Developing an Intentional Discipleship System:
A Guide for Youth Ministry
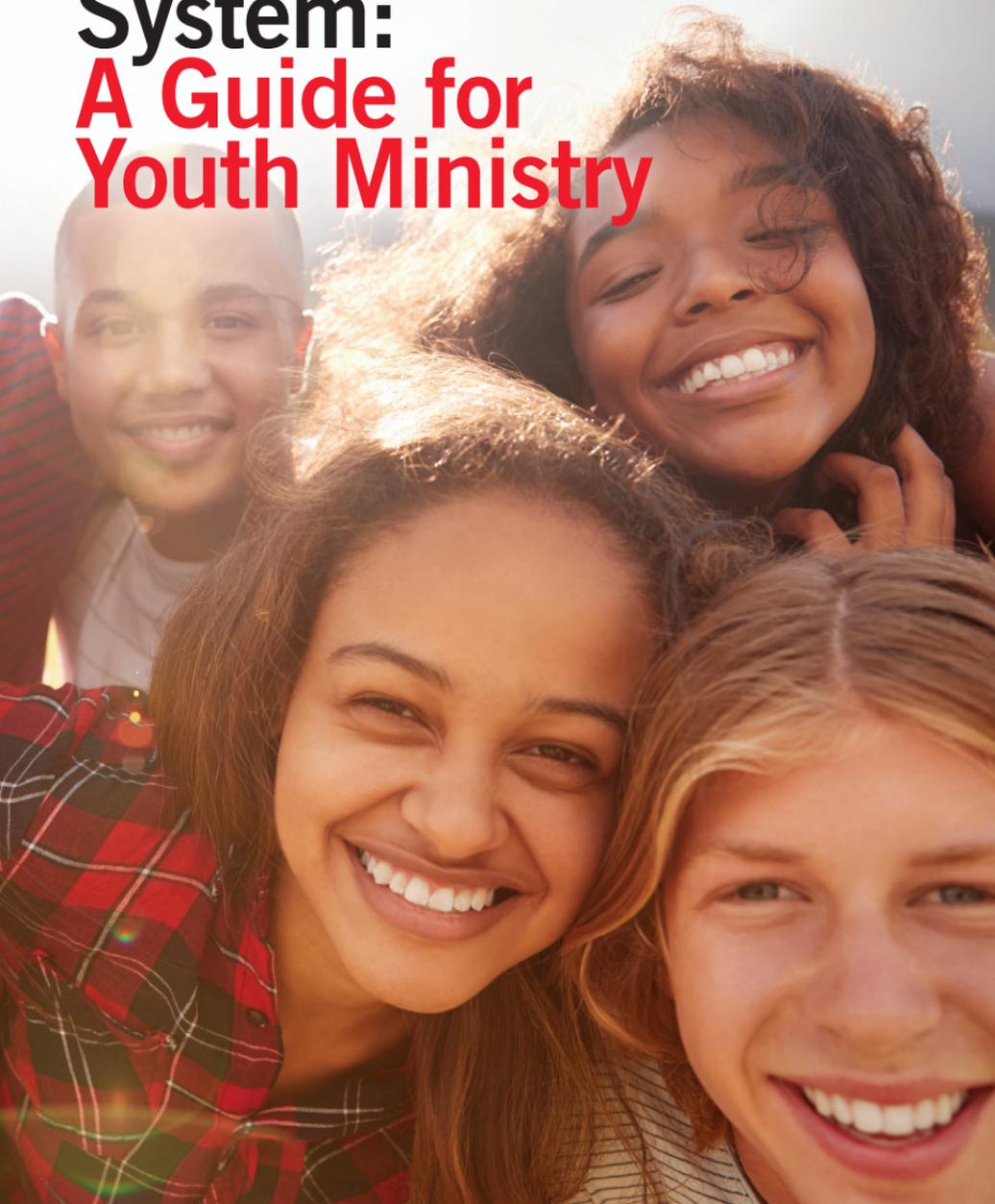
#SEEALLTHEPEOPLE

"We cannot disciple people that we are not in relationship with. Discipleship begins with relationship."

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General Secretary, Discipleship Ministries

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This booklet is a companion piece to:
Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations
by Rev. Junius B. Dotson

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Welcome

This guide serves as a complementary resource to *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius B. Dotson. As a church leader who cares about discipleship and youth, read and familiarize yourself with that resource to gain the most from this publication.

The scientists of the Manhattan Project, a research and development undertaking during World War II that produced the first nuclear weapons, worked long hours. That gave them time to sit and discuss brainy, probably very "nerdy" things, at length. During the course of their long working hours, the subject of aliens (extraterrestrial life) came up. Several scientists remarked on the likelihood of the existence of intelligent alien life. With many billions of stars surrounded by many more billions of planets, the odds are that people do not stand alone as intelligent life in the universe. Several scientists agreed, citing similar statistics and probability. Then, Enrico Fermi raised a simple question, now known as the "Fermi Paradox." "Where is everybody?" In other words, if statistics and probability say that intelligent life exists, why haven't we humans met anybody from another planet?

