

A DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY

Creating a system for growing faith in
your worshipping community.

Why a Pathway to Discipleship Matters. page 1

6 Steps to Get Started. page 3

Sample Pathway to Discipleship. page 9



UNITED METHODISTS
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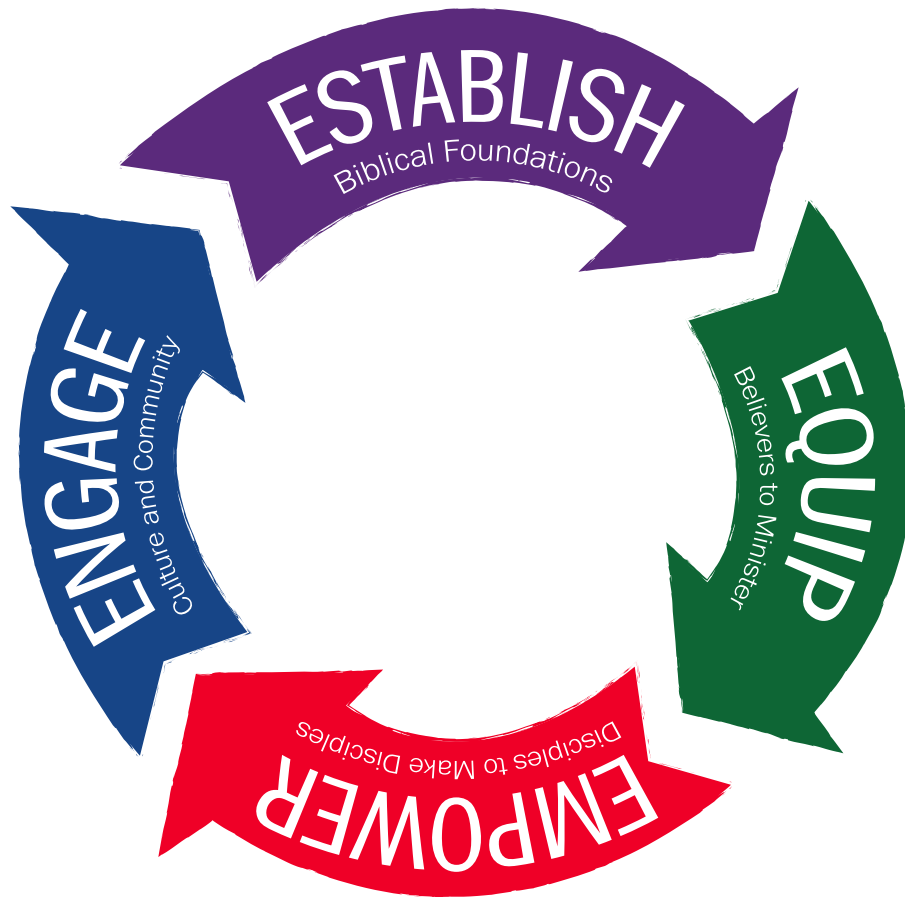
WHY HAVING A PATH MATTERS

People like to know the “*rules of the game.*” That’s true for church as well as life. On a typical Sunday morning, your church guests are wondering, “*What does it mean to be a part of this community?*” or “*What exactly does it mean to practice faith?*” or “*What do I need to do to connect deeper?*”

These may seem like fundamental questions, however, the answers are not always easy. By offering your guests an answer to these questions, the chances are far greater that they will take the next steps on the path to discipleship.

This book is designed to outline how to make and implement a pathway to discipleship within your congregation. The first place to start is with a leadership team. Gather 3-10 leaders to help you work the process. You should plan on taking two hours to work through these steps.

GENERALLY SPEAKING, CHURCHES USE ONE OF TWO WAYS TO DESCRIBE THEIR DISCIPLSHIP PROCESS:



OTHER CHURCHES ARE MORE LINEAR:



Whatever your church chooses, our hope is that the process and examples on the next few pages help your church to find clarity and take your discipleship ministry to the next level.

6 STEP PROCESS FOR YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

To clarify your church's discipleship goals and processes, you'll want to work these six steps, making adjustments for your context.

1. Start With A Clear Definition Of Discipleship

To invite people into discipleship, you need to tell them what that means. You may be surprised that if you talk to half a dozen congregants, you might get six definitions of discipleship. Agreeing on your congregation's definition is important to start the process of inviting people to join you. Here are a few examples to start the discussion:

Greater New Jersey Annual Conference's Definition

A Holy Spirit-led follower of Christ whose passion every day is to know, grow in, live and share the life of Jesus. (John 15:5)

General Rule of Discipleship from Wesley's General Rules | Book of Discipline - 2016, ¶1117.2

A disciple is a witness to Jesus Christ in the world who follows his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

From Junius Dotson in Developing an Intentional Discipleship System

A disciple is one who knows Christ, is growing in Christ, serving Christ, and sharing Christ.

