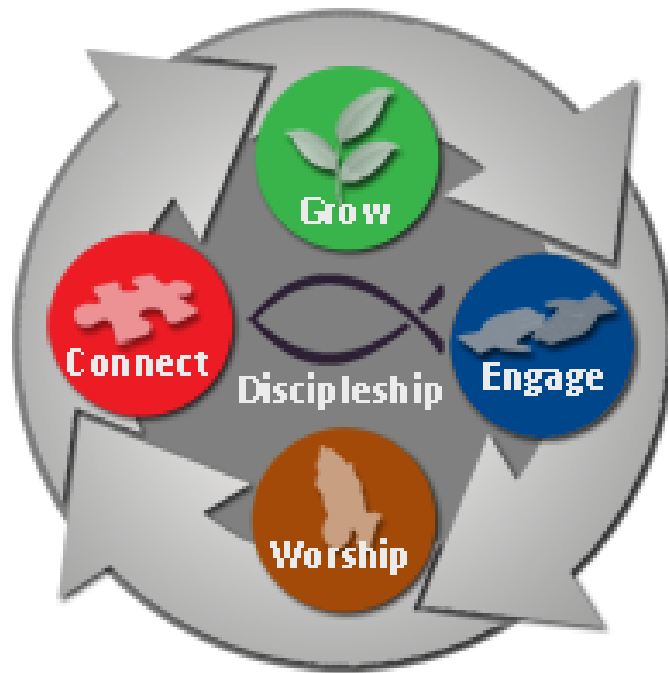


The Discipleship Circle: A Process for Making Disciples



The Report of the Discipleship Process Task Force
2011 Church Conference

First United Methodist Church
Pflugerville, TX

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the Administrative Council of First United Methodist Church, Pflugerville authorized the creation of a Long Range Planning Committee (LRPC) for the church. The committee comprised of Clark Meier (chair), Senior Pastor Monte Marshall, Ron Eck, Holly Taylor, Jack Foreman, Cindy Meier, Wayne Moore, and John Wester met throughout 2010, facilitated conversations across the church to gather input about the future direction of the church, and submitted a report to the 2010 Church Conference. The report was adopted.

One component of the Long Range Planning Report was entitled *Discipleship Process*. The vision was to *Create a Discipleship Process Task Force to work for one year on the following items:*

- Develop criteria for measuring our congregation's effectiveness in making disciples of all ages,
- Using the criteria, evaluate our congregation's effectiveness in making disciples,
- Consider options for change to make the process more effective,
- Develop a plan and implementation strategy for instituting needed changes,
- Submit a report and any action items to the 2011 annual Church Conference.

The chair of the 2011 Administrative Council, in consultation with the Senior Pastor, appointed a Discipleship Process Task Force to do this work. The task force consists of Holly Taylor (co-chair), Senior Pastor Monte Marshall (co-chair), Mike Pursley, Jacob Claussen, Ron Valentine, and Matt Rutkowski.

This report entitled, *The Discipleship Circle: A Process for Making Disciples*, is submitted by the task force to the 2011 Church Conference for adoption.

FOUNDATIONS

The Biblical Witness

The work of the Discipleship Process Task Force has been informed by a key biblical text, Matthew 28:16-20:

¹⁶Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

As the Task Force engaged this story of the appearance of the risen Christ to his remaining eleven disciples in Galilee, several insights arose:

- It was a small group of eleven that encountered Christ on the mountain.
- They were called *disciples*. The Greek word translated *disciples* literally means *learners*.
- They arrived at the mountain in obedience to Christ's direction.
- When the disciples saw the risen Christ, they worshipped him even though some doubted.
- After asserting his authority, the risen Christ said to his disciples: *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations*. The disciples were given a mission: they were to make disciples. This involved going into the world and encountering all sorts of people from different backgrounds and cultures, risking resistance and hostility, all for the sake of Christ and his call to a demanding mission.