Those engaged with culture both inside and outside the church can testify that adolescents can feel like alien life. They use different words, different music, different clothes, different technology, and generally have a different experience of reality. A church may not see many young people from their community enter their church building; yet, statistics say that those alien youth are out there. Nearly eleven thousand babies are born every day in the United States, about 26 percent of the US population is under 19 years of age, and about 25 percent of the US population is between the ages of 20 and 40. **That's right!** *Over half the people living in the United States are under 40!* **Are about half the people**

in your church under 40? If you lead a church where the congregation's ages don't match the ages of the community, you're probably asking Fermi's question about young people. Statistics say that young people are out there, but "Where is everybody?" As Dotson notes on page 4 in *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System,* "The problem is not a lack of people. The problem is our inability to see and reach them."

Engaging a church to #SeeAllThePeople means including young people who help do the seeing while needing to be seen. This resource will reframe the question "Where is everybody?" That question comes from the perspective of "We are the church; we are here. If a person doesn't cross the threshold of our doors, we don't see them." The time has come for a new perspective.

Our asking "Where is everybody?" implies our interest in where young persons find themselves on their journey of faith. Let us get beyond the church walls to see and meet youth as they go about the difficult job of navigating today's rapid-fire culture. We know youth are out there; our churches are in the same communities as schools. Many church members have extended families with younger generations.

The key component to an intentional discipleship system with youth is the answer to the "Where are they?" question—not where are they hanging out, not where do they spend their time. Rather, where are they in their journey of identifying and solidifying their beliefs? When we ask that question from this new perspective, it opens the door to reimagining the inputs and outputs of an Intentional Discipleship System.

Personal & Corporate Discipleship

Sam Halverson opens his book *One Body: Integrating Teenagers into the Life of Your Church,* with a reflection on time he spent at a graduation party for a teen he knew in ministry. Many people came to celebrate the graduation and had self-segregated into smaller groups based on how they knew the family. Over here were the parents' work partners; here were the teen's school friends. Connections from school, church, plus family—all had staked out their spots at the party and were interacting largely with one another in small groups. Where did the people come together? The table: the horizontal piece of wood that held the delicious food and drinks for the party. At the table, the disparate people connected to this family came together as a whole to share stories of how they knew the graduating youth and to laugh and celebrate together. At the table everybody saw one another!

Likewise, the table provides a place for the different generations of a church to come together. The Communion table calls to each of us—welcoming and refreshing us as God calls us to remember that we are indeed one body in Christ. *A disciple is one who knows Christ; one who is growing in Christ, serving Christ, and sharing Christ.* As part of one body, we as disciples will interact and influence one another through *discipleship—the process that makes or forms disciples.*

Personal Discipleship (Individual Discipleship)
Equipping and empowering disciples for their own growth.

The Allegory of the Long Spoons tells a parable that fosters our understanding of personal discipleship. As the basic version states it, in both heaven and hell people sit before identical tables of food. Spoons longer than anyone's arms are

the utensils with which to eat the meal. At the "hell" table, the people are starving; they cannot guide food to their mouths because their arms are too short. The greater their hunger, the greater their struggle to put the long spoons into their own mouths. At the "heaven" table, the people are all well fed. Why? They use the long spoons to feed the persons seated across from them. In turn, their neighbors feed them.

You may picture that table of hungry people in your mind and ask, "Why in the world don't they just feed each other?" Perhaps no one has shown the people at that table another way to live. Maybe they know they *ought* to share, but they allow their own struggles to interfere with actual practice. How many young people do we know who struggle to feed themselves spiritually? Do we see issues of youth not knowing their own faith and not knowing how to share it and to help feed their peers? Do we also see youth who are hungry and yet struggle because they do not know how to receive from others? Youth often strongly sense "the way things ought to be" and yet lack the knowledge or experience to implement that sense.

Come alongside youth and show them how spiritual disciplines have impacted your life as a disciple. In doing so, you will both demonstrate and be reminded that growth into spiritual maturity is not about age but about experience. It takes more than knowing what ought to be done. Life as a disciple also involves knowing how to grow. Walking alongside young people in covenant groups, during a faith-development season like confirmation, and worshiping with them can teach them how to hold a spoon and feed others while being fed.

Corporate Discipleship (The Church)

Doing everything we can as a church to provide opportunities for disciples to grow and mature in faith.

Staying with the image of the two tables, remember that both tables are equally set. Think of corporate discipleship as the work of dressing and setting the table. Even people at the table in heaven would go hungry without someone to set the table with plates, long spoons, and the food itself. The church does the work of setting the table: providing place settings of organized generosity, laying a clean tablecloth, making sure the chairs are stable and the right height for the table itself, determining appropriate foods, and preparing that food to perfection. Corporate discipleship involves the work of hosting. The host ensures optimum conditions for the individuals sharing the meal. Much of what you read about intentional discipleship systems will use language and processes that refer to personal discipleship. Those personal actions have a much better chance of developing into a transformative experience with a well-prepared table.

