One in
Spirit

An Ecumenical Curriculum for Local Congregations

The Council of Bishops
The United Methodist Church

2020
# Table of Contents

**PREFACE** ................................................................................................................................. 4

**INTRODUCTION** ......................................................................................................................... 5-6

**FACILITATOR’S GUIDE** ............................................................................................................... 7

**SESSION 1 - Christian Unity in a Divided World: Our Scriptural Calling** ................................. 9-14

**SESSION 2 - Context: Divisions and Christian Conversations Through the Ages from the Protestant Reformation All the Way Back to the Early Church** ........................................ 15-23

**SESSION 3 - The Ecumenical Movement: From Division Towards Missional and Doctrinal Unity** ......................................................................................................................... 24-31

**SESSION 4 - United Methodism and Ecumenism: Wesley’s Grounding for Ecumenism to the Current Book of Discipline** .......................................................................................... 32-37

**SESSION 5 - Growth in Love: The Limits of Acceptable Diversity and Constructive Conversations** .............................................................................................................................. 38-45

**SESSION 6 - Embarking on the Journey: Reflecting on the Past and Commissioning for the Future** ........................................................................................................................................ 46-49

**APPENDIX** ................................................................................................................................... 50-56

**RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY** ...................................................................................... 57-58
Preface

One of Jesus’ prayers for his followers is that they be united in a way that resembles a healthy, functioning body. In fact, an overarching theme of Christian 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 the rest of 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 help participants discern ideas for bringing the Body back to visible unity.

The curriculum is offered by The United Methodist Council of Bishops. 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 Ms. Erin Sears, who took the original version of the curriculum and transformed it into what it is today. Her gifts and skills, offered through the Candler Advantage Summer Intern Program, were invaluable. Appreciation is also given for Mrs. Sarah McKinney, Mrs. Cindy Thompson, and Rev. Daniel Reffner, who piloted the curriculum in its various stages.

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 over 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 and 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 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. 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: "Christian Unity in a Divided World: Our Scriptural Calling"**  
(An overview of unity as a gift from God that is central to our identities as Christians called into relationship with God and one another as expressed throughout the scriptures)

**Session 2: "Context: Divisions and Christian Conversations Through the Ages from the Protestant Reformation All the Way Back to the Early Church"**  
(An overview of the historical developments of Christian unity working backwards from the Protestant Reformation to give context to the conversation around Christian unity)

**Session 3: "The Ecumenical Movement: From Division Towards Missional and Doctrinal Unity"**  
(An overview of the historical developments of the Ecumenical Movement, along with a practical discussion around a document from the World Council of Churches)

**Session 4: United Methodism and Ecumenism: Wesley’s Grounding for Ecumenism to the Current Book of Discipline" (An overview of the historic ties to ecumenism in the Methodist Movement along with the current expression of ecumenism in The United Methodist Church)

**Session 5: "Growth in Love: The Limits of Acceptable Diversity and Constructive Conversations”**  
(This session will provide practical skills to help us witness to the gift of unity as we engage ecumenically.)

**Session 6: "Embarking on the Journey: Reflecting on the Past and Commissioning for the Future"**  
(A group reflection on the curriculum along with a conversation about next steps and a meaningful, guided worship to end)

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  
2020
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.

- When meeting in-person, 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 during an in-person meeting, 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. Zoom or online platforms are helpful in this way, as they show everyone each other’s names.