- Baptizing disciples *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* implies that the mission is to make new disciples. Baptism is a visible sign or mark of a disciple's connection to God. Baptism also identifies one as a follower of Jesus Christ and a member of the community of disciples.
- The mission also includes disciples teaching disciples to obey *everything* that Jesus Christ commanded. This suggests that discipleship involves a process of growth in following Christ.
- There is a promise from the risen Christ that the disciples are urged to remember: *I am with you always, to the end of the age*. In all that happens to the followers of Jesus Christ beyond this point of encounter on a mountain in Galilee, there is an assurance that the disciples will never be left alone or abandoned. The presence of the risen Christ will be with them.

The Task Force used this biblical text from Matthew's gospel, and the insights gained from it, as a foundation for this report.

Our Heritage

Methodism began as a reform movement within the church in eighteenth-century England. An Anglican priest named John Wesley preached throughout Great Britain to call people to faith in Jesus Christ. He then sought to give the followers of Christ—not a new church—but an effective means of deepening their discipleship.

Wesley summarized the way of Christ in three rules that all Methodists were to observe in living their lives: (1) Do no harm and avoid evil of every kind. (2) Do good in every possible way to everyone. (3) Attend *upon all the ordinances of God* such as public worship; the ministry of the Word, either read or preached; the Lord's Supper; family and private prayer; searching the scriptures; and fasting or abstinence.

Wesley provided a structure for community, learning, mutual care and accountability. He organized Methodists into societies, and then into small groups called classes. As Methodists grew nearer to Christ in love through the power of the Holy Spirit, other groups were formed called bands and select societies, which were based on deeper commitments so that Methodists had a structure and a process to move forward in the life of discipleship.

The Task Force has drawn from this rich heritage and used it as foundation for the proposals contained within this report.

DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

The task force used a resource entitled *Simple Church* to develop criteria for measuring our effectiveness in making disciples of all ages. This book by Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger is based on case studies of more than four hundred American churches. The research conducted by the authors has shown that *the healthiest churches in America tend to have a simple process for making disciples*.

A simple church is defined as *a congregation designed around a straightforward and strategic process that moves people through the stages of spiritual growth. The leadership and the church are clear about the process (clarity) and are committed to executing it. The process flows logically (movement) and is implemented in each area of the church (alignment). The church abandons everything that is not in the process (focus)*.

The task force used these simple church criteria for measuring our church's effectiveness in making disciples:

- *Do we have a clear process for making disciples (clarity) that everyone can understand and articulate?*
- *Do our programs provide a logical flow through the stages of spiritual growth (movement)?*
- *Is every area of the church aligned with the process for making disciples (alignment)?*
- *Are we focused on doing only those programs that advance the process (focus)?*

MEASURING OUR EFFECTIVENESS

In considering the criteria noted above, we concluded that our congregation had room for improvement in the area of making disciples:

- *Do we have a clear process for making disciples (clarity) that everyone can articulate?*
The Task Force concluded that we do not have a clear vision of what a mature disciple looks like. Consequently, we do not have a simple, easily understood and communicated process that leads to the desired result. Without the destination in mind, it's impossible to chart a course that brings us to the goal.
- *Do our programs provide a logical flow through the stages of spiritual growth (movement)?* Without a process, there is no flow. The Task Force is not clear about how the programs we offer fit together to move people through the various stages of spiritual growth, toward a mature discipleship.
- *Is every area of the church aligned with the process for making disciples (alignment)?* Without a clearly defined process, we do not have alignment.
- *Are we focused on doing only those programs that advance the process (focus)?* Without an identifiable process, there is no focus. Even the current statements of vision, mission, and values are not intentionally used to provide focus to our programs.

The task force resonated with the descriptions of complex churches presented by the authors of *Simple Church*. The questions raised by the complex church experience seemed relevant to our situation:

- *Are we being transformed? Or is everyone just busy?*
- *Does our church feel “cluttered” with too many programs that all point in different directions?*
- *Are we experiencing ministry “schizophrenia,” with many programs moving in a multiplicity of directions, disjointed, and competing for time, space, and energy, while our people are left unclear about our fundamental identity?*
- *Do we see the whole picture, or are more and more things added without an understanding of how it all affects the whole?*

Given these conclusions, the Task Force agreed to move forward in designing a discipleship process informed by *Simple Church* to increase our effectiveness in making disciples of Jesus Christ.

PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

After considerable prayer, scripture study, and discernment, the Task Force recommends that First United Methodist Church, Pflugerville, adopt the following process for making disciples of Jesus Christ:

- **Guiding Definition: What does a mature disciple look like?**

A mature disciple WORSHIPS God (Matthew 28:17), CONNECTS with others for learning and community (Matthew 28:16), ENGAGES the world for mission and service (Matthew 28:19), GROWS in the Spirit while following Jesus in all that he taught (Matthew 28:20).

- **The Process: What is our process for making disciples?**

WORSHIP God

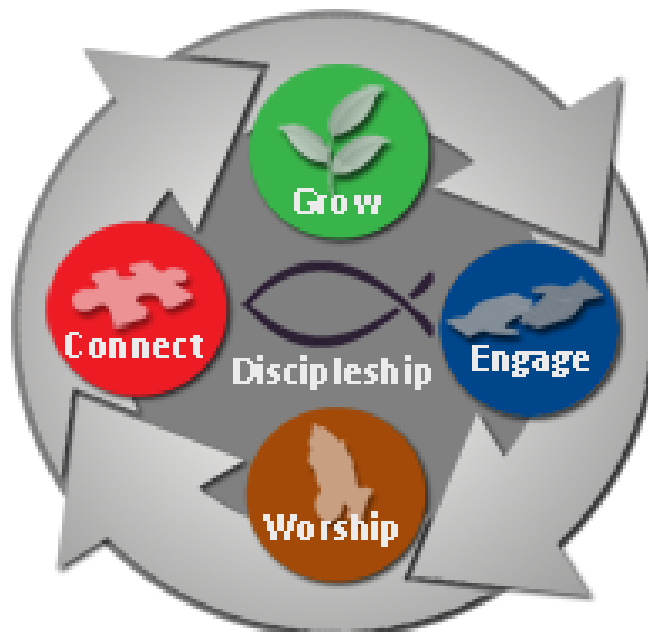
CONNECT with others for learning and community

ENGAGE the world for mission and service

GROW in the Spirit while following Jesus in all that he taught

- **Illustration: How will this process be communicated visually?**

The Discipleship Circle



The Discipleship Circle process is built on several key insights:

- People may enter the discipleship process at any entry point: WORSHIP, a CONNECT GROUP, an ENGAGE mission or service activity, or through GROW DISCIPLINES or a GROW GROUP (Note: adult participation in a GROW GROUP may be in lieu of participation in a CONNECT GROUP).
 - Regardless of the entry point, the aim of the process is to move people around the Discipleship Circle so that growth occurs.
- **Initiation: When will the Discipleship Circle go into effect?**
 - The Discipleship Circle will begin on September 1, 2012
 - An eight-month transition process will begin January 1, 2012 that will include
 - A pilot-group training process for adult CONNECT GROUP leaders
 - Further detailed planning for implementation through all age-levels
 - Promotion and interpretation throughout the congregation
 - Orientation of the church leadership
 - **Audience: Who is the Discipleship Circle process for?**
 - The Discipleship Circle is open to everyone.
 - Persons may participate in one or more entry points without committing to participate in the whole process.
 - Persons may also commit to participate in the whole process.
 - The process is followed in all age-levels, children, youth, and adults, with age-appropriate modifications.
 - Beginning September 1, 2012, those adults seeking to become members of the First United Methodist Church, Pflugerville will be encouraged to enter a covenant expressing their intention to participate in the Discipleship Circle (see below).
 - Beginning September 1, 2012, existing members of First United Methodist Church and others may choose to enter a covenant expressing their intention to participate in the Discipleship Circle. When appropriate, these commitments will be celebrated by a Reaffirmation of Faith in worship (see below).

THE DISCIPLESHIP CIRCLE COVENANT: Adults

Trusting God to work in me that I might have the strength to keep this Discipleship Circle Covenant, I intend to...

WORSHIP God by...

- participating at least once a week in worship unless unavoidably hindered

CONNECT to others for learning and community by...

- participating in a CONNECT GROUP

ENGAGE the world for mission and service by...

- giving at least four hours per month to either Out-Reach mission, In-Reach service, or a combination of the two

GROW in the Spirit while following Jesus in all that he taught by...