Time Out
Discuss the following with youth leadership:

1. What does the church offer that has fed me in my faith-life?

2. In what ways does the church encourage me to feed others?

3. How do I own my faith? At what tables do I sit to receive spiritual nourishment? Where are they?

4. How is our church setting the table for youth to become more spiritually mature? How is the church's intentionality of setting a table and sharing a place at the table with youth made obvious?

Systems

What is a system? It is a group of things that regularly interact and work together. Many distinct bodies make up the solar system, for example. They all interact with one another. Likewise, the systems that make up the human body, while distinct in their makeup and purpose, interact and influence one another to maintain our physical bodies. A discipleship system involves the interaction and working together of people and church so people themselves may become more Christlike and the church better reflects the kingdom of God.

John Wesley in Sermon 24 notes that "Christianity is essentially a social religion." The social nature of our faith implies that a disciple shares life in community. The community (or congregation or church) provides a social framework where the processes of a discipleship system take place. A community creates an Intentional Discipleship System by asking two questions: What is a disciple? How are disciples formed?

The answers to those two questions help shape an Intentional Discipleship System. No cookie-cutter or one-size-fits-all system works for all people in every context. The reign of God is more diverse and beautiful than that!

System Elements

Systems come in many varieties, and yet every system will have some elements in common. An effective Intentional Discipleship System with youth will include three elements:

Recognizing Spiritual Maturity. The system helps disciples recognize their own growth and maturation through the process. The system will also help other church members recognize and celebrate spiritual growth and maturity in their companion disciples.

Demonstrating the Great Commandment. The system will provide opportunities and guidance to show love for God and for neighbor. Wesleyan traditions call these opportunities "works of piety" and "works of mercy."

Practicing Theology. The system will offer opportunities to practice what is preached, linking action and belief.

Inputs, Processes, and Outputs

To help identify and organize what happens within an Intentional Discipleship System, the components of that system can be labeled clearly as inputs, processes, and outputs within that system. As you read on, and create your own systems, make sure that you can identify each of the three items below.

Inputs: What enters the system or the prerequisites to begin the work in a particular piece of a system. These items exist before a process begins.

Processes: The actions that take place to create growth or change within a system. These actions or activities happen with and to inputs.

Outputs: The end results at the close of a process within a system. Once inputs go through a process, they become outputs.

People, things, and actions can fall in any category, though actions are most often processes.

Time Out
Discuss the following with youth leadership:

1. How do the three elements of an Intentional Discipleship System for youth find expression in our church?

2. How does the social aspect of the youth ministry connect with faith development?

3. Why am I a part of youth ministry here?

4. Who brought me here, and what keeps me here?

5. Why is this place important to me?

Intentional Discipleship Systems

We have covered what creates a system and defined the meaning of *disciples* and *discipleship.* Now, intentionality simply means taking purposeful action and preparing to see results. Notice the subtle difference between *preparing* to see results and *expecting* a certain result. Economists and many other professionals make a living from the unexpected consequences of processes and systems.

Ruth Wakefield, a talented and practiced baker, had crafted her cookie recipe to near perfection over several years. One evening in 1937, Ruth prepared to bake a batch of her favorite sugar cookies. She enjoyed tinkering with her recipes and discovering new and tasty combinations. On this night, she reached for a chocolate bar. She wanted to try and mix chocolate into her dough and make chocolate sugar cookies. She chopped pieces off the chocolate bar and mixed them into her dough, thinking that the chocolate would melt into the dough. However, when she pulled the cookies from the oven, the chocolate hadn't melted at all. The chocolate that she had chipped into the dough remained in place. Ruth Wakefield did not create a chocolate cookie that night. Instead she invented the chocolate chip cookie! A world changer if there ever was one.

If Ruth had *expected* a chocolate cookie to emerge from her oven, she would have faced disappointment. She could have gotten angry and thrown the cookies away. Fortunately for us—and unfortunately for our waistlines—Ruth had *prepared* herself for the results of her experiment. Instead of looking at the output (the cookies) of her system (making and baking the dough) and expecting them to turn out a certain way to be acceptable, she simply prepared herself to accept the results

of a process (chopping and adding chocolate) that she had never tried before.

Expectations resemble nothing more than premeditated resentments. When creating an Intentional Discipleship System, set the table and prepare for the results. Avoid the trap of expecting the system to create identical results from every input. Instead, prepare for the outputs and then study and refine the system so you understand how the processes shape disciples. As Dotson states in *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations,* a system produces what it is designed to produce. Ruth's system was designed to make cookies, and she got cookies in the end. However, by experimenting with her process, by deviating from the inputs to her system, she produced something new and amazing as an output.