What is your church's definition of a disciple?



2. Break Down Your Definition

Identify the different components of your definition as distinct Discipleship Categories (typically 3-5 large categories: things like community, growing, serving, acts of devotion, etc). When you're done, take a look at these components and ask, *“Are these the key categories of a life of discipleship?”* If the answer is no, make adjustments.

1. _____

4. _____

2. _____

5. _____

3. _____



5. **Check For Alignment**

Do each of the categories of discipleship have an adequate number of opportunities under them?

If not, do you need to adjust the kinds of opportunities your church offers in a typical year, or do you need to alter your definition of discipleship? Keep in mind that even though the opportunity will fall under a particular category, they shouldn't be silos.

For instance, if your categories are "*community, growing, serving,*" you might list a Bible study under the category of "*growing,*" but that doesn't mean your Bible study isn't a community and maybe they occasionally serve as well.

6. A Clear And Simple Message

Although life of discipleship is nuanced and personalized, it is important that your church be able to talk about this system clearly, simply and often so that new worshipers know how they can fit in. Ideally, a newcomer will be able attend church one Sunday and have a basic understanding of what it means to be involved in your church and practice a life of faith.

Can you describe your church's process for discipleship in a few sentences?

Have each leader practice explaining your entire discipleship system in 60 seconds or less.

What are the spaces and places that you'll communicate this message? In the bulletin? The welcome table? In your weekly words of welcome? How many of your leadership team will commit to memorizing this message? Could this be the answer if someone asked *"What's your church about?"*

Is there an image that can help people visualize the process? How can it be shared often enough that people recognized it?

Last thing, it takes time for things like a Discipleship Pathway to take root in a church, so it helps to regularly check back with your leadership team to assess how things are going and make any necessary updates.

How often will this team check back with this document to make sure that your church is committed to creating a clear pathway to discipleship?



SAMPLE CHURCH - PATHWAY TO DISCIPLESHIP

At Sample Church, we believe that a disciple is someone who is committed to:

Belonging to the body of Christ (“the Church”)
Becoming more like Jesus, and
Joining in the work of God in this world.

Discipleship is practiced, never accomplished, so don’t feel like you need to do all of these at once.

These categories simply serve as a map so that you can easily see the path and components of healthy discipleship. If you’re new to a life of faith, then most of your time might be spent in the **“Belonging”** category. However, if you’ve committed yourself to a life of following Jesus, then it is very important that you regularly check this list to make sure you aren’t ignoring components of your discipleship practice.

We have divided nearly everything we offer as a church into these three categories. If you’re new here, relationships are foundational for everything we do, so we always encourage people to focus on a few items in the **“Belonging”** category. As you grow more interested in learning more or engaging in practical faith habits, you might join one of our options in the **“Becoming”** category. As you develop a desire to take part in serving our community and/or leading others on a similar path, you might check out the opportunities under the **“Join In”** category.

Nobody’s path is the same, and you might be more comfortable serving at a soup kitchen than at a church picnic! That’s perfectly fine. We simply want you to consider taking a proactive approach to developing your life of faith.

We’re glad to have you along for the ride.

BELONGING TO THE BODY OF CHRIST

Nobody goes through life alone in this church. During some seasons of your life, you'll feel like faith is easy and God's presence is close. Other times, you might feel like life is all uphill and God is giving you the silent treatment. No matter what season you're in you've got a community.

- Sunday Worship
- Pizza With The Pastor
- Coffee Hour
- Spring Church Picnic
- Fall Church Picnic
- "Who We Are" Classes
- Mops (Mothers of Preschoolers)
- Theology On Tap
- Prayer Shawl Group
- Supper Club

BECOMING MORE LIKE JESUS

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the "*fruits of the spirit*") don't just happen on their own. They take practice, accountability, and grace when we don't get it right. These are opportunities to practice habits of faithfulness.

- Sunday Worship
- Genesis Bible Study
- *The New Jim Crow* Book Club
- *40 Days of Purpose* Small Group
- Confirmation
- Giving Away Part Of Your Income As An Act Of Generosity
- Making A Profession Of Your Faith
- Church Membership

JOINING IN THE WORK OF GOD IN THIS WORLD

The "Kingdom of God" is not something we wait on as much as it's something we practice. We help feed people in our community, AND we try to change a system that would let them go hungry. We treat our money as a tool to be invested in mission. We begin leading and inviting others on a similar journey.

- Volunteer team at Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
- Serve as small group leader
- Serve as youth group mentor
- A commitment to tithing your income
- Annual mission experience to Puerto Rico

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS? NO PROBLEM.



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