- practicing GROW DISCIPLINES of daily prayer, daily scripture reading, and committed giving of financial resources
- participating in an annual SPIRITUAL GROWTH ASSESSMENT
- participating in a GROW GROUP when ready (optional opportunity that replaces the CONNECT GROUP)

Name

Date

FOR ADULTS

- **Programming: How will our programming support the process?**

WORSHIP God

- Morning Glory service
- 10:45 Traditional service
- The Creekside Gathering
- Special services (Holy Week, Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, etc.)

CONNECT with others for learning and community

- Groups that choose to participate in the Discipleship Circle process are identified as **CONNECT GROUPS**
- **CONNECT GROUPS...**
 - Have four or more participants with a trained leader
 - Meet at least twice a month
 - Meet for a meaningful period of time each gathering
 - Use the Discipleship Circle Core Curriculum for study. This curriculum will be organized into short-term study units including:
 - an overview of the Old and New Testaments using Disciple Bible Studies material
 - biblically-based thematic studies on discipleship themes such as worship, community, money, lifestyle, sharing the good news, the prophetic task, spiritual gifts, relationships with the poor, alleviating suffering, the inner life, family life, single life, etc.
 - the core curriculum will include learning-by-doing experiences
 - Choose Electives as desired. This option might include a **CONNECT GROUP** choosing to do a class on United Methodism or a Disciple Bible study, for example. Individual group members might also choose to leave the **CONNECT GROUP** for participation in a short-term class or group on a particular topic such as marriage, and then return to the **CONNECT GROUP**.
 - Provide mutual care for **CONNECT GROUP** members. **CONNECT GROUP** leaders will be trained in giving care to their group members. Participants in **CONNECT GROUPS** will covenant together to support one another on the journey of discipleship. Each **CONNECT GROUP** will have a plan for enabling **CONNECT GROUP** members to care for one another.
 - Provide regular accountability for **GROW DISCIPLINES**. Each **CONNECT GROUP** will develop a clear process for enabling individual members to give a regular accounting of their faithfulness to the **GROW DISCIPLINES** while also providing encouragement and support for keeping the **GROW DISCIPLINES**.
 - Participate in the annual **GROW ASSESSMENTS** offered during Lent each year
 - May choose to enter the **ENGAGE** entry point as a group, taking-on an In-Reach or and Out-Reach project as a group.
- Existing classes or groups will be given the option of becoming **CONNECT GROUPS**
- **CONNECT GROUP** leaders will...

- participate in the Discipleship Circle process;
- facilitate their CONNECT GROUPS;
- provide accountability and care for CONNECT GROUP members;
- develop new CONNECT GROUP leaders;
- facilitate the movement through the Discipleship Circle process
- meet monthly with a CONNECT GROUP shepherd for prayer, encouragement, problem-solving, accountability, and support;
- participate in periodic skill training.
- CONNECT GROUP leaders will be supervised by CONNECT GROUP shepherds in a ratio of one shepherd per a maximum of five CONNECT GROUP leaders
- CONNECT GROUP shepherds will...
 - Meet monthly with their assigned CONNECT GROUP leaders;
 - Provide counsel, prayer support, encouragement and accountability for their assigned CONNECT GROUP leaders;
 - Participate in problem-solving as needed with their assigned CONNECT GROUP leaders
 - Participate in periodic skill training
 - Be accountable to the assigned Lay Leader, pastor, or staff member.

ENGAGE the world for mission and service

- IN-REACH: service within the church (participation in music ministry, Sunday School teacher, Trustee, Lay Leader, etc.)
- OUT-REACH: in mission to the world beyond the church (Food Pantry, Angels' Clothes Closet, mission trips, Mission of Mercy bags, Faith in Action Caregivers, etc.)
- Goal: at least 4 hours per month engaged in either In-Reach, Out-Reach, or a combination of the two
- When applicable, initiating a new ENGAGE program will require the following:
 - Approval by the Administrative Council
 - Alignment with the Discipleship Circle process
 - 2 people committed to lead the program
 - 5 other people committed to participating in the program
 - 5 other people committed to pray for the program