- 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 instructional video(s) followed by discussion questions and/or a guided activity. If for some reason the videos will not work in your context, the video script is provided in the leader’s guide. 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. Also, for each session, there is an optional homework assignment for participants as a way to engage the content outside of the meeting time, as well as, to work towards engaging in an ecumenical ministry.
John 17:20-22

20 “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 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. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one...”
SESSION 1

Christian Unity in a Divided World:
Our Scriptural Calling

KEY FOCUS
Unity is a gift from God and is a central part of our identity as Christians who are called into relationship with God and one another as expressed throughout the scriptures.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Begin to build community and conversation amongst those participating in the study
2. Start to answer the question of why Christian unity is so important and should matter to individual Christians
3. Give a basic overview of the scriptural understanding of Christian unity

SCRIPTURE
The underpinning scripture passage for this lesson is John 17:20-23 from the New Revised Standard Version:

20 “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, 22. so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

PRAYER
For this first session, we offer a prayer in the form of a hymn text. United Methodist Bishop William Boyd Grove wrote the words for this hymn entitled “Christ, the Church You Gave is Broken” for the January 20, 2002 Inaugural Celebration of Churches Uniting in Christ. As expressed on their website, “Churches Uniting in Christ is a covenant relationship among Christian communions that have pledged to live more closely together in expressing their unity in Christ and combating racism together. The member churches of CUIC include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Moravian Church (Northern Province), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church.”

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The entire hymn is based on John 17:20-21:

“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.”

and 1 Corinthians 12:27:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

It is often sung to the tune CWM RHONDDA, more commonly known as the tune to United Methodist Hymnal 127, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.” The prayer we now pray is the fourth stanza of the hymn:

“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.”

INTRODUCTIONS AND ICE BREAKER:
Following the prayer, as the facilitator, begin by giving a brief personal introduction that includes why you are leading this class and what interest you have in the subject.

To help build community within the class or even to continue to help people get to know one another if this is an already established class, ask individuals to share three things:

1. their name
2. their faith communion background, meaning the churches or other faith groups they and/or their families grew up going to or have attended in their adult lives
3. and their interests or initial thoughts about the topic of Christian unity

You might have noticed that we used the term faith communion. This term refers to what most people think of as denominations. However, not every group thinks of themselves as a denomination, so faith communions is used in ecumenical circles in an effort to be more inclusive to all.

It always helps if you, as the facilitator, model this particular introduction to show people what exactly it looks like. This may seem odd, especially since you have already introduced yourself more broadly prior to this but it helps to make everyone feel as if they are equal and helps to establish your role not as just as a teacher but as a co-participant of the class. In this case, it is also helpful to have someone model what might be included in terms of faith communion background.
LESSON MATERIAL AND VIDEO SCRIPT

Unity.

What comes to mind when you hear the word unity?

Isn’t it this ideal version of something that one hopes for and dreams for, especially in our world? A world that has seen countless acts of disunity. A world which seems to cycle through chaos, violence and distress in many varied forms. It is easy to point out disunity. We see it all around us and sometimes even experience it among and even within us. But, it’s not as easy to define unity.

So, what is unity?

It is a simple word. But it is complex and often hard to fully define, as it has many possible definitions. Take for instance the Merriam-Webster Dictionary entry for the term unity. There are six entries for the word, of which, three have multiple meanings within one definition. And if multiple definitions weren’t already confusing enough, there is an added layer of complexity to some of the definitions. With the many possible meanings, it’s a complicated word that often leaves people saying the same word but meaning very different things.

So, if there are so many meanings for the word, what exactly does unity mean in the term Christian unity?

In order to understand unity in the context of Christianity, we turn to our source of authority which “contains all things necessary for salvation,” Scripture.²

While there are many passages in Scripture that speak to unity, the central passage in this session for understanding Christian unity comes from the Gospel of John in the 17th chapter. This particular passage is part of what is known as the “Farewell Discourse.”³ As the name suggests, it is a long, extended monologue of Jesus that spans from chapters 13-17 that expresses the last words Jesus wishes to share. It takes place just after the Lord’s Supper is ending and before Jesus’s arrest. As part of his final words, Jesus looks up to heaven and prays to God the Father. He prays for his disciples, his followers gathered with him that night, asking for God to protect them and sanctify them. Then, in John 17:20, Jesus extends his prayer by saying:

20 “’I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word,‘”

With these words, Jesus is extending his prayer to those who will come to believe in him through his disciples once he has gone to be with the Father. In essence, Jesus is praying for the church which will come into being through the disciples. As part of those who have come to
believe in him through the words of others before us, this passage is a prayer for us and all followers of Jesus.

