by doing good, by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible to all men.... Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded, the Supper of the Lord; private prayer, searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence. More welcoming with balanced accountability” (Wesley’s rule of life).



We live disconnected lives. Even as I write this, I feel the conviction of it in my own life where I barely know the neighbors who live just next door. We exchange pleasant waves pulling in and out of the neighborhood but I have never shared a meal with them or sat late in the evening and talked about significant things. As an advocate for real connection, I am keenly aware of that same need in my own life.

Several years ago Robert Putnam wrote the landmark text that identified this cultural trend when he penned *Bowling Alone*. Since then study after study has reconfirmed his research that twenty-first-century people live on the most crowded planet in history. We are surrounded by more people and living in closer proximity than any time in history. However, we are almost entirely without connection. Even though the most introverted around us craves some level of connection, we have withdrawn into our corners and cubicles, often settling for Facebook friends rather than real relationships. We make tenuous ties that can be snapped and “unfriended” with a few simple clicks. It is time for us to reconnect with our roots and the people around us who need to be invited into communion with Christ.

Class meetings were the foundation of relational discipleship for John Wesley, Methodism’s founder. They were originally led by hand-picked leaders Wesley had personally discipled. This empowering of lay leadership allowed for relational discipleship to extend to every member of the society. Class leaders visited homes, offered instruction, encouragement, pastoral care, and spiritual discipline as needed. (Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*)

Class meetings provided pastoral care for every member of the society and those seeking to become part of the Methodist movement. Class meetings included spirited biblical instruction and acted as a catalyst for missional action as the members were “spurred on to perfection.” Additionally, class leaders provided personal mentorship related to families, financial instruction, and addressed lifestyle issues. By visiting house to house, class leaders were able to observe the family dynamic of each member of their class.

In comparison to other revival movements of the day, the Methodists were able to spread faster and last longer in large part due to the relational nature of class meeting discipleship. In most revival movements the movement only lasts as long as the emotionally charged spiritual response continues. With class meetings, Wesley was able to provide ongoing spiritual nurture and accountability to accompany the movement’s powerful preaching.

Lastly, the empowering of lay leadership, a hallmark of Methodism, began to take root. Almost all class leaders were laity, discipled by trained clergy and lay pastors. This decentralization of authority allowed for greater reach into communities previously ignored by the parish church. By creating, lay Methodist missionaries going into every corner of the city and involved in commerce, factory work, and local government, the movement penetrated the heart of the community.

New Faith Communities seeks to recover the practice of relational discipleship practiced by Wesley and his early followers and help people reconnect with God and each other. As a core practice, relational discipleship provides for care, saturates our lives with scripture and prayer, and encourages practices of worship and mission. Most importantly, it allows everyone to fully participate in the act of disciple making. Please be in prayer for our planters and their teams as they seek to make disciples for the transformation of the world.

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