GROW in the Spirit while following Jesus in all that he taught

- GROW DISCIPLINES provide a foundation for growing in the Spirit. Supporting resources such as the Upper Room Devotional Guide and on-line materials will be provided to assist Discipleship Circle participants in keeping these GROW DISCIPLINES.
 - Daily prayer
 - Daily Bible reading
 - Committed giving
- GROW DEEPER
 - Annual GROW ASSESSMENTS offered during Lent each year to help people measure their growth in discipleship
- GROW GROUPS

- Allow people to move beyond CONNECT GROUPS when they are ready for a deeper commitment
- Built around common rules of life that express a broader, more comprehensive vision of discipleship (see Appendix)

ORIENTATION CLASS: Entry Point

- Participation in the ENTRY POINT is a prerequisite for those desiring to commit to the Discipleship Circle process without seeking church membership
- Participation in the ENTRY POINT is a prerequisite for those seeking to join the membership of the church as of September 1, 2012
- ENTRY POINT will be held at least once a quarter
- 3 hours on a Sunday evening that includes...
 - Dinner
 - Introduction to United Methodism
 - Introduction to PFUMC
 - Introduction to the Discipleship Circle
 - Next Steps

ORIENTATION CLASS: Transition Point

- The TRANSITION POINT is a prerequisite for current members seeking to participate in the Discipleship Circle process
- TRANSITION POINT will be held as needed to aid existing members in the transition to the Discipleship Circle
- 2 hours on a Sunday evening that includes...
 - Dinner
 - Introduction to the Discipleship Circle
 - Next Steps

- **Movement: How will movement be facilitated around the Discipleship Circle?**
 - Within the first eight months of 2012, the pastors and the lay leadership teams of each Entry Point will design “on-ramps” to help move participants from one Entry Point to another around the Discipleship Circle.
- **Measurement: How will the Discipleship Circle process be evaluated?**
 - Accurate attendance records will be kept at each stage in the Discipleship Circle process so that participation may be tracked and appropriate care provided to maximize involvement.
 - Movement will be measured from one Entry Point to another. The goal will be to monitor the flow through the process to make sure that the Discipleship Circle participants are moving from one entry point to another as one indicator of discipleship growth. If there is indication that movement is not taking place, methods can be considered to free-up the flow.
 - The church staff and appropriate lay leaders and teams will periodically monitor the workings of the process.
 - The Administrative Council will evaluate the progress and effectiveness of the Discipleship Circle at least quarterly.

- **Alignment: How will we maximize everyone’s energy around this process?**
 - Make the Discipleship Circle visible through church publications (newsletters, bulletins, letterhead, etc.), website, posters and displays.
 - Discuss the Discipleship Circle process frequently in one-on-one conversations, in committees and in small groups.
 - Provide periodic “tests” of the leadership on the Discipleship Circle process
 - The leadership will be oriented to the process and encouraged to speak of the Discipleship Circle corporately.
 - Continuously brainstorm ways to communicate the Discipleship Circle.
 - Organize the leadership of the church to support the Discipleship Circle process.
 - Support for the Discipleship Circle process will be a top priority for the church staff and lay leadership.
 - All new programming must be in alignment with the Discipleship Circle process and approved by the Administrative Council.

FOR YOUTH

- Beginning January 1, 2012, the Youth Council will develop an age-appropriate plan for utilizing the Discipleship Circle for youth to be implemented September 1, 2012.

FOR CHILDREN

- Beginning January 1, 2012, the children’s ministry team will develop an age-appropriate plan for utilizing the Discipleship Circle for children to be implemented September 1, 2012.

Implementation Timeline 2012-2013

TASKS	BEGIN DATE	COMPLETION DATE
<u>Discipleship Circle Promotion (pre-launch)</u>	Jan 1	Aug 31
• <u>Administrative Council orientation</u>	Jan 1	ongoing
• <u>Newsletter updates</u>	Jan 1	ongoing
• <u>Promotional posters</u>	May 1	ongoing
• <u>Bulletins & letterhead</u>	Sept 1	ongoing
• <u>Promotional tables</u>	Sept 1	ongoing
<u>Develop Discipleship Circle “on-ramps”</u>	Jan 1	Sept 1
<u>Discipleship Circle Launch</u>		Sept 1
• <u>Sermon series</u>	Aug 25	Sept 22
<u>Discipleship Circle Children Planning</u>	Jan 1	Sept 1
<u>Discipleship Circle Youth Planning</u>	Jan 1	Sept 1
<u>Connect Adults Group Leader Orientation</u>		
• <u>Plan session</u>	Jan 1	Jan 13
• <u>Schedule facility</u>	Jan 1	Jan 7

