



Partners in Making Disciples of Jesus

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In the fourth year of planting Wesley's Place Faith Community on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, we have learned a few important lessons. The first is that our mission of "being an intentionally diverse place where people connect with God and each other" is central to all we do. This may not come as a surprise to many congregations, but that statement guides ALL of our decision making.

Have a new idea? Interested in beginning a new outreach to the community? Should we spend money on it? As good as the idea might be, if it does not fit our mission then perhaps there is a better place for it. We all do good things. We all try to show love to our neighbors. What are the good things that your congregation does that do not fit the mission of that church? We have to be clear about who we are, what we are about, and why we exist. Otherwise it is so easy to chase the next shiny new idea and forget what our focus is all about. There is no more crucial time to remember that in the UMC than right now.

The other lesson we have learned is that together we can accomplish God-sized dreams. This has become evident in several areas of ministry unique to the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. Our missional incarnational (serving others through relationship building) approach to ministry means that we function as several nimble small groups

rather than one larger congregation. We need to build positive relationships with people so we can introduce Jesus and then God can do the work of transformation. Partnering with God in making disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world begins with building relationships. Five small groups numbering around 60 in total gather in various places on different days of the week. They meet in taverns, coffee shops, office buildings, and restaurants. None of this would be possible without partnering with businesses and community groups in the area. We do not currently own our own space so we share with others! Being present and visible in the community is essential to building relationships with people that have forgotten, wandered away from, been hurt by, or were never invited to a church. Our primary contact points (think entry points on a discipleship pathway) are:

Pastor on Duty

I go to a rotation of restaurants during the week at lunch time. At my table I set up a sign that says "Pastor on Duty: How can I pray for you?" It is amazing what conversations can be had simply by being available. This would not be possible without a unique partnership with area restaurants and Wesley's Place. It took almost one year in some places to build enough of a relationship to inquire if I could take up some table space. This has become a wonderful entry point for people.





ReFresh

ReFresh is a weekly student ministry that takes place at the University at Buffalo (UB) Medical School. Every Wednesday we provide a free lunch for students along with some sort of spiritual formation. We regularly rotate between Bible study, guest speakers, praise singing and prayer, and students sharing about their faith journey. If there is a fifth Wednesday that month, we play a trivia game. The games usually spoof popular culture and point toward faith. We have up to 35 students each week. Some of the topical conversation that have brought the largest groups have to do with student debt/personal finances and self-care. This ministry would not be possible without a unique relationship with the Christian Medical and Dental Association and UB. Some of the local restaurants discount or occasionally donate food for the meal!



Oishei Children's Hospital (OCH)

Twice a week, we go to OCH to love on the patients, their families, and the staff. Currently, pastoral care is provided on the pediatric oncology and pediatric intensive care units. These are two high-stress places for all people involved. Families are under tremendous stress both financially and relationally. Hospital staff have a ton of stress because of the complexity and level of care that is needed on their floors. This ministry came to be by looking at the campus around us and realizing that no one is caring for the 15,000 medical staff that work on it. We sought some training on things such as vicarious



trauma and family systems. During visits we talk with people, we pray with people, and we hand out items such as toys, Tim Horton's gift cards, and unscented hand lotion. Other than the training, this ministry is possible because of partnerships with local churches and the Niagara Frontier District United Methodist Women. We receive toy donations and \$5 gift cards from these groups. Every donation has contact information on it and a QR code for Wesley's Place. Every week people are directly impacted and introduced to faith and we leave the room with information in their hand. If partnerships with local congregations, district UMW, and Oishei Children's Hospital were not nurtured this ministry would not be a reality.

Community Entities

Wesley's Place is a regular presence at many community organizations. This takes time, but the opportunity for learning about the community and building relationships is amazing. Remember that we need to build relationships to introduce Jesus. Attending Block Club meetings and Rotary meetings have yielded need in the community that we could rise to meet. They also are great places to meet people that have the desire to serve others. Some of the community agencies have provided grants for ministries with the poor. Other agencies have connected us with schools in the area with specific needs that we are working on meeting now. Inviting the community to a service opportunity has become our greatest entry point at Wesley's Place!

There are many other collaborative partners, especially other United Methodist Churches that provide resources for this to be possible. Some provide needed items. Some provide additional volunteers. Some provide financial contributions. As Wesley's Place continues to work with people early on their faith walk, financial support is crucial. We are working on developing a theology of generous stewardship, but that takes time! We are also looking for a partner in helping us to secure a more permanent home.



Historically, the United Methodist Church has worked together in a connectional way as a witness to the world of Jesus' life changing love. Methodists have established schools, hospitals, shelters, feeding programs on a large scale. We have worked with unlikely partners to eradicate malaria in sub-Saharan Africa. We have established a Mission HUB in the Upper New York Conference. All of these things were possible because of partnerships and relationships. If we are to continue that faithful witness, we will need to reclaim our connectionalism and move toward our mission together.

Learn More

If you are interested in learning more about Wesley's Place or more of the lessons that were learned, Contact the Rev. Gregg Stierheim:



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