

North Georgia Conference - Leadership UMC 2007-2008

Executive Summary

Discipleship: Dedicated Followers of Jesus Christ

Report by the Kingdom Builders

Loss of membership is a growing concern for the United Methodist Church. Statistics show a steady decline in membership and attendance over the past several decades. Our research indicates that causes for the decline are multi-fold, but can be distilled down to a few key issues:

- The perceived image of the church from those not a part of the church
- A lack of relevance in today's culture
- An inability to connect with the local communities in meaningful ways

All of these issues can be tied to the need for the church to follow through with its given mission as declared to us from our Lord Jesus Christ, *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."* – Matthew 28:19-20

From its inception with our founder John Wesley, the Methodist Movement has been strongly based upon the methodology of **Discipleship**. Wesley understood the necessity of discipleship and structured the organization of churches (or societies) in a way to maximize discipleship among members by going out into the communities where they lived. Wesley's goals for this entire process were: godliness and goodwill - spirituality and service to others.

Despite the overall decline of the United Methodist denomination, particularly in North America, there are, however, some churches that are doing extremely well in terms of discipleship. The methods of these churches are varied but find a common denominator in the fact that they develop a plan, communicate the plan, empower lay leadership, and work the plan being obedient servants of Jesus Christ.

Using the examples as provided by Jesus, John Wesley, and today's successful churches, we have identified several ways in which churches can be more effective in their discipleship. The key components include going out into our communities and connecting with people where they are and in ways that are meaningful to them; creating hospitable environments within our churches; communication of and focus on our given mission; the continuous empowerment of existing and newly developed leaders; and in all of this, the highest attention given to the development of personal relationships with one another and our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The challenges to the United Methodist church in today's culture are daunting; however, hope is ever present. The Church has been given a mission by Jesus. That mission was furthered by the guidance of John Wesley, and continues to proceed in churches today. With a renewed focus on discipleship, congregations can again connect with the people in their communities and in the End, the Kingdom of God can and **will** come to its full realization.