Hear the prayer that Jesus prays:

21 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.22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Jesus prays “that they may be one;” or “that we may be one.”

“One” this is the central term of this passage. But not just in this passage, it also appears thirty-two times in the Gospel, making it a significant part of the whole message of the account.4 Professor of New Testament at Perkins School of Theology, Jaime Clark-Soles claims this was done very intentionally by the author because of the “worldview” in which this Gospel account was written. As we all know, context matters, especially when we are trying to convey an important point. In this particular case, the author of this Gospel account is of Jewish descent writing in a Jewish context. As a Jewish person writing to other Jewish people, the author would have been steeped and rooted in the Shema.5

The Shema is a particular passage of scripture found in the book of Deuteronomy (6:4-5):

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

It can also be translated to be:

The Lord is our God, the Lord is one.

This passage “became a daily prayer in Ancient Israelite tradition. It’s the equivalent of the Lord’s prayer (“Our Father in heaven...”) in Christian tradition.”6 It is a prayer that the reader and the audience would have known by heart, saying it twice a day. This prayer is attributed to Moses as one of the speeches he gave “before the next generation of Israel entered the Promised Land”7 as a way to remind and encourage the Israelites of the centrality of the one Lord in their lives and to respond in with love to the Lord.

By using “one” in the Gospel of John, the author is harkening back and recalling the Shema. The Lord is One. “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you.” Jesus and the Lord are one. The Lord is One. But the Oneness does not stop there:

22 The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.
The glory of connection to the Lord extends beyond to all those who have come to believe, making them part of the One Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. What does the term “oneness” mean? Does the passage speak to institutional or spiritual unity?
2. Based on this passage, what are some characteristics of unity that might later help us define it?
3. What is the source of unity?

GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR THE DISCUSSION
These points might be helpful to refer back to as the group discusses the questions above:

Unity in the biblical sense is oneness. Oneness with God through Jesus by way of all the saints that have gone before us and to all those around us. It all relies on the relationship with Jesus and to others.
The source of our unity is Jesus, who gives us the gift of relationship to God and to one another.

LESSON MATERIAL AND SECOND VIDEO SCRIPT
This call to be the church united is given more definition throughout other places of scripture.

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" and as such a character our faith calls us to exhibit to the world.

FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. In what ways is this sense of unity reflected in our world and in our lives?
2. In what ways have you been stretched or challenged by this session?
3. What is one lasting thing you are taking with you?

CLOSING
To help engage the topic beyond the class session, participants are encouraged to participate in voluntary homework assignments. The assignment for the next session is to research your own family faith history and try to see if you can figure out your spiritual autobiography describing the faith influences on you for a couple of generations back or research your local church history to see if it was ever another denomination.

To close out the session, it is suggested that you listen to the hymn “The Summons” or read some of the lyrics which emphasizes that unity is a call from Jesus to “let my life be grown in you and you in me,” before ending with a time of prayer.
SESSION 2

Context: Divisions and Christian Conversations Through the Ages from the Protestant Reformation All the Way Back to the Early Church

KEY FOCUS
To know how we got to where we are today, with so many denominations and divisions, we must look at our past. Faithful and disruptive conversations have existed in the church from the beginning. Disagreeing isn’t always a bad thing, as it can sometimes point a light on the work of the Spirit among us. However, learning how to distinguish between faithful and constructive conversations and simply disruptive conversations helps us to better become the church united.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Provide a brief overview of some of the major divisions of the church.
2. Help people understand why there are so many denominations and divisions in the church today.
3. Invite people to consider how our past impacts our future and the lessons that could be learned from the past.

