



# One in Spirit

## An Ecumenical Curriculum for Local Congregations

The Council of Bishops  
The United Methodist Church  
2018





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## Preface

One of Jesus' mandates to His followers is to be united in a way that resembles a functioning, healthy body. In fact, an overarching theme of Scripture is the importance of unified relationships among the community of believers. It could even be argued biblically the foundation of Christianity is relationship (our relationship with God and our relationship with others in God's Creation). However, the Body we currently inhabit is fractured to the point of interfering with our witness. This curriculum will seek to address that reality and offer suggestions for bringing the Body back to visible unity.

The curriculum is offered by The United Methodist Council of Bishops. It can also be accessed online as [www.unitedmethodistbishops.org](http://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org). Its goal is for the participants to commit together to enter into some sort of ecumenical and/or interreligious ministry in their local area. Although the focus is between United Methodists and Christians of other traditions, the same principles can be used within The United Methodist Church itself. The hope in writing this curriculum is for United Methodist Christians to become more engaged in our call from Jesus "to be one."

Appreciation is given to Mrs. Sarah McKinney and Mrs. Cindy Thompson who helped put together this curriculum and initially piloted it. Since this was written in a North American context, parts of it may not apply across the Connection.

If you would like to create a similar curriculum for your context, please feel free to take what you find here and adapt and translate it. There is no restriction.

As you are working through the curriculum and have questions, please contact either your annual conference Committee on Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships or the Council of Bishops' staff, as listed below.

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## Introduction

As a United Methodist clergyperson having served in itinerate ministry for twenty years, I look around the church and realize it is more difficult to be a Christian leader today than it has been at any other time during my life. Not only have Christians lost our majority voice in North American and European cultures, our clergy are frequently mistrusted, and our members are often ridiculed. Within societies around the world, people are self-sorting into more and more rigid cultural groupings over things like: political parties, tribes, economics, religious affiliation, race and justice stances. Sadly, we are sorted even within our own faith communities by some of the very same categories.

And yet, as a pastor looking at my beloved United Methodist Church, I also realize now is a time of unprecedented opportunity. No matter in what culture we live, there is a clear need for a witness of the kind of Love Christ has taught us, a love that surprises people with its vulnerability, commitment to equality and open generosity. There is a need for the radical way of living life that Jesus modeled. There is a need for the best of what the Ecumenical Movement can reveal. We cannot "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" unless potential disciples look at us and believe what we are saying. As long as we are not actively seeking the unity Christ desires, we are less likely to appear authentic.

This curriculum is an offering from the Council of Bishops to help United Methodists strengthen our witness of unity. It is designed to help small groups within United Methodist congregations work together to make witnesses of the kind of love Christ taught.

What follows is a short, accessible book, which is a small group curriculum divided into six chapters. Leaders will find questions for discussion at the end of every session. Each chapter can stand alone but will aid a much deeper conversation if it is engaged as one session of a six-session curriculum. The focus audience consists of small groups or classes within local United Methodist congregations, but it can also be adapted for use by an ecumenical group of participants from several, diverse congregations (there are suggestions on how to make that adaptation in the appendix). It is written from a perspective of the authors' home culture of the United States of America and must be received as such, but United Methodists from across the Connection are welcome to adapt what they find here for use in their contexts. The person who is facilitating needs to have no prior knowledge of ecumenical ministry, but it is suggested he or she be familiar with each chapter before leading its corresponding session. The goal of this curriculum is for participants to enter into some sort of ecumenical ministry in their local area as a part of their on-going congregational witness.

The assumption is one chapter will be covered each time the group gathers for study. Those sessions are:

Session 1: "The Scriptural Calling" (*An overview of several passages of Scripture which point us toward unity*)

Session 2: "Unity: Past, Present and Future" (*An overview of the Ecumenical Movement and the theological grounding of the movement for Christian unity*)

Session 3: "Limits of Acceptable Diversity" (*An honest conversation of tensions between unity and holiness, and unity and justice*)

Session 4: "Holy Conferencing" (*Suggestions on how to have healthy dialogue with others that could be used practically*)

Session 5: "What Is The United Methodist Church Doing?" (*An explanation of how our denomination is trying to live our calling of unity currently, both locally and through the ministries of the Council of Bishops*)

Session 6: "What Can We Do?" (*A group of suggestions for personal witness, the witness of local congregations and the witness of our denomination*)

May God bless you as you enter into this study, for the sake of the witness of Christ's church.

*Rev. Dr. Jean Hawxhurst*

Ecumenical Staff Officer

The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church

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## Facilitator's Guide

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate this study. Our prayer is it will be a holy, motivating and productive time for you and those participating in the study with you. If each local congregation will catch Christ's spirit of unity, then, the universal church will have a much better chance of moving and growing together as one.

We have some suggestions on how to prepare and lead each session. Those will follow in outline form. However, please feel free to adapt what you will read here to work best in your local context.

- We suggest each session be planned to take place in one hour. This will work well for Sunday school classes, evening studies or small groups.
- We also recommend you begin each session with a fellowship gathering time as people arrive. This extra time would be added before your hour-long session begins.
- You might want to have quiet music playing in the background and simple snacks available to enjoy together.
- When it is time to start the session, invite participants to bring their snacks to where the meeting will take place, and turn off the music as a signal you are ready to begin.
- You may, at least for the initial sessions, also want to have name tags available if the participants do not already know each other.
- And, for the work of the actual session, you will probably also want to provide Bibles, paper and pens each week.

During each session, there will be some additional needs. For example, during Session 2 you may want to have Books of Discipline available for participants to examine. If these kinds of special needs are requested, they will be listed in the Outline of the Class.

We have also included both a guiding Scripture passage and an ecumenical prayer at the beginning of each session. You may use those for your own devotion as you prepare to facilitate, or you may want to share them at the beginning of the session with all participants.

## *John 17:20-22*

*<sup>20</sup> “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one...”*

SESSION 1

# The Scriptural Calling

## FOCUS

This session gives an overview of several passages of Scripture which point us toward unity.

## GOAL

Participants will understand the biblical basis for the call to unity and be able to share at least one or two of those passages with others.

