

A church for disciples (John 1:29-42)

So often the call to discipleship slides into becoming a call to church membership.

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Near my seminary is Broadway United Methodist Church, which for years has practiced a form of neighborhood "name, bless, and connect" ministry that seeks to discern how God's spirit is moving in the community around it. Building on the philosophy of asset-based community development--along with a robust pneumatology--the members and leaders of Broadway are, in my view, gradually redefining what it means to be a church for the community.

So often the call to discipleship, when it is framed in evangelistic terms, slides into becoming a call to church membership--a consolidation of discipleship into a visible church. But what if the call to discipleship, to "come and see," is first and foremost a call that comes *from* the church *to* the church? A call that asks the church to retain its sense of joyful anticipation--even after Advent!--for the surprises that God has yet to reveal?

Consider the following anecdote [from Broadway](#):

For 30 years, Broadway had tutored neighborhood kids after school. And for 30 years, the neighborhood dropout rate kept climbing higher. So Broadway stopped tutoring.

For decades, the church had been feeding people out of its pantry. But local health officials were telling Mather that the No. 1 health problem facing the neighborhood wasn't starvation.

It was obesity -- often leading to diabetes.

To Mather, it made no sense to hand out carbs in a box and peaches in cans of heavy syrup to people who were overweight.

"We're not only not helping," he concluded. "We're actively making people sicker."

Instead of handing out food, Mather hopes to help people find long-lasting solutions to problems such as hunger. He likes to tell the story of Adele, who came to the food pantry for supplies for her family and ended up, a year and a half later, using her gifts as a cook to open her own restaurant.

One of the most striking things about Broadway's move toward a more external sense of God's presence in the world is how thoroughly the old expectations about the church's role needed to be rewired. The call to the church's members was to actively de-center the church's agency in favor of a more anticipatory approach: what might be found in the community? The move is away from the church as protagonist and toward the church as the one exercising the power to name and bless what the Spirit is doing, and to foster connections.

What do you think of this method of "name, bless, and connect" as practiced by churches? What are its possibilities within your context?