Pioneers seem rare these days.

While new information seems abundant and cheap, doing new things with the new information is rare. We humans, being chronic creatures of habit, seem to fall back into old ways of thinking, being, and doing, no matter how much new information comes our way. Information alone does not motivate us to change.

Nowhere is this truer than in the church. While every indicator tells us that the church in the west (of every denomination, every race, and every geographical location) is on the decline, we seem slow to change. When faced with information about decline, most of us in the church instinctually begin to circle the wagons. "It's time to strengthen the faithful, not try something new," we think. "Let's take care of our own, and then, when we are strong enough to care for ourselves, then we can reach out to others," we say.

Pioneers are rare these days.

The people you'll meet inside this newsletter are stepping outside of the old and familiar. They are seeking to lead us into communion in new places with new people. Here's the thing: while they are pioneering our work in new places with new people, the work they are doing is anything but new.

Pioneering new relationships based on love is the ancient work of the God called Trinity, and of the people called Methodist. The God who sends Jesus Christ, who sends the Holy Spirit, who sends the apostles, who sends John Wesley, who sends the pastors who started our churches, this God has always been in the business of sending pioneers out.

This newsletter is an introduction to the newest people who are called to that ancient work.

While their craft of creating new spaces for new people to be gathered in the communion is old, it is a new thing in our day to see people step out into unfamiliar places and meet unfamiliar people in order to embody the deep love which is creating us all.

Maybe you’re called to do that work, too.

Maybe you’re a pioneer.

The New Room Society is seeking to gather together the pioneers within the North Carolina Conference. If you, like the people here in this newsletter, feel called to move into new spaces in order celebrate communion, we want to hear from you. Contact our office, let us discern and celebrate with you the call that God has laid on your life.

Pioneers may seem rare these days, yet by God’s grace, they are leading us into God’s preferred future, where all are at the table sharing in God’s grace together.
Hunger looks different in every place. Hunger sometimes looks like a homeless man’s roadside sign, a child who goes without breakfast, or an addict’s fidgeting nervousness. Hunger sometimes looks like angry questions or tears of loneliness.

The people of Asbury UMC are learning again about hunger that brings people to the table – especially perplexing questions that push and prod the vacant places beside the table, like the hungry child who goes without breakfast, or the addict's fidgeting nervousness. Hunger sometimes looks like a homeless man's roadside sign, a table set up in a public square, a rented building, or a public park? What does buildingless belief look like? What if you are a leader with virtually no debt have the burden of operating costs and maintenance which is ever-growing and never ceasing.

In John 6:35, Jesus says, “I am the bread of life whoever comes to me will never be hungry.” The journey to inviting new people to the table and into communion with Christ starts with the realization of a common need for the bread of life. We are called to remember that while our tables and lives are full, other’s tables and lives may be empty. The call of a new faith community is to be a place that spreads a full table and opens our lives to those who are seeking and hungry.

“The hungry he has filled with good things” (Luke 1:53). Our prayer for the coming year spreads a full table and opens our lives to the hungry, often our people have reached the realization of a common need for the bread of life. Our prayer for the coming year is that this will be so in our neighborhood as well.

What happened? In a world with bigger and bigger buildings, I believe that Christ followers are beginning to realize how unsatisfying consumer Christianity is. Just because you have a great building, an amazing music program, and a preacher who can make you laugh and bring you to tears, it doesn’t mean you are becoming a disciple. The hole in our soul remains despite moving worship experiences and inspiring messages. We crave more. Those seeking to be real, radical disciples crave living examples of discipleship, not perfect ones. We crave relationship, not showmanship. We crave community, not just crowds.

We crave living examples of discipleship, not perfect ones. The humanity of notable Christian leaders and their personal stumbles have caused most of us to realize that there are no perfect disciples. I think we knew that all along, but when their public image of perfection starts to decay, so does our faith in the community of believers. Now we are at a point where we have given up on the myth of the perfect pastor, and simply seek a living example of discipleship, with all of its messiness and struggles. This kind of discipleship only happens when you live in a close community.

Not only do we desire living examples, but we also want real interaction with those who lead us spiritually. We crave relationship, not showmanship. Real disciples want to walk with Jesus in an intentional relationship with others who are seeking to follow Him. Yes, we love a well-delivered message, but more importantly, we love a well-lived life.

We crave community, not just crowds. It seems everywhere I go there is a crowd and it’s exhausting. I love big venues filled with cheering fans or engaged in powerful worship, but for me, those experiences are like Christmas and my birthday, great for celebration but hard to handle every day. In a crowd, you are one of the masses, and it can be awesome. In real life with its daily struggles and pain, however, the crowd simply reinforces the isolation of our culture. During those times I like the smaller community. I embrace those twenty to fifty people in my life who hold me up to live at a higher level; hold me accountable to the standards of who God wants me to be, and hold me together when my life falls apart.

Lastly, while some studies show that believers continue to gather in large churches, with great worship experiences, and powerful teaching, they are attending fewer Sundays per year and expect more and more from the place and the preacher than ever before. When they come to consume, they want the best product on the market. What if we realized that with the decline in soul satisfaction of consumer spirituality, we are coming to the end of a building based Christianity? What if we actively begin to move back to gathering house to house, home to home? What if every time the whole community gathered it was around the Eucharist table set up in a public square, a rented building, or a public park? What does buildingless belief look like? What if you are a pioneer planter who is more concerned with open hearts than abandoned buildings?

Please support our planters with your payers for communion to be celebrated in new ways in their lives and in their communities.

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