## SCRIPTURE

For this first lesson, we offer Ephesians 4:4-6: *“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”*

## PRAYER

For this first session, we offer a prayer in the form of a hymn text. Bishop William Boyd Grove wrote the words for the hymn entitled *Christ, the Church You Gave Is Broken* for the January 20, 2002 Inaugural Celebration of Churches Uniting in Christ. It is based on John 17:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 12:27, and is sung to the tune *Cwm Rhondda*. This is the fourth stanza:

*“Christ, the church you gave is broken,  
Mend it now through us, we pray;  
That the message it has spoken  
May be heard and lived always.  
Make us one now, make us one now,  
For the glory of your Name,  
For the glory of your Name.”*

## BACKGROUND READING

Across the United Methodist connection there are many churches, small groups and individuals who actively practice the biblical principle of unity. Unity is best defined by Jesus’ prayer for His followers “to be one” as He and God are one (John 17). That means individuals, local congregations and whole church communions are called by Christ to be connected with each other, engaged in ministry together, and living together as parts of Christ’s holy Body. This principle of unity at all levels of the church is known as “ecumenism” and it is lived out through multi-denomination special worship services, joint community ministries, open neighborhood

Bible studies, ministerial associations, and deeper conversations among local congregation about what their similarities and differences are.

Ecumenism (pronounced “eck-you-men-ism”) is an English noun that comes from the Greek work “oikoumene” which loosely translates to mean “the whole inhabited world” or “the household of God.” Early on oikoumene was used to mean literally all people everywhere. Over time, however, the word became shorthand to refer to all Christians everywhere. Today ecumenism is used most often to mean Christian unity. It applies to the gift of unity that Christ gives to individuals, groups, local congregations and entire churches around the world. An ecumenical (adjective) congregation, for example, is one who is in positive relationship with the other churches in its context and around the world and seeks to live that unity as a part of their Christian witness. The United Methodist Church is ecumenical by our very nature and at our very core.

Often local congregations engage ecumenically (adverb) because it is what has been done for years or because friends or contacts are members of the other congregations in the neighborhood. Underlying these ecumenical practices is deep and meaningful theology. It is right and good to re-visit it, so we are mindful of why we do what we do.

For the Hebrew people and the early followers of Christ, unity was an important and basic principle by which they tried to live their daily lives. Teachings the leadership wanted the whole Body to assimilate were included in the canon of Scriptures. For example, Jesus taught unity for important reasons, and those reasons were handed to the early followers. They are given to the contemporary church as well, through the Christian Bible, and it is important to review them and assimilate them into our theology. As United Methodists, we believe Scripture is primary among our sources of authority and "contains all things necessary for salvation." So, study is always begun with Scripture <sup>1</sup>.

In the western mind we tend to think of a person as an individual entity. That was not necessarily so in the ancient Hebrew mind. A person was a part of the whole and all things were dependent on each other. This is the basis for the teaching found in Genesis 2:18-19b:

*"Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner. So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them'."*

It was also the basis for the Hebrew community, as celebrated in Psalm 133:

*"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore."*

The pouring of oil on a person made the statement the person was a minister of God or a valued guest. The mountains of Hermon and of Zion were holy places, where the Lord was revealed. So, the psalmist is celebrating unity among God's people as being valued, like someone special, and holy, like the mountains.

The teacher in Ecclesiastes agrees, saying in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, that relationships among people are more important than wealth and exhorting how much stronger lives are when they are intertwined:

*"Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And, though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken."*

The value and teaching of unity continues in the portion of the Christian Bible that teaches about salvation through Jesus Christ. One of the most famous passages of Scripture about unity is found in the Gospel of John. Just after Jesus teaches the disciples during what is known as the Last Supper, and just before his arrest, Jesus looks up to heaven and prays to God the Father. He prays for his followers, asks God to protect them, and asks God to sanctify them. Then, in John 17:20-21, Jesus prays that his followers will be one:

*"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul affirms Jesus' hope with clear and straightforward teaching. In 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 he writes about the diversity and interdependence of members that form one body and how that metaphor of unity is an excellent one for the church:

*"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individual just as the Spirit chooses."*

Two passages in the Letter to the Ephesian Church continue this early church teaching theme. John and Charles Wesley used this epistle frequently in their preaching, because it so clearly explains the theme of salvation by grace through faith. The letter also emphasizes the theme of unity and harmony in Christ in all settings. In Ephesians 1:8b-10, Paul explains God's overall purpose of unity:

*"With all wisdom and insight, he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

And, in Ephesians 4: 1-6 Paul stresses the need to keep unity among those who have just been united (Jews and Gentiles) so they may grow to spiritual maturity together and be a witness of God's oneness:

*"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."*

Clearly, when we read through the Scriptures with which we have been blessed, we find a clarion calling to be one Body united in Christ both for our own formation and for the rest of the world to understand the very nature of God. The unity of the church, therefore, is not to be taken lightly. It is a gift given to us by a gracious God. It is also an "essential part of the biblical revelation" <sup>2</sup> and as such a character our faith calls us to exhibit to the world.

## OUTLINE OF THE CLASS

- I. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have name tags and pens for all participants.
- II. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- III. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- IV. Invite participants to introduce themselves if necessary. Ask them to share whether or not they grew up in the church and, if so, what kind of congregation was it (what denomination was it, if any?)
- V. For an icebreaker ask the following questions:
  1. What are all the different kinds of Christian churches you can name? (e.g. Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, non-denominational, United Church of Christ, Roman Catholic, etc.) As they are being named write them on a large piece of paper hung on the wall or write them on a chalk board/white board.
  2. What are the differences among those denominations around baptism? (Expect there to be blanks here, places where people don't know the differences.)
  3. When was the last time the church in which you hold membership participated in an event with the other churches near you for the sake of showing a witness of unity?
- VI. Explain the holes in those answers are why we are engaging in this kind of study for the next 6 weeks.
- VII. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral was developed by Albert Outler (and accepted by our United Methodist General Conference) as a part of our Methodist identity. It is a

- configuration used to describe the sources of authority John Wesley used when thinking through theological questions. The four sources of authority in the Quadrilateral are: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience, with Scripture being held as the primary source. So, that is where we start our exploration. Then, talk about the passages shared in the reading. Give time for engaging with the passages.
- VIII. Talk through what you learned in the Background Reading above about Scripture.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When have you been a part of an ecumenical gathering or ministry?
2. Do you have friends who are part of other denominations/faith communions? What do you know about them? Do you worship together? What do you notice?
3. How does describing unity as a gift help you understand ecumenism?
4. What characteristics of other denominations/faith communions in your area do you most appreciate and affirm?
5. What are some of your favorite Scripture passages that you think speak to the kind unity of followers of Christ for which Jesus prayed?
6. Which passage of Scripture in this session spoke to them most and why? What is that passage saying to them, in a practical, hands-on way for their community?