SCRIPTURE
The underpinning scripture passage for this lesson is Acts 15:8-11. This passage comes from a portion of Peter’s speech at the Council at Jerusalem:

8 And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; 9 and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. 10 Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? 11 On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

PRAYER
For this second session, we begin with a prayer found in The United Methodist Hymnal, #713, which is entitled “All Saints.” This prayer has been adapted from The Book of Common Prayer, the liturgy of the Church of England which is used by other denominations such as the Anglican and Episcopal Churches. May this prayer prepare us to remember our past as we move forward into the future:
“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.”

ICE BREAKER
Following the prayer, to start this session, as the facilitator, you might consider asking anyone if they had any thoughts or questions that have stayed with them since the first session. This will help signal to the group that the lessons build upon one another and that the space is open for honest exploration and discussion. Another advantage to beginning the class in this manner is that it signals to everyone participating, the work we do in these times together could and should influence them outside the sessions in ways that they might want to discuss with others.

After allowing time for questions and comments from the previous week, you might transition to allowing people to share brief highlights from their spiritual autobiographies with the class. Each person could be given a minute or two to share any interesting discoveries they had when looking into their spiritual history. As the facilitator, you might want to begin by modeling this. However, be aware that as the facilitator, you hold power in the space. It is always good to share that power with others by allowing someone else to start the sharing or even by reading the opening prayer.

Once everyone shares their spiritual autobiographies, it might be helpful to discuss what was learned about each other from the exercise. Discussing what has been learned about each other helps to grow the community of people who are participating in the sessions together. The conversation can be free-flowing or structured. If you need some guiding questions, here are a few to help guide people to be reflective of the exercise:

1. In doing this exercise, did you learn anything interesting about yourself? About others? If so, what did you learn?
2. What are some of the commonalities you heard as people shared their spiritual autobiographies? Were there any major differences?
3. What are the things you wish you knew more about or want to explore more? Why is that interesting to you?

You will not have time to do all of the questions in an hour timeframe and complete the lesson material. It is up to you as the facilitator to determine which, if any, of these questions you want the group to discuss as a reflection on the exercise.

To wrap up the ice breaker section and enter into the lesson material, it might be helpful to summarize and remind everyone that Christianity is expressed in a multitude of ways, which is why there is diversity in our spiritual histories. Today’s lesson will explore why there are so many divisions by looking back in history at Christian conversations through the ages from the Protestant Reformation all the way back to the Early Church.
LESSON MATERIAL AND VIDEO SCRIPT

Have you ever wondered just exactly how we got here? Now that is a loaded question, I will admit. Let me be more clear. What I mean is: have you ever once wondered why there are so many faith communions if we are called to be the church united?

Well, today we are going to take a look back in history to see what exactly led us to where we are today.

Throughout history, people have continually strived to answer questions about who God is and how we can most faithfully be the people of God. Now these questions have often led to differences of opinion, and those differences of opinions have led to divisions in the church.

To begin, let’s start by looking at the Protestant Reformation, which occurred in the 1500s. At this time, the Catholic Church was the central church that spanned across nations in the European Western world. As such, the Catholic Church was the authoritative voice of Christianity and set the standards of doctrine and discipline for believers.

There are a few important things to remember about this time in history. During this time, most lay people, ordinary church members who are not clergy, did not have access to the Scriptures, because the Bible was not yet printed in the language of the people. Another important piece of information to keep in mind about this period of time is that the Catholic Church conducted all of their services in Latin; nothing was in the language-the people spoke. So, the Catholic Church mediated lay people’s access to the Scriptures helping them to find and grow in the faith. Most of the leadership at that time saw this as the best way to be faithful to the tradition and uphold the theological standards they held as important.