<u>TASKS</u>	<u>BEGIN DATE</u>	<u>COMPLETION DATE</u>
• <u>Promotion</u>	<u>Jan 15</u>	<u>Feb 5</u>
• <u>Orientation session</u>		<u>Feb 5</u>
<u>Connect Adults Group Leader Pilot Group</u>		
• <u>Course & Curriculum design</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Jan 31</u>
• <u>Connect Group Leader recruitment</u>	<u>in progress</u>	<u>Feb 5</u>
• <u>Pilot Groups meet</u>	<u>Feb 12</u>	<u>Aug 31</u>
• <u>Core Curriculum development</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
<u>Entry Point</u>		
• <u>For new members and others</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>	<u>ongoing (at least quarterly)</u>
○ <u>Planning</u>	<u>March 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
○ <u>Printed materials</u>	<u>March 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
<u>Transition Point</u>		
• <u>For current members and others</u>		<u>Sept 8</u>
○ <u>Planning</u>	<u>March 1</u>	<u>Sept 8</u>
○ <u>Printed materials</u>	<u>March 1</u>	<u>Sept 8</u>
<u>Engage Adults—In-Reach</u>		
• <u>Planning for In-Reach opportunities</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
• <u>Online sign-up for In-Reach service</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
<u>Engage Adults—Out-Reach</u>		
• <u>Planning for Out-Reach opportunities</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
• <u>Online sign-up for Out-Reach missions</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
<u>Grow Adults planning</u>		
• <u>Acquisition of resources for Grow Disciplines</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
• <u>Development of Grow Assessments</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>	<u>Jan 1, 2013</u>
• <u>Training in Grow Assessments</u>	<u>Jan 1, 2013</u>	<u>Feb 13, 2013</u>
• <u>Planning for Grow Groups</u>	<u>Jan 1</u>	<u>Sept 1</u>
<u>Attendance tracking</u>		<u>Sept 1</u>

FOR ACTION:

The Discipleship Process Task Force of First United Methodist Church, Pflugerville presents this report for adoption by the 2011 Church Conference. (Note: This report was amended and adopted as it now appears in this document. A new logo has also been added.)

APPENDIX

GROW GROUPS: A Rule of Life

What is a Rule of Life?

A Rule of Life is a written set of principles designed to guide, direct, and support members of a community in the path of discipleship that they have chosen to follow. It puts into words the priorities of a Christian way of life as discerned by the community members. It brings rhythm, discipline, and order to discipleship. The Rule helps those living by it to open themselves to God's love and purpose for their lives. The Rule is not an end unto itself, but a means of strengthening obedience to Christ.

Background

The Rule of Life comes from the monastic tradition. John Wesley used a rule of life to guide the discipleship of the early Methodists. Communities of disciples still use The Rule of Life to guide their discipleship today.

Sample Rule of Life

1. We seek a new economic life marked by greater sharing, increased freedom from money and possessions, and a movement toward a simpler life that is more just and loving. We are looking to live on less so that we can give more.
2. We seek to be free from upward mobility, status seeking, consumerism and similar cultural ills so that we might more fully become servants of Christ and others.
3. We seek deeper relationships with others in the Body of Christ along the lines suggested by Paul: *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.* (1 Cor. 12:26)
4. We seek continued growth in a spirituality that nurtures us in the presence of God throughout each day.
5. We seek to live more peaceful lives where enemies are loved and inclinations toward violence, hatred and revenge are yielded to the grace of God.
6. We seek greater involvement in the church's prophetic task, especially as it involves participation in God's work to overcome social evil in all of its forms.
7. We seek to be more intimately and personally connected to the poor, both to minister to them and to receive ministry from them.
8. We seek to share the Good News of Christ more boldly and powerfully, in both word and deed, with those we encounter.