### CONCLUSION

Share in a time of prayer for the pastors, members and ministries of the churches located in buildings or gathering places closest to them.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture passages are quoted from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

<sup>2</sup> Willem Visser t'Hooft at the World Council of Churches Fourth Assembly in 1968.

SESSION 2

## Unity Past, Present and Future

### FOCUS

This session gives an overview of the history of John Wesley's thoughts about unity and what Methodists have consistently said through our *Book of Discipline*.

### GOAL

Participants will understand Methodist grounding in the call to unity and be able to share a summary of John Wesley's statement from one of his sermons and a summary of our beliefs from the *Discipline*.

### SCRIPTURE

From the beginning of Psalm 133: *"How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!"*

### PRAYER

The prayer offered before every meeting of Vatican II, as recorded in the booklet: *Prayers before Meetings: Immaculata University Prayer Book* by Immaculata University ([www.immaculata.edu](http://www.immaculata.edu)):

*"We stand before you, Holy Spirit, conscious of our sinfulness, but aware that we gather in your name. Come to us, remain with us, and enlighten our hearts. Give us light and strength to know your will, to make it our own, and to live it in our lives. Guide us by your wisdom, support us by your power, for you are God, sharing the glory of Father and Son. You desire justice for all: enable us to uphold the rights of others; do not allow us to be misled by ignorance or corrupted by fear or favor. Unite us to yourself in the bond of love and keep us faithful to all that is true. As we gather in your name may we temper justice with love, so that all our decisions may be pleasing to you, and earn the reward promised to good and faithful servants. You live and reign with the Father and the Son, one God, for ever and ever. Amen."*

### BACKGROUND READING

While United Methodists claim Scripture as our primary source of authority, we also turn to the other three sides of the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral" for our theological reflection: tradition, reason and experience. We understand tradition as the life of the church over time and space. We understand reason as our God-given ability to logically discern ideas. And, we understand experience as how the Spirit works in our lives and in the lives of others.

All four sides of the "Quadrilateral" point to the importance of unity among God's people. But, tradition is another side we can objectively study. So, in this session we will look at Christian unity in The United Methodist Church through history and through our common document, *The Book of Discipline*<sup>1</sup>.

As you already read, "Ecumenism" is the English word, based on the Greek word "oikoumene," that is used to refer to Christian unity. John Wesley wrote many sermons, and one of his most popular through the years was entitled *On A Catholic Spirit*, in which he shares his beliefs on ecumenism in the universal (or catholic) church. In the sermon Wesley suggests when Christians relate to one another, they would do well to avoid focusing upon differences in belief. He starts with a verse from 2 Kings 10:15 in which Jehu is sitting in his chariot and says to Jehonadab, who is standing on the ground: 'if your heart is right with my heart, climb up beside me'. When Jehonadab answers affirmatively, Jehu reaches out and pulls him up into the chariot.

Wesley sees this statement as the result of a heart and mind-changing decision. Whatever difficulties there have been between them, there must have been a possibility in that moment for the two to form an alliance. There must have also been the possibility for them to form some kind of deeper relationship. If they can trust each other in the heat of battle, then their hearts must be closer than their separate modes of belief suggested.

Wesley says that he knows in general he must be mistaken about some respects of his faith. His problem is that he cannot know specifically in which respects that is. The same, he believes, applies to everyone. One Christian believes in believers' baptism and another believes in infant baptism. The two Christians can either allow those differences to separate them, or they can agree to differ, believing it is much more important that their hearts are right than their beliefs are right.

The sermon is not about blurring boundaries between different Christian communities. Wesley believes each person relates to others from her own adherence to her own tradition, so each person is encouraged to go deeper into the community of his tradition. Instead, the sermon is about love among Christians. The love Christ gave to us is the catalyst for a catholic spirit, and so our United Methodist history strongly encourages us to love Christians not because of each other's beliefs but because our hearts have taught us of the same divine love<sup>2</sup>.

This belief is echoed in many other places in the writings we have from John Wesley. For example, in his sermon entitled, "A Caution against Bigotry," he expressed his belief that the opposite of a catholic spirit is bigotry, which he defined as: "too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, Church and religion."<sup>3</sup> This kind of bigotry, he believed, gives Christians rigid hearts and does not allow free will to exist in the church. In Wesley's "A Letter to a Roman Catholic" he wrote: "Let us... endeavour to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the Kingdom. So far as we can, let us always rejoice to strengthen each

other's hands in God. Above all, let us each take heed to himself (since each must give an account of himself to God) that he fall not short of the religion of love, that he be not condemned in that he himself approveth." <sup>4</sup>

The tradition of The United Methodist Church clearly reflects that foundation among other Christians. Over time we have formalized that ecumenical tradition in our shared document, *The Book of Discipline*.

The Constitution of our church is found there. In Division One, Article IV, entitled, "Inclusiveness of the Church," our fore parents wrote:

*"The United Methodist Church is a part of the church universal, which is one Body in Christ..."* <sup>5</sup>  
Continuing in Article VI, entitled "Ecumenical Relations," they wrote:

*"As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes that the Lord of the church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity; and therefore it will seek, and work for, unity at all levels of church life..."*

In Paragraph 105, under the section entitled "Our Theological Task," United Methodists can find solid and well-refined teaching on the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and how we use it personally and in community. Part of our task, in both cases, is to "work within our diversity while exercising patience and forbearance with one another." <sup>6</sup> There is even a sub-section entitled "Ecumenical Commitment." Some of what can be found there are the following statements:

- *Christian unity is founded on the theological understanding that through faith in Jesus Christ we are made members-in-common of the one body of Christ.*
- *Christian unity is not an option; it is a gift to be received and expressed.*
- *United Methodists respond to the theological, biblical, and practical mandates for Christian unity by firmly committing ourselves to the cause of Christian unity at local, national, and world levels.*
- *We invest ourselves in many ways by which mutual recognition of churches, of members, and of ministries may lead us to sharing in Holy Communion with all of God's people.* <sup>7</sup>

Finally, in The United Methodist Church, our leaders are called upon to shepherd the church in ecumenism. Paragraph 403.1 says the following:

*"The bishop leads therefore through the following disciplines: ... (e) A passion for the unity of the church. The role of the bishop is to be the shepherd of the whole flock and thereby provide leadership toward the goal of understanding, reconciliation and unity within the Church - The United Methodist Church and the church universal."* <sup>8</sup>

## OUTLINE OF THE CLASS

- I. Copies of the most recent *Book of Discipline* will be needed for participants for this session.
- II. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have pens for all participants.
- III. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- IV. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- V. Lead a summary and review of the material presented in this session's Background Reading.
- VI. Hand out Books of Discipline or copies of the Background Reading. As a group discuss together whether or not this is new information to them and how this learning applies in practical ways to their particular congregation. In other words, have a conversation about how your church members follow United Methodist teachings on unity both within the congregation and beyond it to other local Christians.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Describe a time (with family, friends, or a church group) when you had to put aside differences in belief to maintain unity.
2. From your knowledge of John and Charles Wesley, why do you think they believed in the unity of the church?
3. How do you see The United Methodist Church working toward unity today? How do you see your bishop working toward unity?
4. In your ecumenical experience, how and what have you learned about your own denominational identity?

## CONCLUSION

Conclude with a time of prayer for your particular congregation and for the ministries you share with the community in the name of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, Nashville, Tennessee: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon 39, "Catholic spirit," *Works of Wesley*.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon 38, "A Caution against Bigotry," *Works of Wesley*, 2:76.

<sup>4</sup> *John Wesley*, Albert Outler, ed. "A Letter to a Roman Catholic."

<sup>5</sup> *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, p. 24, paragraph 4

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25, paragraph 6

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87, paragraph 105

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 317, paragraph 403.1.e

SESSION 3

## Limits of Acceptable Diversity

### FOCUS

This session allows for conversation about what the limits of acceptable diversity are for your congregation.

### GOAL

Participants will be able to name what those limits are for their particular congregation and have a plan to share those with their church's administrative council.

### SCRIPTURE

Philippians 4:8-9: *“Finally, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me – practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”* (English Standard Version)

### PRAYER

This prayer comes from the *Moravian Daily Texts 2017*. It is the prayer offered on October 31, 2017, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation:

*“Powerful God, give us your strength to remain faithful even when we are despised and rejected by others. May we recognize your image in the ones you created and seek to welcome them with open arms. May we strive always to live in unity with one another. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.”*

### BACKGROUND READING

We have, in the previous two sessions, learned ecumenism is both biblical and traditional to our identity as United Methodists. We are called by The One Whose Way We Follow to be united with other Christians, and we have determined in our connectional organization to do just that.

Christian unity is not always easy, however; there are times when it gets confusing and can feel like it conflicts with other strongly-held beliefs that are also both Scriptural and traditional. This is when the Wesleyan Quadrilateral side of “experience” enters our discernment. We must experience Christian unity, its beauty and its difficulties by engaging deeply in relationships and in reconciliation. S. Wesley Ariarajah once wrote, “True dialogue is a challenging encounter; it is not for the faint-hearted.”<sup>1</sup> Those who commit to unity in Christ Jesus commit to hard, internal work.

Specifically, what do Christians who want to walk in unity with other Christians do either when the theological beliefs they hold conflict with others' beliefs? Similarly, what do Christians who want to walk in unity do when their own internal desire for justice conflicts with their internal desire for unity?

There are no easy answers, and there always will be a tension between truth and diverse community<sup>2</sup>. The tension becomes particularly acute when we realize much of the Ecumenical Movement has been about making statements of belief together, creating a scenario in which one must agree with a statement in order to be comfortable with the council who wrote it. It also becomes personally challenging when, as a Christian, a person wants very much to take stands for justice issues facing the church, but knowing as soon as she does it, she will be ostracized by other members of the same church.

There is no way to remove the conflict. It is innate to the journey we take together as believers. However, there are two foundational ideas that may be helpful.

First, we need to discern from where our unity comes. Are we united as Christians because of our beliefs? Or, are we united because of what God has already done for us? On one level, we are indeed united by the shared belief we have in Jesus Christ as the salvation of the world and of ourselves. However, deeper than that, we are united because of what Christ has done for us. We don't do anything to earn either Christ's love or the unity that comes with that gift. We simply receive it. So, unity cannot ultimately be about correct belief. As Archbishop William Temple once said, "The unity of the church is a perpetual fact; our task is not to create it but to exhibit it."<sup>3</sup> In other words, unity is not something we can judge on belief. It is simply a gift to the church, whether we like it or not.

Having said that, there may come a time when the behavior or the beliefs of other Christians may be detrimental to the Body. So, second, each believer and each community of believers needs to determine, as Michael Kinnamon would say, what are the limits of acceptable diversity. Each of us must determine what we believe would cause us to shake off the dust on our feet and walk away. In his book Kinnamon sets two:

1. The absence of love, and
2. Idolatrous allegiance to things that are less than ultimate.<sup>4</sup>

When we strip away personalities and politics, what truly are the things that we believe are core to Christians being Christians? Once we discern the answer to that question, then all else becomes charitable. All else become those things about which we hold opinion, but over which we do not separate.

## OUTLINE OF THE CLASS

- I. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have pens for all participants.
- II. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- III. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- IV. Begin this time with summarizing the material found in the Background Reading for this session.
- V. Take some time to talk about what the criteria to discern acceptable diversity will be in your congregation. Write down these criteria and make a plan to reproduce this conversation with your administrative council.
- VI. Allow participants to react to it.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does this lesson's Scripture speak to and guide the background reading in this section?
2. Has part of this lesson's prayer resonated with you?
3. How is committing to unity difficult, internal work for every, individual Christian? And, at the same time, how is it exciting to you? How do you explain the tension between the two?
4. Can you put the two foundational ideas about dealing with ecumenical conflict into your own words?
5. What do you believe is the core of Christian belief? How does that belief factor into your ideas about Christian unity?

