About Disciples of Welcome

**Program Vision:** The past five years in the U.S have brought intense partisan polarization, rising white nationalist movement, and in the United Methodist Church, immense pain over differences on human sexuality. North Carolina is on the front lines of these challenges, with pastors often feeling isolated and struggling to figure how to have conversations across difference that lead to greater understanding and stronger community. Church leaders are asking, how do we follow Jesus in these times? How do we lead congregations into having courageous dialogue and model moral courage in the face of division and despair?

There is no silver bullet solution, no magic formula. Instead, what faith leaders need in this moment is a cultivation of the heart, a community of mutual support, and the building of new skill sets to become ambassadors across multiple divides. Such is the vision of Disciples of Welcome, a learning journey for United Methodist pastors serving in North Carolina.

Running from August 2019 to Spring 2021 through the leadership of Faith Matters Network and The People's Supper, Disciples of Welcome aims to support North Carolina in becoming a national model for social healing by catalyzing pastors as systems change agents that embody an alternative to the ruptures that dominate our culture from our politics to the pews. Rooted in the Biblical call to hospitality and the theology of the table, the cohort experience will equip participants with tools, practical wisdom, and relationships to practice the work of bridging divides in vital ways.

The Disciples of Welcome Cohort will provide a container for 50 pastors serving congregations in North Carolina, in a learning journey model that draws from popular education pedagogy and builds on the central role of hospitality and the table in the U.S. South. Popular education is designed to draw out the knowledge and wisdom participants already have in addition to deepening that knowledge through a cycle of action, reflection, and offering new information and skills. The program will integrate core teachings from thought and “heart” leaders in the work of bridge-building and radical hospitality, as well as concrete skill trainings that participants can apply directly to their context. Using the lessons learned along the way, participants will be supported to craft a context-specific plan to create “Brave Space” that holds complexity and difference in their community meaningfully and with courage, as well as monetary resources to make that plan possible.

While this program is designed with a particular focus on rural contexts, it is open to all UMC clergy serving in NC, suburban and urban included.
Program Elements and Commitments:

- **Monthly video calls** (alternating between calls with experienced leaders in bridge-building and smaller peer group reflection calls self-selected by geography or shared interests). *Video calls to be hosted on the first Tuesday or Wednesday of each month during daytime hours, excluding December and Holy Week. Full call schedule will be released in July.*
- **Mini-grants of $1500 per cohort member** to bring a vision for social healing in your congregation or local community to life.
- **One-on-one coaching** to guide personal and professional growth in the ministry of bridge-building, including concrete feedback and support on plan for use of mini-grant funds.

**Disciples of Welcome is for you if you are a current UMC pastor in North Carolina longing to:**

- *Create “Brave Space”* for transformative dialogue across divides of race, politics, gender/sexuality, religion, rural/urban, and more, both within your congregation’s walls and within your broader community;
- *Build relationships* with other pastors in your region who are invested in holding space for courageous conversations;
- *Learn* from experienced leaders from across the globe in the work of bridge-building and social healing;
- *Understand* how forces of power, privilege, and oppression shape conversations across difference, and how to wisely address current and historical social harm;
- *Take action* to create a plan, in collaboration with lay leadership, to leverage the power of storytelling, arts and the table as a tool for change in your church or local community.
- *Practice* habits for sustaining yourself personally and spiritually as a bridge-builder in your community.

**About Faith Matters Network:** Established in 2014, Faith Matters Network equips leaders within and across social movements with resources for connection, spiritual sustainability, and accompaniment. As a co-founder of *The People’s Supper*, an initiative aiming to repair the breaches in our interpersonal relationships across political, ideological, and identity differences, since early 2018 Faith Matters Network has been equipping UMC clergy in rural North Carolina to have courageous conversations in their churches and broader communities. Disciples of Welcome builds and expands upon this work.