With this framework in mind about the overall culture of the times, we can now move on to discuss some of the important features of the doctrine and discipline within the Catholic Church in those days. Common in this time period was the practice of indulgences. A practice of paid grace extended through the pope that was believed to diminish or end the pain experienced in purgatory.¹ In this time, it was the belief that salvation was received through the works of our lives and thus, indulgences were believed to help offset our bad works to help us receive salvation more quickly in spite of our bad works. Within the theological framework that our works equal our righteousness before God and our ability to enter into salvation, the indulgence makes sense. If our works are not righteous, we must have some way of “paying for” our actions. But what did this money do? The money the church gained from this practice was known for, in part, helping fund the renovations of St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome.²

During this time, people began to question some of these practices, and their questions were about practical issues such as: “What must I do to be saved? Where [there is] a disagreement, do I follow the Bible or the church? How can I be a good Christian and a good… citizen, merchant, soldier, husband or wife?”³
As these questions stirred, people began to see things happening around them with different eyes and viewpoints from what the institutionalized church had always taught them to notice. One of the most prominent people in this time period was Martin Luther who began to question “what must I really do to be saved?” As he read and studied scripture, he came to the revelation that we are saved or justified by faith alone and not our works. With this new understanding of salvation, he started to question many things in the church, most notably the practice of indulgences. His thought-process could quite possibly have gone like this: “If our works did not actually save us, then the use of the church to have us buy our salvation is corrupt.” He was so bothered by this particular practice that on October 31, 1517, he nailed a document entitled the Ninety-Five Theses on the church in Wittenberg questioning the practice outright, which, while not a new concept at the time, was seen as a radical action and a call to “reform” the church. The reform Luther looked for was one that rejected any notion of papal authority, due to corruption, in favor of “individual’s right to interrupt Scripture.” Luther in turn set out to translate the Bible into the language of the people, German, as well translating liturgies and hymns into the common language from their original Latin.

While not the only figure, Martin Luther is one of the main Christians that led the way for the outcry of reform during the Protestant Reformation. This time of change led to three new strands within the Western European church: Lutheran, Calvinist, and Anabaptist. All three of these strands had various complaints against the practices and doctrine of the church. This reform movement also spread through the Church of England. All these reform movements then continued to break off and evolve as they took their various expressions to new places and new continents creating the numerous faith communions we know today.

Although the Protestant Reformation is the movement for change in church history about which we may know the most, it definitely is not the first period of division. Prior to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Church developed into the main expression of Christianity in the European Western world. But, it evolved into that position. There is a lot of history before then.

We read in the Gospels and Epistles about a new, Christian movement that spread throughout the world from East to West. But, this spread from East to West slowly started to put a strain on the unity of the one church. The differing geographical locations necessitated different expressions of the one church. The expressions varied not only in the languages spoken amongst the people in the churches but also in church organization, liturgy and even theology. Church historian Everett Ferguson points out the strain of differences “were more of emphasis than of contradictions.” While the Western church continued to emphasize the rules of canon law and move towards hierarchy with a central head known as the pope, the Eastern church understood itself less formally and more as “the local assembly united in eucharistic fellowship, from the sacraments and from the ecumenical creeds.”
These emerging differences didn’t immediately lead to division. For a while they continued on eventually, there was not a desire to be united anymore. An occasion for division occurred in 1054 when the leaders of both the East and the West excommunicated one another creating what is called the Great Schism. The one unified church became the church in the East, now known as the Orthodox Churches, and the church in the West, now known as the Roman Catholic Church. This particular schism has yet to be healed even though both excommunications were lifted in 1965.11

But even that, very significant schism, was not the first division. Prior to that were other divisions, since the emerging Christian movement raised many questions.

Throughout the 1st millennium, these important and critical questions kept coming up within the church, as the church began to define itself more systematically. One of the important factors leading up to the church needing to define itself more systematically is that emperor Constantine became the first emperor to support the church instead of persecuting it. Because of the new church-state relations created under Constantine, the church was forced to define its nature and doctrine.12 Prior to this point, each part of the church had been functioning under a “congregational” model where bishops, in consultation with their clergy, made decisions for their own areas.13 The secrecy required just to survive as a church when being persecuted did not allow for the luxury to openly gather and discuss theological issues across the empire.