## CONCLUSION

For your closing prayer this week, spend some time in prayer for those in your neighborhood or area with whom you do not find acceptable diversity.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Not without My Neighbor*, The World Council of Churches, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kinnamon, *Truth and Community: Diversity and its Limits in the Ecumenical Movement*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> William Temple, a message delivered at the second conference on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> Kinnamon., pp. 112-113.

## Session 4

# Holy Conferencing

### FOCUS

This session gives an overview of the United Methodist theology around holy conferencing.

### GOAL

Participants will develop a list of guidelines for holy conferencing in their congregation and practice it together.

### SCRIPTURE

Matthew 20:19-20: *“Again I say to you, if two or you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (English Standard Version)*

### PRAYER

A Prayer of St. Francis:

*“Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; and where there is sadness, joy. O Divine Master, grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”*

### BACKGROUND READING

We have determined unity is a gift we simply receive. Once we have received it, though, we may need some practical suggestions on how to witness to it. One of the foundational practices of Christian unity is dialogue, talking and listening with the goal of understanding and moving forward together. Despite the spectrum of beliefs on a variety of theological points and social issues, Christians are called to come together in dialogue to understand each other and to learn from each other. This can be quite challenging, but it can also be quite rewarding.

Rev. Dr. Joe Phelps in *More Light, Less Heat* reminds us just how challenging it can be. Few of us Christians really know about how to be careful in our listening and speaking. Instead, most people are naturally defensive. We tend to have a limited ability to tolerate disagreement, particularly disagreements about our faith and religion. And, in the midst of all this, many people have scars from past wounds inflicted by “adversaries”<sup>1</sup>. All these issues come together to make dialogue today a difficult calling.

And yet, people all over the world necessarily engage in small group conversations for a wide range of purposes, and they all have similar challenges to overcome. It is important, therefore, to think about the basics of putting together a group for conversation or dialogue. The Federal Highway Administration in the United States of America provides an excellent, basic grounding for creating the foundation of any small group. They include the following six suggestions for making a conversational group the best it can be:

1. a carefully-crafted agenda, with five or six major questions at most;
2. emphasis on gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversation and interaction;
3. identification of major points of agreement and divergence of opinion;
4. minimal presentation of material to set context and subject;
5. gleaning, not shaping, of opinions or perspectives;
6. eight to twelve participants; and
7. understanding that the participants' role is to give personal insights and perspectives. <sup>2</sup>

Those are wise suggestions for anyone who wants to engage in a serious, open and vulnerable exchange of ideas, opinions and beliefs. And, while many people in many different settings can benefit greatly from that kind of preparation, it may be especially important for Christians, because engaging in conversation well is a direct reflection on our witness to the rest of the world.

From the beginning of our Movement, United Methodists have wanted to use the opportunity of dialogue as a witness and as an opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to work within us for good. We, in fact, call this particular spiritual practice "holy conferencing." John Wesley felt strongly about conferencing. He named it as "a means of grace," alongside: Bible study, fasting, prayer, participating in the Sacraments, acts of mercy and worship attendance.

The first annual conferences of Methodism were called assemblies of the itinerant pastors. In 1784 the leaders of the fledgling Methodist movement in America held a Christmas Conference in Baltimore, Maryland. This conference organized the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, distinct from the English Methodist movement, but similar in concept.

By 1792 there were 66,000 Methodists in America. Holy Conferencing was used throughout the years to speak to each other as well as possible. Many years later, in 2007, the Young Peoples convocation in South Africa still used holy conferencing as their means for speaking together about the future of the church. They said, "We can change the world through honest conversation on matters in which we are passionate." And, they set forth rules by which they would organize their conversation on the difficult things before them:

1. Every person is a child of God. Always speak respectfully. One can disagree without being disagreeable.
2. As you patiently listen and observe the behavior of others, be open to the possibility that God can change the views of any or all parties in the discussion.
3. Listen patiently before formulating responses.
4. Strive to understand the experience out of which others have arrived at their views.
5. Be careful in how you express personal offense at differing opinions. Otherwise dialogue may be inhibited.
6. Accurately reflect the views of others when speaking. This is especially important when you disagree with that position.
7. Avoid making generalizations about individuals and groups. Make your point with specific evidence and examples.
8. Make use of facilitators and mediators.
9. Remember that people are defined, ultimately, by their relationship with God – not by the flaws we discover, or think we discover, in their views and actions.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the 2012 General Conference of The United Methodist Church a similar list of guidelines was put forward by Bishop Sally Dyck. They were listed in an article in the September/October issue of *Interpreter* magazine.

1. Every person is a child of God
2. Listen before speaking
3. Strive to understand from another's point of view
4. Strive to reflect accurately the views of others
5. Disagree without being disagreeable
6. Speak about issues; do not defame people
7. Pray, in silence or aloud, before decisions
8. Let prayer interrupt your busy-ness<sup>4</sup>

Either of these practical lists can help when we are in holy conversation with others. They can help when we are talking in a church hallway to someone who is venting about a decision made by the Administrative Council, and they can help when we are delegates to General Conference discerning together how to collectively speak about an issue facing the church today.

### OUTLINE OF THE CLASS

- I. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have pens for all participants.
- II. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- III. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- IV. Teach the information from the Background Reading for this session.

- V. Discuss the 2 different lists of dialogue guidelines found in the Background Reading, then develop a list that you will covenant to use with each other.
- VI. Practice holy conferencing by breaking into groups of 2-4 persons. Follow the following procedure giving no more than 20 minutes for this time of practice conferencing:
  - A. Introduce yourselves if necessary.
  - B. Read together the list of dialogue guidelines you approved.
  - C. Choose one person to be the facilitator.
  - D. Practice holy conferencing using the following question, or a different question your group develops: How should a global *Book of Discipline* be used in The United Methodist Church? (If you choose this topic, the leader of this study will need to be prepared to give background information on the global *Book of Discipline*.)
  - E. You may want to use a talking stick in order to make sure every person gets a chance to talk.
- VII. Debrief the experience in the whole group.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do the mission of the church and Holy Conferencing fit together?
2. Have you previously seen conversation guidelines? How were they similar and/or different from those presented in this session?
3. Which guidelines spoke to you most? Which are most challenging? Most helpful?
4. Do you believe we have gotten away from Christian conferencing? Why?
5. Can you think of a time when you or your congregation would have benefited from Christian conferencing?