Models of Discipleship

Whether you recognize it or not, some system or process exists at your church to help form and inform disciples. Your table is set, but perhaps you don't know who set it, how it was set in the first place, or why things are the way they are. Perhaps as you read, you'll get excited to play with your inputs and processes to see if you can create some new expression of discipleship. As this resource shares some systems and processes, do not feel the need to adopt any of them specifically. Instead, take what you read here about systems and models and then become more intentional about how your church sets the table of discipleship. Become intentional about the system and processes that your church will actually use.

Covenant Model

Many people may find the concept of covenant confusing because of the temptation to simplify the term into more familiar elements. Some view covenants as contracts where two (or more) parties voluntarily agree to provide a service in exchange for comparable value. Consider how a data company promises to connect devices (mobile phones, tablets, and so forth) to its network and provide the ability to make phone calls, send text messages, and access data as long as a person pays the amount owed for the connection. Legal consequences arise if either the company or the person breaks the contract. Contracts often accompany "things."

Some view covenants as promises, commitments to do or not to do something. We can make promises with ourselves, with other persons, or even with groups of people. Broken promises are always tied to an action. While the consequences of breaking a promise don't always involve legality, they can have a major effect on trust. Consider a friend who doesn't show up when he said he would, a politician who promised changes

in government but kept things status quo after election into office, a sibling who promised to keep a secret but ended up spilling the beans. People are not things, and relationships rely on trust. Covenants often contain promises, but they go a step beyond the promises we normally make.

With discipleship, a covenant involves far more than things or actions that people promise to give. *A covenant is a relationship initiated by God to which people respond by living a life of discipleship.* God's covenant of unconditional love and grace with humanity gives people the opportunity to actively participate and overcome sin and death in the process. God relates to people through covenant. While the making and keeping of promises forms an important piece of that relationship, God's covenant is larger than a contract or promise. In God's covenant, grace goes before us, surrounds us in life, and works in us and through our communities. We are born into God's covenant of grace; when we recognize that gift, we may respond to it by living a life of discipleship.

A Covenant Discipleship System creates smaller groups of disciples within the church family. Those groups are accountable to and for one another's spiritual growth. Those groups define how they will live out their discipleship and meet regularly to reflect upon their actions, growth, and challenges. *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* is an excellent resource to better understand this model in youth ministry. A Covenant Discipleship System asks youth to reflect intentionally upon their own spiritual practices, engage those practices regularly, and share with peers how those practices help them grow in faith.

ELEMENTS IN A COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM

Recognizing Spiritual Maturity: Participants in Covenant Discipleship Groups recognize maturity in one another during their meetings. An administrator (or *class leader* to use Covenant Discipleship terminology) can also see and track the growth of disciples by participating in meetings or by noting the results of the disciples' actions in the church and community.

The Great Commandment: Actions supported in a Covenant Discipleship System find their basis in John Wesley's Works of Piety and Mercy. Every intentional act of discipleship is designed to show love for God or love for neighbor. Please refer to the diagram in the *Covenant Discipleship System Sample* for details on the works of piety and mercy.

Practical Theology: Each work of piety and mercy is a tangible activity. The group accountability asks disciples to reflect with one another on how they are growing as a result of their intentional actions.

Inputs: Learn more about these terms in any covenant discipleship resource (www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/covenant-discipleship): Participants, Class Leaders, Group Covenants, Regular Meeting Times, and Spaces.

Processes: Discernment, Organizing and Administering Group Formation, Development and Training of Class Leaders, Exploring Balanced Discipleship, Covenant Creation and Signing, Ongoing Meetings

Outputs: Covenants, Covenant Groups, Spiritual Practice Records

HIGHLIGHTS OF A COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM

- Covenant Discipleship groups provide a structure to reflect upon intentional Christian action.

- Discipleship is a way of following Jesus' teachings and patterning our life after that of Jesus. Mark 12:29-31 sums up what a life of discipleship looks like: to love God and to love neighbor.

- Covenants are God's way of being in relationship with humanity; they are sacred promises. In a life of discipleship, we live into a new covenant with God by doing all we do in remembrance of Jesus and enjoying a permanent and unbroken relationship with God. (Read Hebrews 9:15.)

- Covenant Discipleship combines God's way of relating to people with the opportunity to pattern a life after Christ.

- Groups of disciples who covenant to act out Jesus' teachings intentionally create opportunities to develop deeper relationships with one another, with God, and with their communities.

- Every action we undertake as Christians is a response to our baptism and the baptismal covenant congregations promise on our behalf.

- The General Rule of Discipleship is "to witness to Jesus Christ in the world and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit." (*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016,* ¶ 1117.2a).

- That Rule guides the development of an active and dynamic faith. We can organize faithful responses to Jesus' call to "love God and love neighbor" into four categories: acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion.

