



Holiness of Heart and Life: A Disciple-making System (part 5 of 6)

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This is the fifth of six parts from a paper I wrote and presented in August 2013. You will find part 1 [here](#), part 2 [here](#), part 3 [here](#), and part 4 [here](#). The final installment will be posted on Monday, January 5. Your comments are welcome.

Elements of the Disciple-Making System

The Wesleyan way of making disciples of Jesus Christ is designed to form the habits, attitudes, and character of Christians. John Wesley called these holy tempers. The Apostle Paul called them “fruit of the Spirit”: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

At the heart of the process are relationships formed in Christian community, a set of practices (the means of grace), and a system of mutual accountability and support. The goal is to form Christ-centered congregations that live and witness as signs and foretastes of the reign of God. These congregations intentionally help their members to learn and practice holy habits that form holiness of heart and life. They teach and interpret essential Christian doctrine, provide a community for the practices of Christian discipline, and help persons to grow in love of God and neighbor.

As sign-communities they point beyond themselves toward Christ and his kingdom. They also work intentionally to equip their members to serve as witnesses to Jesus Christ and to participate in his mission in the world. To that end Christ-centered congregations in The United Methodist tradition are organized for the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

The basic elements of such a Wesleyan disciple-making system are:

1. **Clear Expectations:** The mission and ministry of the congregation are focused upon making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. The congregation trusts God will keep God’s baptismal promises and that God will act in, with, and through the people to prepare the world for God’s coming reign on earth as it is in heaven. In response to God’s amazing grace the members will, according to their ability, follow Jesus’ teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The congregation’s vision is to become a Christ-centered sign-community for the coming reign of God.
2. **The congregation provides an intentional “disciple-making” system designed to provide the means for persons and the congregation to fully participate in the Baptismal Covenant and grow in holiness of heart and life:**
 - An interconnected, intentional system of small groups focused upon Christian formation is foundational. Because Christian formation is a relational process, congregational leaders must develop contexts for the baptized to obey Jesus’ command to “love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”^[1] The congregation will provide groups that meet people where they are—seekers, new Christians, growing, and mature Christians—and help them to grow in holiness of heart and life. The small group system of early Methodist societies provides an excellent model.^[2] Such a system is how the congregation will cooperate with the dynamic of grace that seeks to draw people to Christ, awaken them to who and whose they are, accept the gift of God’s love through faith, and live and serve as daughters and sons of God who are channels of grace for the world.

- Worship that is sacramental and evangelical in which Christ in all of his offices (prophet, priest, and king) is proclaimed. By sacramental I mean worship that is directed toward the triune God and invites people to come to Jesus Christ, his very body and blood. The mystery, majesty, righteousness and justice of God are lifted up through prayer, music, Scripture, proclamation, ritual and sacraments. Evangelical means that worship conveys the good news of God given to the world in the person, life and work of Jesus Christ. This good news is conveyed through word, hymns, praise songs, sermons and ritual that invite congregational participation. Finally, the congregation worships the whole Christ in all his offices because Christ saves and redeems the whole person. Therefore, liturgy and proclamation must proclaim Christ as prophet, priest and ^[3]
 - Every member participates in a curriculum for Christian initiation and formation. This is integral to the small group system discussed above. The “entry level” groups will focus on catechesis, similar to the early Methodist class meeting. The leaders for this catechetical process will be seasoned, responsible Christians who can be trusted with the care of souls. An essential element of the catechesis will be teaching basic Christian doctrine and the practice of the means of grace (discipline): works of piety (prayer, Scripture, worship, the Lord’s Supper, fasting or abstinence) and works of mercy (feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, visiting prisoners, caring for the sick, peace-making, and witness to Jesus Christ in the world). The goal of catechesis is to form persons as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ who help one another from “holy tempers” and who strive toward growth in holiness of heart and life.
 - Ministry in and with the local community and the world, especially with poor and marginalized people. This ministry both meets physical and material needs while also sharing the good news of God in Jesus Christ in ways that they receive it as good news. This acknowledges that Christians are commanded by Christ to do good to their bodies and to their souls.
1. **Practice evangelism that is contextual and centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ.** The congregation and its leaders understand that the practice of evangelism is a responsibility of all Christians. It is not a program delegated to “professionals.” The congregation understands that evangelism is witnessing to the good news of the coming reign of God revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. “To evangelize is one way of bearing witness to what God has done in Christ and is doing through the Holy Spirit today to convey the good news. One shares the message in both word and deed.”^[4] The evangelical task and responsibility is to share the good news of Christ in ways that it is received it as good news indeed and they desire a relationship with Jesus Christ, freedom from sin, and new life in the reign of God.

^[1] John 13:34-35, NRSV

^[2] Henry H. Knight, III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 95-116.

^[3] for more on the importance of this see John Deschner, *Wesley’s Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 73-77.

^[4] Scott J. Jones, *The Evangelistic Love of God & Neighbor: A Theology of Witness & Discipleship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 15.

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