

John 17:20-23 New International Version (NIV)

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— ²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Being raised going to church in South Korea and here in the United States, I have heard the rhyme or a saying close to this so many times. “Here is the church, here is the steeple, open the doors, and see all the people.”

That’s how Jeff Campbell, the associate general secretary of the Discipleship Ministries of the United Methodist Church began in leading a seminar titled “Intentional Discipleship”, just over a week ago in Naperville which a few of our church members and I attended. He pointed out today’s harsh reality that now the rhyme has changed to “open the door and where are the people?” As he presented the grim reality as a leader within our denomination, he alluded to the fact that it’s not the reality of just our denomination, it was nationwide.

Well, we learned two weeks ago from the presentation from our own Vision 2020 team we, the United Methodist Church of Geneva are not exempt from that reality; that over the last 20 years, this church has been experiencing decline in attendance, financial giving, and professions of faith. However, we also heard some good news, that we have obvious and tremendous strength of several vibrant ministries, lives are already experiencing change and spiritual growth, AND that we are a church within a stably growing community with lots of “nones”, people seeking meaningful relationships and opportunities to make a difference in the world. Friends, we have hope, as Pastor Rich preached last week that God is with us and we seek to see God’s vision; that as we strive to see what God is revealing to us and we follow on

the path where God is walking with us, we will be blessed! So, what is this path? What is the mission?

One of the most memorable moments at the “intentional discipleship” seminar was the moment Jeff asked us to turn to the person next to us and ask, “What does your church do?” How would you answer it? Oh, where do we start as members of UMCG? We feed the hungry through holy casserolelers and Third Tuesday supper, we visit the sick and shut-ins through Stephen’s Ministry and Friendly Visitors, we provide for those in need through supporting Lazarus House and Hesed House and having rummage sales, we have great Bible studies and book studies, we play T-ball with the residents at Marklund, the facility that serves disabled youth, which is this afternoon (a plug), we have great worship with second to none music program like today... then Jeff asked... why? So what? What is the mission of your church? What is the mission of the United Methodist Church? Shouldn’t that be the answer to what your church does?

Woo, I know... Those of you who have been a United Methodist for many years, what is the mission of the United Methodist church? To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world... to Make... disciples... ouch...

Jeff continued to say that there is the obvious disconnect that even though the church is “doing” so much, there is still a decline meaning the church being busy doing so much, many have lost the “why” of doing all that is being done; that this keeping busy has become a burden with lots of “should do’s”. Because the compelling “why’s” are lost, the church has lost its effectiveness.

We read in Matthew 28: 19-20 that Jesus gave his disciples a mission, “therefore, go and make disciples of all nations”, that as disciples, followers of Jesus, we are all to go and make disciples, to GO; to take action, to be intentional, to join in a movement, to be on a mission. And as United Methodists, we know what it means to GO. This is how we started, with circuit riders who followed God’s mission to GO, that’s how our church UMCG began right?

So, as we read today for centering for worship a quote from comedian Michael Jr, “when you know your “why”, your “what” has more impact.” We are aiming to be intentional about

our “why” here at UMCG. As we have heard some of the work being done by the subgroups of Vision 2020, we as a church are going to join together in a movement, to shift from how we used to do church and to be the church with intentionality starting with a clear “why” to what we do.

In Jesus’ prayer in John 17 verses 20-23 Jesus prayed for his disciples in his time as well as those who will come to believe after them, the church through the message they carry. “My prayer is not for them alone, I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one.” The message that Jesus instructs his disciples to carry is of “unity”, “as you father are in me, and I in you, so that they may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me.”

And what is this unity? William Barclay’s commentary on this scripture passage says, “It was not a unity of administration or organization; it was not in any sense an ecclesiastical unity. It was a unity of personal relationship. It was a unity of love for which Jesus prayed, a unity in which people love each other because they love Jesus, a unity based entirely on the relationship between heart and heart. Christians will never organize their churches all in the same way. They will never worship God all in the same way. They will never even all believe precisely the same things. But Christian unity transcends all these differences and joins people together in love... If we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no church would exclude any person who was Christ’s disciple. Only love implanted in the people’s hearts by God can tear down the barriers which they have erected between each other.”

So, with some wisdom from a clergy colleague from the Florida conference and ministry coach, Phil Maynard through his book “Shift”, we are going to SHIFT as a church, not just the pastors, or a committee, not just the leaders on the church council, we all are going to shift! First, from Fellowship to Hospitality. That we as a church will shift from having fellowship as a certain time with coffee to Hospitality, an intentional shift of attitude in all areas of the church by all people in this church, to be intentional about building relationships within the church and outside the church. As many people know, we are good with this, but we will strive to do this

better. We all need to shift to live intentionally, to carry the message of God's love, the message of unity, relationship of connecting with others heart to heart: To share the love we each received through Jesus who gave all of himself for us!

For inspiration and as a closing, we are going to watch a short video released by Amnesty International Ireland. 20 years ago, psychologist Arthur Aron discovered that 4 minutes of looking into each other's eyes can bring people closer. Using this discovery, they carried out a simple experiment, during which refugees and Europeans sat opposite each other and looked into each other's eyes. Ordinary people, strangers met for the first time during the experiment.

(view video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7XhrXUoD6U>)

Such a powerful video of what happens when strangers spend just 4 minutes staring into each other's eyes. What would happen if we all strived to give others undivided attention like this? Would they receive the message we carry, the message Jesus gave us? What would happen if we at UMCG are all about building authentic relationships with others?