### CONCLUSION

For your closing prayer time, spend time in prayer for each other.

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Phelps, *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999), pp. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> The Federal Highway Administration, "Small Group Techniques," *The Federal Highway Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation Website* (Washington, DC: Federal Highway Administration, updated 2015); online at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/smlgroup.htm>; accessed September 2017.

<sup>3</sup> From a report on the Young People's Convocation in South Africa, 2007

<sup>4</sup> *Interpreter*, September/October 2012, "Holy Conferencing: Bringing Grace to Touch Conversations."

SESSION 5

# What Is The United Methodist Church Doing?

## FOCUS

This session gives an overview of what the United Methodist Council of Bishops are doing in the areas of ecumenical and interreligious engagement and ministry.

## GOAL

Participants will understand the ways and methods their Council of Bishops engage in ecumenical and interreligious ministry and be able to share with someone else about them.

## SCRIPTURE

Galatians 3:27-28: *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

## PRAYER

From *The United Methodist Hymnal*, #713, entitled “All Saints” and adapted from *The Book of Common Prayer* –

*“Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship, in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord. Grant us grace so to follow your holy saints in all virtuous and godly living that we may come to those unspeakable joys, which you have prepared for those who sincerely love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”*

## BACKGROUND READING

The United Methodist Church gets a lot of things right. There are many local congregations in annual conferences who are joining together with their neighbor churches to offer ministries vital to those communities. There are joint worship services, Bible studies, food pantries and refugee resettlement ministries. Occasionally, there are even times of holy conferencing among members of local congregations about issues that affect the universal church of Jesus Christ together. You may want to explore via the internet what kinds of councils and associations exist in your annual conference and see what Christians are doing ecumenically in your area.

Our denomination has also made a commitment to continue ecumenical ministry on a denominational level. The General Conference in 2012 voted to create the Office of Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships (OCUIR) as an office of the Council of Bishops. For that

quadrennium that office set its vision is for The United Methodist Church as: "to live more fully into Christian unity and to deepen interreligious relationships." Their mission was to assist and support the Council of Bishops in working toward that vision. At the beginning of the following quadrennium the transition into this new way of doing ministry was completed. With the same vision, OCUIR is now a group of laity and clergy from across the connection who advise the Council of Bishops on this ministry they have fully claimed as theirs to lead. A new structure, new vision and new location in Washington DC have been created. And, a diverse staff works with the bishops to assist them in their ministry goals.

The Council of Bishops has appointed an Ecumenical Officer from among the retired bishops to oversee the daily needs of the ministry. They have also appointed a group of bishops to form the LTEIR, Leadership Team on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relationships, who take on the responsibility of guiding the Ecumenical Officer and the staff. The clergy and laity of OCUIR continue to serve as an advisory board to The Council of Bishops, through the LTEIR.

There are three broad areas of ecumenical and interreligious ministry in which the Council of Bishops engage. First, they provide institutional representation of The United Methodist Church when and where it is needed. When there are events around the world at which it is important for The United Methodist Church to show support, representatives are prepared and sent. On councils and other ecumenical or interreligious organizations the Council of Bishops appoints representatives. When those, and other groups request funding, the Council of Bishops, administers the Interdenominational Cooperation Fund on behalf of the denomination. All this keeps the voice of The United Methodist Church strong in ecumenical and interreligious ministries around the world.

Second, the Council of Bishops provides theological perspective on ecumenical and interreligious engagement. Papers, brochures, books and curricula (like what you are currently reading) are created and made available for use throughout the denomination and beyond. Dialogues with other Christian denominations are organized and United Methodist theology is shared on an official level. Dialogues at round tables with members of other religions are also staffed on behalf of the denomination. And, theological insight and leadership are also provided for the denominational Committee on Faith and Order.

Third, the Council of Bishops provides development and formation opportunities for those in The United Methodist Church who wish for their faith maturity to include ecumenical and interreligious education. United Methodist Ecumenical and Interreligious Training (UMEIT) events can be found annually in the USA and around the world. Training handbooks are made available to local congregations, annual conferences, District Superintendents, Bishops and Directors of Connectional Ministries. Grants for local annual conference groups who are doing the ministry are offered. Scholarships for United Methodists to attend several different training events are offered. And, communication on events, ideas and resources are shared via a newsletter, website, Facebook page, and active staff interaction.

For more information explore [www.ocuir.org](http://www.ocuir.org) paying special attention to the section on resources. We also have a Facebook page and use Twitter. You may also want to visit some of the websites of our ecumenical partners, which are included in the appendix of this study.

### OUTLINE OF THE CLASS

- I. For this session provide brochures from the Council of Bishops about what their ecumenical ministries and a copy of their ecumenical and interreligious handbook for annual conferences. These can be obtained from the Council of Bishops' office.
- II. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have pens for all participants.
- III. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- IV. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- V. Teach the information from the Background Reading. Show the resources you were able to obtain from the Council of Bishops' ecumenical staff.
- VI. Have a discussion about which aspects of the Council of Bishops' ministry excites them the most, and which ones they think they could successfully engage in in their context. Write these ideas down and bring them back for the next, and final, session. In your discussion, think together about the following three areas:
  - A. Representation - Could congregation members engage in the local council of churches or ministry association? Could they volunteer to be a part of (or re-start) the annual conference Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships Committee? Could grants or scholarships be given to support ecumenical and/or interreligious ministry in the area?
  - B. Theological Perspective - Could the congregation sponsor a meal and time of holy conferencing with members of congregations of different denominations near them? Could this study be adapted for use between two different congregations?
  - C. Development and Formation - Could the congregation agree to have all Sunday school classes and/or small groups engage in this study (maybe having the persons who are participating in it now volunteering to teach it in the other settings)? Could congregational members attend the next UMEIT? Is there another study or another ecumenical event coming up in the area in which congregational members could participate?

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Have you heard of the COB, OCUIR, or LTEIR? What does each do?
2. Find out who serves as the current Ecumenical Officer of The United Methodist Church. Does your annual conference also have an official Committee on Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships?

