

## A “Corny” Approach to Disciple Formation

By Beth Fender, Coordinator of New Streams and Rev. Patty Johansen, Co-chair of New Streams Team

One exciting privilege we have in the New Streams ministry is visiting with churches that are studying the *Charting the Course* workbook and developing a disciple formation process unique to their particular context.

The Laura-Monica charge in the Illinois River District is an example of two churches that have stepped outside the expected boundaries, and have created a disciple formation process that encompasses the people of the charge. The two communities are nestled in the midst of an agricultural environment. They are two separate churches, yet the disciple formation process crosses the boundaries, and together Laura and Monica make and form disciples of Jesus Christ.

The leaders of the team developing this process are Dennis and Marcie Whittaker, members of the Laura United Methodist Church. Rev. Marc Brown, pastor of the Laura and Monica churches, has been very involved in participating with the team of approximately 12 lay people from the two churches.

What makes this particular approach to disciple formation so corny? From their vision statement to their stages of faith (discipleship steps), the whole thing is grounded in the metaphor of corn – something that the people of Illinois know a lot about!

The vision statement of the Laura-Monica United Methodist Churches is to provide a fertile environment in which to:

- Plant the seeds of Christianity through faith in Jesus Christ
- Provide opportunities for continuing spiritual nourishment
- Monitor spiritual growth by being an engaging and loving community
- In order to reap a bountiful harvest for the Glory of God’s kingdom.

The stages of faith are described as:

1. Seed: Every person is created in the image of God (with the basic capacity to be filled by Him.)
2. Planted in a fertile environment: Cautiously seeking to know God.
3. Germinated: You have the desire to learn more about God.
4. Emerging: Emerged into the light. You now have an increased desire to grow toward the light.
5. Growing: You are ready to be connected to the Christian community. You have the need to be spiritually fed on a continuing basis. You have the desire to serve and grow in Christ Jesus.
6. Tassel/Pollination: Your relationship with God is the main priority in your life. God becomes what you are about.
7. Yield: Selfless in your desire to serve Christ Jesus. You are committed to investing in the lives of others to help them become faithful disciples.

The metaphor of corn, from seed to yield, provides a rich understanding of our call to make and form disciples who are continually growing deeper in love of God and neighbor. One member of their team loves taking pictures, and has many photos of corn in various stages, including an image of one stalk leaning on another for support – a powerful metaphor for Christian life. The team plans to use these photos as they continue to help the congregations understand the nature of disciple formation. They anticipate a bountiful harvest.

It's exciting to see what congregations are creating as their imaginations are unleashed in the development of disciple formation processes. The New Streams team would love to visit other churches that are working on disciple formation. Your congregation's story might inspire other churches, so that we can all learn together. To schedule a visit from the New Streams Team, contact Beth Fender, Coordinator of New Streams, [bfender@igrc.org](mailto:bfender@igrc.org)