

What's Your Plan?

Vital Congregations by Douglas Ruffle, Coordinator of Congregational Development

The gospel of John (Chapter 5) recounts the story of an encounter between Jesus and an infirm man beside the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. The infirm man had been there, posted by the pool, for thirty-eight years. The first thing that Jesus said to the man upon seeing him was, "Do you want to get well?"

It was a good question. If the man had by lying there for thirty-eight years seeking a cure for his infirmity, one would wonder if he really wanted to be well. In thirty-eight years he could not come up with a plan of wellness? The man was ready with an excuse: "Sir, when the water is stirred, I don't have anybody to put me in the pool. By the time I get there, somebody else is already in." The pool of Bethesda was known for its curative powers. One had to get into the pool when its waters were stirred.

I reflect on this passage of scripture in light of churches that have been going along for years without any plan of action for making disciples of Jesus Christ. Like the infirm man, why can't they come up with a plan? Too often, the church is filled with excuses for why they don't have a plan. "We're too old." "We live in an area where there are a lot of non-Christians." "It's the Pastor's job." Jesus told the man to get up and carry his bedroll and to start walking. And he did. The passage in the Bible underscored Jesus' willingness to cure even on the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus' first question still resonates. "Do you want to be well?" You would think that in thirty-eight years the infirm man could have elicited the help of others. He could have come up with a plan to make sure he could enter the pool when its waters were stirred.

The challenge is there for many of our United Methodist Churches. What is your plan for making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world? What are the goals and strategies to help you realize your plan?

The Office of Congregational Development exists to help churches come up with a plan. We have resources and tools to help. Give us a call or send us an email to start the conversation. Email: druffle@gnjumc.org. Tel: 732-359-1046.