3. What are some actions you would like to see The United Methodist Church do to promote Christian unity in your context?
4. Why is it important the Council of Bishops leads the denomination in ecumenical ministry?
5. What did you think while you were watching the young adults on the video speak?

### **CONCLUSION**

For the closing prayer time pray for dreams, possibilities and potentials in the future.

SESSION 6

# What Can We Do?

## FOCUS

This session is a time of summary and setting goals for using the information the participants have learned.

## GOAL

Participants will leave this session with a plan of how their congregation can move forward with ecumenical and/or interreligious ministry in their context.

## SCRIPTURE

Jesus' prayer from John 17:21: *"As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

## PRAYER

This prayer is at the end of the "Litany of Recognition and Celebration of Ministries" used by Churches Uniting in Christ, and shared at the Pentecost Worship of CUIC at Christian Chapel Temple of Faith CME Church in Dallas, Texas, on June 4, 2017 -

*"Accept our prayers and thanksgivings, most gracious God, for leading us in this movement to be one in the Spirit and in mission. Inspire us to live more fully into the recognition and celebration of our diverse ministries. Grant us inquiring hearts and minds to seek your Truth as brothers and sisters in Christ. Deliver us from pride, hypocrisy, divisions, and all forms of oppression. Open our ears and hands to respond to the needs of neighbors near and far, and continually guide us into doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly before you all our days. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."*

## BACKGROUND READING

On August 27, 1953, at the third world conference on Faith and Order, meeting in Lund, Sweden, a joint text was agreed upon and approved by the representatives of the churches present. The document was entitled "A Word to the Churches" and it asked the question of why, in this present age, the churches were not working together more fully. Specifically, it asked: "Should not our Churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other Churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?" This principle in ecumenical thought became known as "The Lund Principle." Simply stated it reminds Christian churches we are called to manifest a witness of unity in all we do, unless there is some reason of conviction that prevents it. We should do as much as possible together, as a witness to our unity.

Christian unity is a gift given to all who profess faith in Jesus Christ and choose to be his follower. It is not a gift to unwrap and leave on a shelf, because it looks pretty and should be admired from afar. It is a gift to be revealed and used by every Christian in Christ's universal church. Through the participation in this study, you have unwrapped the gift. What is left now is the determination of how it will be shown and used.

The United Methodist Church will continue to use a percentage of apportionment gifts to fund the ecumenical ministry of the Council of Bishops and their staff. There will continue to be denominational representation on boards and councils around the world. There will continue to be a voice for unity in theological

conversations. And, there will continue to be training events offered for the denomination. We do this, because our Scripture, history and theology tell us it is vital to who we are as Christ's followers.

Local congregations will continue to have access to curricula, some of which is listed in the last section of this book. Pastors and laity alike will continue to have access to the Council of Bishops' website and Facebook page, as well as to personal interaction with office staff when particular questions or issues arise. They will continue to have access to trainings, and grants and scholarships.

But, the ministry is for all of us. In The United Methodist Church, we believe the central focus of the church is the local congregation. This is where the ministry happens, where people come to know Jesus, where outreach happens for the sake of God's Love, and where the transformation of the world happens at its purest level.

When we look around at God's world today, we see conflict, pain, severe division, and actual hate among different groups. Local congregations can make enduring and eternal changes in their societies when they risk sharing the gift of unity with those around them. As we have said, it is not an easy ministry to do. But, it is one at the very heart of Jesus.

You continue to have the ability to witness to your faith in Christ through your beliefs, words and actions. So much can be done for the sake of the unity of Christ's church. The creation of a plan of ministry action is a great place to start.

### **OUTLINE OF THE CLASS**

- I. As participants arrive have some sort of snack available. If possible, have quiet music playing in the background. If necessary, have pens for all participants.
- II. When it is time to start, stop the music.
- III. Share in an opening prayer. (There is one offered at the beginning of this session.)
- IV. Begin this last session by sharing a summary of the previous 5 sessions. Go through each one and share what they learned.

- V. Ask participants to share what has been most meaningful and/or helpful to them in this short study.
- VI. Somehow show the participants the list of possibilities they created at the end of the last session. Use your holy conferencing guidelines to lead a discussion on which one they will commit to doing.
- VII. Work out the details, responsibilities and timeline to accomplish the new goal.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Are there organizations in your community that work toward visible Christian unity?
2. What events and celebrations take place in your community around Christian unity?
3. What challenges does your community have in living out Christian unity?
4. What can you do individually to work for visible Christian unity in your community?
5. What can your church do? Write out two or three goals, making sure they are measurable. Create a timeline to accomplish those goals. Take them to your Administrative or Church council for a deeper discussion among your church's leadership.

### CONCLUSION

For this last prayer time spend time in prayer for this new ministry and those who will participate in it.

## Appendix

### 1. Definitions of terms:

- a. Ecumenism – a noun referring to the movement promoting unity among the world’s Christian churches. Efforts by Christians of different church traditions to develop closer relationships and better understandings.
- b. Ecumenical – an adjective describing efforts or persons involved in ecumenism.
- c. Christian Unity – a phrase referring to the God-given bond among all Christians because of the salvific work of Jesus Christ.
- d. Faith Communion – a term often used for a particular religious tradition. Often the term is interchangeable with the word “denomination,” but not all Christian groups like to use the term “denomination.”
- e. House of Worship – a term often used for a particular place of worship. For Christians the term is interchangeable with the words “church building.” It is, however, a more inclusive term for religions other than Christianity.
- f. Catholic – (when used with a lower-case “c”) - an adjective meaning universal.
- g. Full Communion – a relationship formed between two or more faith communions in which the Sacraments can be shared, ministry is to be done together, and clergy can be interchanged (with the approval of the receiving denomination). Full communion relationships are approved and accepted by our United Methodist General Conference. Currently, we are in full communion with:

The Uniting Church in Sweden  
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
The Moravian Church (Northern and Southern Provinces)  
The Pan-Methodist Churches:  
    The African Methodist Episcopal Church  
    The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church  
    The African Union Methodist Protestant Church  
    The Christian Methodist Episcopal Church  
    The Union American Methodist Episcopal Church)

Other similar relationships exist within the United Methodist Central Conferences. For example, United Methodists in Norway are in relationship with The Lutheran Church in Norway. United Methodist Central Conferences in Europe are also

members of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, and all members are in full communion with one another.

