

New Streams at Peoria First United Methodist Church

By Rev. Beth A. McLaughlin, Pastor of Discipleship Ministries

(Note: Since writing this article, Rev. McLaughlin has been appointed to another congregation. However, her description of how a large church encountered the New Streams resources continues to be helpful.)

In 2004 a Discipleship Ministry Team was created at First United Methodist Church in Peoria, involving ministry leaders serving in the areas of Education and Congregational Care. These leaders were responsible for children, youth and adult education ministries, older adult ministries, men's and women's ministries, leader development, counseling, small groups, short-term classes, Stephen Ministry, membership, hospitality and visitation.

In the first year we wrote our purpose: *to prayerfully develop, implement and coordinate a disciple-making process that will involve new members and our entire congregation in growing as disciples of Jesus Christ to prepare us to be witnesses who lead others to Jesus.* And we selected a Scripture that would guide our work: Hebrews 10:19-25 with specific emphasis on 25: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

In 2006 we began using the New Streams workbook, *Charting the Course of Christian Discipleship*, to help us in our process. We already had a clear mission statement in place and a pretty good understanding of what a disciple is, but we used Bible study materials in the workbook to be especially clear as we moved forward and to help us understand what a disciple formation process could look like.

Then, we jumped in to *Charting the Course* Chapter 4, "What Are We Doing?" and put on paper what our current process looked like. We used the matrix in Chapter 6, "How Will We Get There?" to see who we were trying to reach and what ministries we already had in place to reach them. We found where we had holes in our outreach and evangelism and where we needed to be more intentional in offering faith forming opportunities to people at all stages of their relationship with Jesus.

Many members of the team read and discussed Dan Glover's book, *Deepening Your Effectiveness*. Those discussions helped us further understand the gaps and weak areas we needed to address in order to have a healthy disciple formation process at First Church. We now talk about that process in terms of pathways. Pathway I, "Embarking on the Journey," helps new and old members rehearse the basics of the faith and our Wesleyan heritage. Pathway II, "Growing on the Journey," is filled with opportunities for Bible study, growing through life transitions and challenges, and small group discussions. Pathway III, "Leading on the Journey," offers opportunities for leaders to be equipped and encouraged as they listen for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in moving the whole church forward into God's desired future.

Our purpose and our name have changed over these years of discovering the pathways God has for us. We are now the Assimilation Team, and we have three objectives: 1) to connect all who worship with us in caring community, 2) to engage each person in one or more of our pathways for intentional faith formation, and 3) to help everyone find a ministry where they can reach out beyond themselves.

Our disciple formation process will continue to evolve and grow, but we are grateful for the help we found in the New Streams materials that launched us in the direction we are now heading.

Note: This article describes one church's journey toward an intentional disciple formation process. While Peoria First UMC is a large congregation, churches of all sizes have successfully developed disciple formation processes using a variety of materials, including the resources produced through New Streams. Over the next few months, we will share stories of a number of churches who have undertaken this journey. If your church has a story to share, please contact Beth Fender, Coordinator of New Streams, at 217-529-2611 or via e-mail at bfender@igrc.org.