When Constantine removed the need for secrecy, the whole function and structure of the church was released to become more developed. There was freedom to discuss things more broadly and there was pressure from Constantine to have unity.14 Thus, it was imperative that the church begin to develop an agreed definition of faith.

The work of developing a universally-accepted definition of faith began when Constantine invited bishops in the church to come to Nicaea in May of 325 to settle a controversy that had developed. This gathering became to be known as the first ecumenical council. In this particular use of the word, ecumenical simply means universal. The bishops met together and made decisions about the doctrine of the church and began the canon law of the church. Out of this gathering also came a creed. Over the course of 500 years, there were six more councils that met to discuss various theological issues that developed as the church tried to express an agreed upon definition of faith. At one of these councils another creed was approved that is still used today, known as the “Nicene Creed.”

With all the success of the councils, some of the tensions that existed among differing opinions can be easily overlooked. However, these were, at times, difficult situations that often produced highly debated topics. Some left unsatisfied with the end results because they did not include their understanding of the definition of faith. Some dissenters’ ideas were labeled as
heresies, false doctrine. The result was that each one of the seven councils represent the breaking away or schism from the one united church of another group with a divergent opinion.

So how did we get here? We got here through years and years of people asking questions about God and disagreeing about the answers to which they came. Opinions resulting from attempts to define, expand and reform the faith, over and over again, have produced separations.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. After looking at history, why are there so many denominations if we are called to be the church united?
2. What themes did you hear throughout this view of Christian history?
3. What are some the unique characteristics of the divisions in the church over the ages?
4. Church historian, Everett Ferguson, states this about unity: “Where that will to unity is present, major differences can be overcome; where it is lacking, minor differences can be an occasion for division.” What do you think of his idea of unity?

GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION
These points might be helpful to refer back to as the group discusses the questions above:

There are three major periods of divisions in the Church over the centuries:

The 1500s with the Protestant Reformation that created a division from the Catholic Church after seeking to reform, ultimately leading to a rejection of papal leadership in favor of personal Scripture interpretation. It was mainly focused on issues of practical implications of theological claims and beliefs, particularly theological beliefs on salvation.

The 1000s with the Great Schism that broke apart the East and West after strain from geographical distances and differing emphases on particular parts of beliefs. The split became official with the excommunications in 1054 which remained until 1965.

The 500s with the seven Ecumenical Councils, each one focused on articulating a particular doctrine of the church to help identify what Christians say that they believe.

Just as a reminder, in the lesson, the term faith communions is used. This term refers to what most people think of as denominations. However, not every group thinks of themselves as a denomination, so faith communions is used in ecumenical circles in an effort to be more inclusive to all.

LESSON MATERIAL AND SECOND VIDEO SCRIPT
Now that we have had an overview of some of the major church divisions, I bet you are wondering what it looked like when the church was perfectly united. There has to be an example somewhere in history that can show us what it looked like.
Some of you might even have a guess of where we can find that exact example. Perhaps you are thinking of the early church right now, you know the one just after Jesus ascended. It had to have been perfectly united in those days. But, is that reality? What exactly did the early church look like and how perfectly united were they?

To find a picture of the early church, we can turn to our Scriptures. In particular, we can look in Acts. It is within this book of the Bible that we find the story of the beginnings of the church. The story that we hear every year on Pentecost from Acts chapter 2:

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

It is this story that we remember and mark as the beginnings of the church. A church where it is recorded just a few verses later in chapter 2 of Acts that:

“44all who believed were together and had all things in common; 45they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, 47praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”

It seems to me this is the picture we are all looking for and is possibly what we hope for when we think of the perfectly united church. “All who believed were together and had all things in common.”