- h. Interfaith – efforts among individuals to understand and build relationships among persons of other religions.
- i. Interreligious – efforts among religious organizations to understand and build relationships among other religious organizations.
- j. Quadrennium – a period of four years that, for United Methodists, runs between General Conferences.

## 2. Ecumenical Relationships Engaged in by the UM Council of Bishops

- a. Bi-lateral Dialogues - formal holy conversations that occur between two faith communions. Currently, The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church is participating in two bi-lateral dialogues: one with The Episcopal Church in the USA and one with The Roman Catholic Church.

It should be noted, through the World Methodist Council, The United Methodist Church is also part of dialogues with the Baptist World Alliance and the Pontifical Council on the Promotion of Christian Unity of The Roman Catholic Church.

- b. Multi-lateral Dialogues – formal holy conversations that occur among multiple (more than two) faith communions at the same time. Currently, The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church is participating in one official multi-lateral dialogue: Churches Uniting in Christ (CUIC) which is among eleven Protestant denominations in the USA.
- c. Conciliar – of, or relating to, a council. The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church is involved in several conciliar organizations, including (but not limited to):

- The World Council of Churches
- The World Methodist Council
- The African Methodist Council
- The Asian Methodist Council
- The National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
- The All African Conference of Churches
- The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe
- The European Methodist Council

- d. Concordat – a special relationship between two faith communions that is especially significant, because of a shared concord, which include holding both voice and vote at our United Methodist General Conferences. The Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church does not consider these “ecumenical” relationships, but family partners, and is involved in four such relationships, with:

The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas  
The Methodist Church in Great Britain  
The Methodist Church of Mexico  
The Methodist Church of Puerto Rico

- e. Affiliate and Autonomous – these are also special relationships, because they have grown out of the same tradition. At some point in their history, they became strong enough to become faith communions on their own, but maintain voice at our United Methodist General Conferences. Similar to concordat relationships, the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church considers these to be family relationships, and include:

Affiliated Autonomous Churches

Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina  
Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia  
Evangelical Methodist Church of Costa Rica  
Evangelical Methodist Church of Panama  
Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines  
Korean Methodist Church  
Methodist Church in Brazil  
Methodist Church of Chile  
Methodist Church in Cuba  
Methodist Church of Hong Kong  
Methodist Church in India  
Methodist Church of Indonesia  
Methodist Church of Malaysia  
Methodist Church of Peru  
Methodist Church in the Republic of China  
Methodist Church in Singapore  
Methodist Church of the Union of Myanmar  
Methodist Church of Uruguay

Affiliated United Churches

Church of Pakistan  
Dominican Evangelical Church  
Eglise Protestante Unie de Belgique

Evangelical United Church of Ecuador  
United Church of Christ in the Philippines  
The Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China  
The United Church of Canada  
The United Church in Japan (Kyodan)

3. How to Use this Study with Other Local Congregations of Other Denominational Traditions or Faith Communions:

After you and your congregation have taken this study, you may want to share it in an ecumenical setting. Maybe, there are other local congregations from other faith communions who would like to take the study with you. This is great news, as sharing in an ecumenical setting will allow you to have deeper conversations and learn from different points of view.

First, ask the leadership of your congregation to talk with the leadership of the other congregations in your neighborhood or community. Provide them with this study and ask them to discern whether or not they would like to engage in a joint study, with the hope of creating a joint, ecumenical project at the conclusion of the study.

While the overarching themes will be applicable for all Christians, much of the details of the study will not apply to other denominations and faith communions. This can give them an opportunity to share documents, canons, catechism, traditions and structures that teach things similar to what The United Methodist Church teaches. So, prior to each session, invite them to search for parallel information from their tradition. During the question period, encourage them to bring their own questions for discussion. Remember to include them in your planning, in the facilitation of the sessions, and discussion times. Maybe you can rotate meeting places to make sure you are being inclusive and invite different church members to bring snacks for each session. The best outcome would be for the churches involved in the ecumenical study to commit to finding ways to be a witness for visible Christian unity after the study is complete.

## Resources for Further Study

Some helpful internet links include:

**World Council of Churches**

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources>

**National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA**

<http://www.nccusa.org>

**The United Methodist Church Council of Bishops**

<http://www.ocuir.org>

**The World Methodist Council**

<http://www.worldmethodistcouncil.org>

**Churches Uniting in Christ**

<http://www.churchesunitinginchrist.org>

**Christian Churches Together**

<http://www.christianchurchestogether.org>

**The Pan-Methodist Commission**

<http://www.panmethodist.org>

**Roman Catholic Church's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity**

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/index.htm)

**Parliament of the World's Religions**

<https://parliamentofreligions.org>

Some books for further reading include:

**Bid Our Jarring Conflicts Cease: A Wesleyan Theology and Praxis of Church Unity,**

David N. Field, Foundry Books: Nashville, 2017

**Can a Renewal Movement Be Renewed? Questions for the Future of Ecumenism,**

Michael Kinnamon, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 2014

**Christian Unity: How You Can Make a Difference,**

Thomas Ryan, Paulist Press: New York, 2015

**Celebrating God's Love: Living into Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships,**

edited by Donald E. Messer, Abington Press: Nashville, 2015

**Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement,**

edited by Lossky et al., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1991

**Ecumenical and Interreligious Handbook: A Resource for Annual Conference**

**Committees on Christian Unity and Interreligious Relationships,**

First Edition: 2016-2017, Published by the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church (download from [www.ocuir.org](http://www.ocuir.org))

**The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices,**

Second Edition, edited by Michael Kinnamon, World Council of Churches Publications: Geneva, 2016

**Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation,**

Miroslav Volf, Abingdon Press: Nashville, 1996

**Truth and Community: Diversity and Its Limits in the Ecumenical Movement,**

Michael Kinnamon, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1988

“Ut Unum Sint” (an encyclical from Pope John Paul II), **Origins: CNS Documentary Service**, Vol., 25, No. 4, June 8, 1995

**Whole: A Call to Unity in Our Fragmented World,**

Sharon Watkins, Chalice Press: St. Louis, 2014