- Acts of justice and compassion fall under works of mercy: actions and practices that show love of neighbor.

- Acts of worship and devotion fall under works of piety: actions and practices that show love of God.

- Compassion and devotion are personal acts that people undertake as individuals. Justice and worship are acts that people undertake in groups and in community.

- The Jerusalem cross provides a helpful way to picture a balanced life of discipleship. Refer to the diagram, and notice how the public and private works of piety and mercy are evenly distributed across the quadrants of that cross. A life of balanced discipleship includes participation in acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion.

- Covenant Discipleship provides the opportunity to experience mutual accountability and to actively participate in spiritual growth.

- Each group creates its own covenant that includes a preamble (who the members are as a group and why we meet), four to ten clauses (things we will intentionally do to grow as disciples), and a conclusion (closing prayer and reflection). Find sample covenants in *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth.*

- Participants can view Covenant Discipleship as a way to run the race referred to in Hebrews 12:1-3. Participants in a group are one another's training partners, supporting their brothers and sisters in Christ while running the race alongside them. The race isn't competitive but collaborative.

- Everyday people doing everyday things every day can change the world. In essence, the Methodist movement calls us to shape the world and ourselves through regular activities that intentionally connect us with God by doing the work of Jesus with the support of the Holy Spirit.

COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM SAMPLE

In this system, the four column headings form a repeating pattern of experiences in discipleship. The blank table on the following page helps a disciple reflect upon each of the categories of piety and mercy. If a blank is hard to complete, it can inspire a person to follow through on the action and keep the process of discipleship rolling.

Time Out
Discuss the following with youth leadership:

1. How and when do we use covenants in our ministry?

2. With whom do you currently talk about your growth as a disciple?

3. In what areas are you called to accountability in your life?

4. What benefits could Covenant Discipleship groups bring to our church life? For what ages would this program be best suited?

COVENANT DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM SAMPLE

	Live Christ's Teachings	Learn in Relationship with Others	Experience God through Our Actions	Witness to Growth
Acts of Compassion				
Acts of Justice				
Acts of Worship				
Acts of Devotion				

WORKS OF MERCY

PUBLIC
- Seek justice
- End oppression
- End discrimination
- Address the needs of the poor

PERSONAL
- Do good works
- Visit the sick
- Visit prisoners
- Feed the hungry
- Give generously to the needs of others

JUSTICE • WORSHIP • DEVOTION • COMPASSION

WORKS OF PIETY

PUBLIC
- Public worship
- Communion
- Ministry of the Word
- Christian conference
- Share faith

PERSONAL
- Read, meditate, study scripture
- Pray
- Fast
- Live healthfully

Ages & Stages Model

This model adapts some of the examples provided in *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius Dotson. Some of that initial study was adapted from the work of Phil Maynard.

Developmentally, youths' brains continue to form into their 20s. As their physical bodies grow and mature, so too can their faith. The educational model in the United States uses benchmarks for certain grade levels, clearly stating what a youth should know by a certain point in their education. By completing grades and meeting educational standards, a youth grows toward a level of education identified by the wider culture as "adult-level." Likewise, an Ages & Stages model of an Intentional Discipleship System with youth clearly identifies characteristics of young disciples and stages of growth as they mature.

We may find it tempting to think of this model like a baseball diamond, where a faith experience will move a disciple from first base, to second, to third, and then finally home. However, that image is incomplete. The rules of baseball only allow players to move forward on the base paths. In faith, while the paths and stages of growth may be clear, youth (and adults for that matter!) can move back and forth on the paths created by the system. A system based on ages and developmental stages creates clear stages where beliefs become actions. This system is built around three questions:

1. **What are the characteristics of a disciple in our context?** Create descriptions of what a disciple looks like at each stage of growth.

2. **What is the output of our system?** Clearly identify the characteristics of a maturing disciple in our context.

3. **How does a disciple grow in this system?** Identify markers for stages of growth, and develop processes that help move disciples from stage to stage.

ELEMENTS IN AN AGES & STAGES DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM

Recognizing Spiritual Maturity: The church identifies markers so church leadership and disciples themselves can recognize where they are in their spiritual development. These are called "stages of growth." The characteristics of a maturing disciple can also reflect what spiritual maturity means within the community.

The Great Commandment: The actions created by combining the characteristics of maturing disciples as they go through the stages of growth all link to the Great Commandment.

Practical Theology: Each stage of growth creates opportunities for participants to connect faith with life. Participants do not necessarily take action related to a particular spiritual growth experience. The emphasis comes in how that experience speaks into and shapes everything they do.

Inputs: Characteristics of a maturing disciple defined by the church itself or by denomination-wide definitions, stages of growth and markers to identify those stages, participants answer the three questions in the section above.

Processes: Creation of markers for stages of maturity, self-reflection, or guided reflection of participants on their current stages and direction for desired growth, meetings with church leadership to refine development. In many cases, the process of combining the characteristics of a maturing disciple and the stages of growth create subprocesses for participants to experience.