Yet, this isn’t the complete picture of the early church that we have recorded in our Scriptures. You see just a few chapters later in the Book of Acts, we find out what happens as the Gospel message spreads further and further and more people are added to the community of believers. Issues bubble up about the right way to do things. In one instance, the issue at hand was whether the Gentile, non-Jewish, believers needed to be circumcised. A gathering occurs to discuss this issue in Jerusalem. At the gathering Peter stands up and gives a speech which is recorded in Acts chapter 15:

“...God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”
After further discussion it is decided a letter will be written to the Gentile believers to state their final decision on the matter. In that letter, they state that they must only impose the essentials, not all of the Jewish law.

It seems odd to have a picture of dissention and disagreement or even division in the canon of Holy Scripture. There shouldn’t be such disunity and quarreling if this is the Holy book. And yet, here it is.

So perhaps it provides us with a lesson.

Unity within the church is not without disagreements and difficult conversations. Even within our Scriptures we found examples of faithful people disagreeing about how to be the church and who is really part of the church.

Robert W. Wall, a New Testament scholar and professor, makes the claim that this is one example of a repetitive theme of “the importance of theological controversy for initiating a process of discernment” that occurs throughout Acts because it is helping us to see that “open disagreement between earnest believers is formative [for] Christian theological understanding.” He makes the important distinction that “constructive disagreements are ... not between believers over issues of power and personality but [are] about God [and between believers] over issues of theological formation.”

While the disunity that is portrayed in the Bible might make us uncomfortable or seem odd, in the end, the early Christians, become united in their belief to only impose that which is essential on one another, because they know they are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus.

**FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. After surveying history from the Protestant Reformation all the way back to the early church recorded in Acts, what lessons have you learned about unity? What does it look like?
2. What parallels do you see to the past? Is there anything specific from history that can continue to guide us?
3. What seems to be dividing people still today? How divided are they really?
4. Are there any times and places where discussions over divisions are faithful and constructive? What makes them that way?
CLOSING

It is quite difficult to look back on our history and relive the divisions and pain. However, looking back leads us to our beginning and to the source of our unity, along with providing us a clearer picture of some of the questions we have asked and the lessons we have learned along the way.

Before the next week, participants are encouraged to participate in voluntary homework assignments, so they might engage the topic beyond the class session. This week’s homework assignment follows the theme from the lesson and invites participants to look back. Each person is invited to think back upon their life and identify the most significant time in which they can remember being a part of an “ecumenical” gathering or event. This does not have to be strictly labeled as an ecumenical function; it could be a community event specifically focused on gathering faith-based individuals together, or it might be an event where the individual was participating in a faith-based activity with a group that wasn’t from their own home church. As participants identify that event, invite them to remember the story and create something to help them relive it and then retell it to the group next week. Ask them to consider and think about the specific lessons they learned in that experience and come ready to share their story and lessons next week.

To close the session, it is suggested that you listen to the hymn “The Church’s One Foundation” or read some of the lyrics which emphasizes that historic struggle of unity within the church while reminding us all that “by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed, yet saints their watch are keeping, their cry goes up, “How long?” and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.”
SESSION 3

The Ecumenical Movement: From Division Towards Missional and Doctrinal Unity

KEY FOCUS
In order to more fully understand Christian unity, we must understand and know about the organized movement for Christian unity known as the Ecumenical Movement. By seeing all the various ways unity is expressed, we will better be able to see our personal and local place within the continued witness of Christian unity.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Provide a brief overview of the Ecumenical Movement.
2. Help people understand the two streams of the Ecumenical Movement: “Faith and Order” and “Life and Works.”
3. Invite people to consider the relevance of the Ecumenical Movement to both the institutional and personal level for faith communions.