Outputs: Disciples engaged in a continual growth process, clear markers for each stage of growth, defined expectations for engagement at each stage of growth.

HIGHLIGHTS OF AN AGES & STAGES SYSTEM

• Provide a clear understanding and common language for a community to discuss and recognize growth and change.

• Modifications for cultural understandings of maturity are welcome in this system. Input from leaders can create locally specific and meaningful paths.

• There is freedom to encourage intergenerational growth as people of different ages may be at different stages of their discipleship.

Characteristics of a Disciple (far-left column)
• Worships
• Partakes in community
• Commits to spiritual practices
• Serves and gives generously
• Seeks to be Christlike

Discuss these characteristics and modify them to fit your context. Match the language the youth ministry uses to articulate faith, growth, and expectations.

Characteristics of a Maturing Disciple (far-right column)

For each of the characteristics listed in the left-hand column, develop language that best describes the output of that characteristic when it goes through the processes of your system. The characteristics below are only examples. Your leadership will discuss, modify, define, or recreate these to fit the context of your youth ministry. What will a maturing disciple in your context look like for each characteristic your leadership identifies?

AGES & STAGES DISCIPLESHIP SYSTEM SAMPLE

	Searching	Exploring	Beginning	Growing	Maturing
Worship					
Community					
Spiritual Practices					
Service & Generosity					
Christlike					

Worship—A maturing disciple finds ways to worship more than weekly and invites others to worship together.

Community—A maturing disciple builds and maintains a network of relationships within the church.

Spiritual Practices—A maturing disciple regularly practices spiritual disciplines; can show others how to engage in those disciplines and articulate their growth through those practices.

Service & Generosity—A maturing disciple gives generously in time, talents, gifts, service, and witness, willingly restructuring his or her life and resources in order to give.

Christlike—A maturing disciple partners with others to explore the life and teachings of Jesus.

Stages of Growth (top row of the chart)

These stages of growth represent the qualities a church determines it will recognize. The categories below are only examples and, like the characteristics of a maturing disciple, require discussion, modification, definition, or re-creation by leadership to fit the context of the youth ministry.

Searching—Tries to make sense of life and the surrounding culture. Asks questions like these: "What is my purpose? What do I do that brings me joy?"

Exploring—Attends church/community events but does not necessarily "belong" to the community. May or may not be committed to following Christ. Willingly, and perhaps actively, wrestles with God's presence in his or her life.

Beginning—Understands some elements of faith and has initiated some practices of faith. May or may not be excited about faith and church and may still hold doubts about God, Jesus, and the church.

Growing—Discovers the commitments that make one a Christ-follower. Takes personal responsibility to grow in relationship with Jesus. Starts to integrate faith into life. Looks to Jesus and other disciples for help.

Maturing—Moves toward more fully surrendering and aligning life to Jesus. Desires to learn more: to know, obey, serve, and follow Christ's teachings and life. Begins to make other disciples.

To see an example of a completed chart, refer to *Developing an Intentional Discipleship System: A Guide for Congregations* by Junius Dotson.

Time Out
Discuss the following with youth leadership:

1. What do the current stages of growth look like in our church?

2. How do we set the table to help youth realize what stage they are in? How do we encourage them to grow?

3. In a perfect world, what actions and practices would a maturing youth disciple take on?

Planning Phases & Your Intentional Discipleship System

In class meetings, John Wesley encouraged faithful Methodists to connect and support one another. While questions like "How are you doing?" or "How's it going?" offers an initial connecting point, those questions invite superficial responses. A question like "How is it with your soul?" will draw deeper responses. The most intentional set of questions that John Wesley would have posed in class meetings go more like this, per David Werner: "How is it going with what you are doing?" Werner (*John Wesley's Question*, 2010) notes that stating the answer to that question, "sharing how well you were living out your faith pushed you to live a changed life." Intentional Discipleship Systems require intentionality from the leadership about the processes that make up the system as well as a deliberate approach to the planning, development, and upkeep of the discipleship system.

A significant difference exists between processes and systems. A process has a definite beginning and ending and is part of a system. A system is the overall combination of processes and inputs that creates a specific output. While processes and systems differ from each other, the creation process for both have commonalities. Consider spending time in each of the following phases during the creation and launch of a discipleship system. Project management professionals have identified the phases below, which occur in many different contexts. Often, the initiating, planning, and closing phases do not receive adequate attention. The excitement of launching a new system without proper planning can confuse church members.

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Initiating—The phase of creating buy-in for the creation of an Intentional Discipleship System. Ensure that everyone—church leadership, youth, parents—who will feel the impact of the discipleship system be made aware of the desire to become more intentional about faith development. Discover needs from those who care about the growth of youth in your community. Certainly be in conversation with church leaders, as well as all congregants. This could include all people and organizations connected with the faith community. Consider speaking with other youth ministers in your area, leaders of other youth organizations, and discovering other systems that are vastly changing the lives of youth in your area. Before lots of planning happens, spend time in prayer, discernment, and relationship with your community so your leadership can create a needed and relevant Intentional Discipleship System for Youth. A project management term for people who care or will be affected by a system is *stakeholders.*

Planning—The "devising your doing" phase of creating a system. At this point, leaders make detailed plans and record *how* they will create the system. Include specific parameters like deadlines, budgets, and other elements. Make sure that all stakeholders identified in the initiating phase are aware of the finalized plans. Informing stakeholders can take different forms, based on how influential those stakeholders will be in the development and success of the Intentional Discipleship System. Think of this phase as creating the game plan of how you will create the processes that will make up your system. Back to the table-setting analogy, this phase would entail figuring out how to get all the silverware, napkins, cups, and plates that you will then use to set the table. Plan how to launch the system!

Executing—The phase of actually doing the work to create the system. Take plans and then create the processes that will make up your discipleship system. Hold meetings to inform leadership (especially youth leadership!) of progress. Create new educational materials based on feedback from church leadership. This phase continues until the system is created and launched. Consider having a launch, or kickoff, when the discipleship system is ready for roll out.

Monitoring & Controlling—This phase confirms that the processes receive the needed inputs and generate the desired outputs. Make sure that what you are defining and building in your discipleship system works. Ensure that the system receives everything it needs for success. Check to see that the processes work as designed and that leadership can track disciples as they grow. If an input or process is not generating the expected outcomes, this phase would encourage a leader to return to the planning phase and make changes to the inputs and processes. Remember, a system produces what it is designed to produce.

Closing—The final phase, documenting the successful creation of the system and its implementation into the fabric of your church community. Create any records necessary to repeat or revise inputs, processes, outputs, or the system itself in future generations. Record the outputs, the success stories of the system, in ways that you can share with all stakeholders and market to potential new disciples. Consider the ease of evangelism when people share meaningful, personal experiences.

Time Out
Discuss the following with youth leadership:

1. In what phase does our leadership spend most of its time and energy?

2. Who are the stakeholders (those impacted) if we develop a new Intentional Discipleship System in our youth ministry?

3. How would an intentional focus on discipleship change the way our leaders lead?

Seeing & Reaching
All the People

Thinking intentionally about the discipleship systems in your faith community can cause headaches. Systems are big concepts that require faith, time, and energy in order to set the table for the kind of faith development that a church desires to inspire. That said, take heart and be encouraged in this important work.

Consider the saying that "Shepherds don't make more sheep. Sheep make more sheep" in the context of discipleship systems for youth. People could easily leap to the conclusion that pastors or youth workers do not make more disciples. Disciples make more disciples. In that spirit, remember that youth are often the best evangelists to their peers. Hearing about the transformation that came from the good, hard work of engagement with your Intentional Discipleship System will sound a lot more intriguing to a new youth when it comes from the mouth of their peers as opposed to an adult. Recall the Allegory of the Long Spoons. You may ask youth to invite friends and share their stories to encourage new young people to join the flock. Your youth may realize that they ought to do that, but they may not know how. Perhaps the maturing disciples in your system deserve the chance to learn to tell their stories and intentionally share their faith.

Consider Isaiah's (Isaiah 11:1) prophecy that a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse. An old, gnarled stump of a tree in a barren wasteland still held the potential to give life. How? Its root system. Below the surface, that stump still worked to draw nutrients from the surrounding soil. Likewise, the Intentional Discipleship Systems that you create and maintain for youth may not be the most obvious aspect of your ministry. Your system may reside below the surface. Yet, no

matter how barren or desolate the landscape of your ministry, that system has the potential for transformation and life.

Consider ants at your picnic. You've spread a blanket with an excellent collection of food. It's a beautiful, sunny day in the field you've chosen. You open the food to begin the feast... and then the ants show up. Do they swarm all at once? No. Just one or two scouts at the beginning. All your planning and preparation only draws a couple of lonely ants. These ants will find the feast you've prepared for them and return with more from their colony. After a while, unless you intervene, a steady stream of ants returns with the scouts to enjoy the feast. At the beginning of your systems work, you may feel disappointed in the returns on your investment of time and energy. However, remember that systems in and of themselves exist to support personal and corporate discipleship. An effective system doesn't necessarily guarantee huge numbers of youth. Even so, an effective system will generate transformative experiences for those first youths who participate in it, and they will be your best advocates, eventually maturing to the point where they will invite others to sit at your ministry's table and become disciples.

Consider the support that agencies like Discipleship Ministries and Global Ministries offer in terms of community mapping. (http://communitymappingforhealthequity.org/what-is-community-mapping) The best Intentional Discipleship Systems maintain an awareness of the community that surrounds a church family. Mapping out and understanding the demographics, challenges, and lifeblood of the context and neighborhood in which your ministry exists will enhance any discipleship system. Creating a system without understanding the context of the larger community risks the creation of an irrelevant system. Youth care about relevance. For something to matter, that thing must make a difference in their lives. Know what life looks like outside your church before you create your system. Take the time to see and know

others who are not connected to the faith community; only then will the system you develop have easier access and feel both familiar and relevant to new disciples.

Appendix

Intentional Discipleship with Youth Across the Connection

Stories and examples of Intentional Discipleship Systems currently in use around the United Methodist Church will be shared on **www.SeeAllThePeople.org**, hosted by Discipleship Ministries. If you would like to share what discipleship looks like in your youth ministry context and potentially be listed on that website, please email cwilterdink@umcdiscipleship.org

For Further Study

- *Masterpiece: The Art of Discipling Youth* (2012) by Paul Martin

- *Teaching Teenagers in a Post-Christian World: Cultivating Exploration and Ownership* (2014) by Jake Kircher

- *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation* (2016) by Terry Linhart

- *Building a Discipling Culture* (2014) by Mike Breen

- *Charting a Course of Discipleship: A Workbook on Christian Discipleship* (2012) by Teresa Gilbert, Patty Johansen, Jay Regennitter

- *Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (2016) by Jake Mulder and Kara Powell, and Brad Griffin

- *Building Spiritual Muscle* (2017)

- *FaithMinder Journal* (2017) by Chris Wilterdink

- *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* (2016) by Chris Wilterdink

References (In Order of Appearance)

- "Fermi Paradox" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fermi_ paradox

- "Meet Generation Z: Forget Everything You Learned About Millennials, Sparks & Honey" https://www.slideshare.net/ sparksandhoney/generation-z-final-june-17

- *One Body: Integrating Teenagers into the Life of Your Church* by Sam Halverson (The Youth Cartel, 2014) https://theyouthcartel.com/product/one-body/

- "Sermon 24, John Wesley." http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-24-upon-our-lords-sermon-on-the-mount-discourse-four/

- "Allegory of the Long Spoons." https://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/Allegory_of_the_long_spoons

- "Ruth Wakefield and the Chocolate Chip Cookie" http://www.socialstudiesforkids.com/funfacts/ chocolatechipcookie.htm

- *Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth* by Chris Wilterdink https://bookstore.upperroom.org/ Products/Default.aspx?bookid=DR793

- "John Wesley's Question: How Is Your Doing?" PDF Download, Werner, David. 2010. http://place.asburyseminary.edu/cgi/viewcontent. cgi?article=1006&context=asburyjournal

- "What Is Community Mapping?" National Community Mapping Institute. http://communitymappingforhealthequity.org/what-is-community-mapping

Find support and information for Covenant Discipleship at www.UMCdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/covenant-discipleship

About Young People's Ministries

UMCYoungPeople.org

This booklet comes from Young People's Ministries (YPM), a unit of Discipleship Ministries. We are a global organization that supports youth, young adults, and those who invest in the lives of young people. We create and sustain relationships that help make young disciples, so that we can help integrate young people into the life of the church and help them live out their faith in the world.

UMCYoungPeople.org is full of connections and support for ministry with young adults and youth, and YPM program staff are available as consultants, speakers, and leaders as a part of their ministry. Consult our website for contact information!

Events:
- **Global Convocation** - Leadership development and the legislative gathering for young people in the UMC. Every four years, 2018 in Johannesburg, SA.

- **The YOUTH Event** - The national event for UMC youth in the USA. July 10-14, 2019 in Kansas City, MO. **YOUTH2019.com** or on social media @youth2019

Resourcing
- **youthworkercollective.com** - Lessons, devotions, coaching, games, and more written by and for youth workers. Make this the first place you look for quality youth ministry resources in the Wesleyan tradition!

- **conspiritor.co** - The Conspiritor Collective: a gathering place for creatives. Discover, create, and submit art that revives the church's mission in the world. Find young artists creating in the Christian tradition!

Written Resources

- ***Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth***
  https://bookstore.upperroom.org/Products/Default.
  aspx?bookid=DR793

- ***Building Spiritual Muscle: A Six-Week Journey to a
  More Powerful Faith*** - https://bookstore.upperroom.org/
  Products/DR862/building-spiritual-muscle.aspx

- ***Sex: A Christian Perspective on our Bodies, Decisions,
  and Relationships*** - 4 core sessions designed for 6,
  7, 8 grade youth. New modules added regularly at
  ypmfaithandsex.org

Grants & Scholarships

- **YouthServiceFund.org** - By youth/for youth grant program.
  Deadline of June 1 for funding the following year.

- **Scholarship.umc.org** - Grants for Ministries with Young
  People applications at umcyoungpeople.org

About the Author

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This and many other See All The People resources are available for download and purchase at:

https://store.umcdiscipleship.org

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