SCRIPTURE
The scripture passage for today is one of that is central to the World Council of Churches Unity Statement which will be discussed in the second half of the lesson. The passage is Ephesians 1:9-10:

“...he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

PRAYER
For this third session, we begin with “A Prayer of St. Francis.” Perhaps, this as a familiar prayer and one that you have even prayed yourself. Or perhaps, this is a new prayer for you. Either way, as this prayer is read, may the words fall afresh on us all today:

“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.”
ICE BREAKER
As the facilitator, after the prayer you might consider starting the session with a brief check-in with everyone. One of the hopes is that, as the group spends more time together, their discussions will deepen as the relationships amongst them deepen. Providing space to check with one another is a great way to help relationships deepen amongst participants. Relationship building is an essential part of the work of Christian unity, so practicing together within this group is an act of practicing Christian unity.

After a brief check-in with one another, it might be helpful to invite people to share about their reflections on the homework assignment from the previous lesson. One easy way to transition into this time is by pointing out that the session allows each participant the opportunity to bring their whole selves. As part of bringing our whole selves, we are invited to share our memories as well as our past experiences with one another. At this point, it is helpful to point out that the memories everyone was invited to reflect upon last week as the optional homework assignment will serve as a great starting place for our lesson today. It will help us all have a broader understanding of the Ecumenical Movement and ecumenicism. At this point it would be helpful to either share your own memory or open it up for others to share.

To wrap up the ice breaker section and enter into the lesson material, it might be helpful to thank everyone for sharing their personal stories. It might also be good to ask people to summarize what they think ecumenicism is and what it looks like in the world based on the participants’ shared experience. After a brief description has been created by the shared experiences of those in the group, then you can move forward toward the lesson material that will explain the broad history and scope of ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement.

LESSON MATERIAL AND FIRST VIDEO SCRIPT
Ecumenism.

I know we have mentioned it at least one other time. But what exactly is it? And how important is it to the life of faith?

These are the questions we will be discussing in today’s session as we take a look at a significant calling in history and in the life of the Christian church known as the Ecumenical Movement.

But first, to start out, let’s begin with this maybe, unfamiliar word, “ecumenicism.” Ecumenism is an English noun that comes from the Greek word “oikoumene” which loosely translated means “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 for all Christians everywhere. Today ecumenism is “synonomous with the fullness and unity of the Church universal, comprising Christians of all nations as gathered and guided by the Holy Spirit.” So ecumenism is now a term we use to mean Christian unity.
Yet, how did it all begin to mean Christian unity?

Like so many things, a complete and definite beginning point is hard to clearly state. The genesis of ecumenism coming to mean Christian unity is a mix of multiple, separate, and somewhat unrelated events that all came together to shift the culture of Christianity and begin a movement now known as the Ecumenical Movement.

André Bimelé, Professor Emeritus of the University of Strasbourg and also a part of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, suggests that this shift occurred due to the “profound social changes resulting from industrialization and western colonial expansion”\(^2\) that occurred during the nineteenth century. These social changes awakened an awareness to the divisions within the churches which seemed “inconsistent with the confession of the Church as one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic.”\(^3\) Led by student and lay people, people of various faith communions began to meet in groups for prayer and fellowship. During this period, various groups were organized that brought together Christians of various faith communions. The Evangelical Alliance, the YMCA and the World Student Christian Federation were all founded during this time as a result of this shift towards unity.

By the end of the nineteenth century, there were many various streams and expressions of organizations gathering across divisions in hopes of working towards some form of Christian unity. The streams of all the expressions were not connected until 1910 when the first ever World Missionary Conference convened in Edinburgh. This conference, while mostly attended by Protestant faith communions, was a monumental gathering for the way it brought together various faith communions that had broken off from one another. It is often marked as the beginning of the formalized Ecumenical Movement. Yet, the connection was short lived as out of this conference, it was determined the work of Christian unity had four distinct streams:

1. Joint missionary work throughout the whole world
2. Promoting peace, which proved to be difficult and important work over the next few years following two world wars
3. Joint engagement in social justice, ethics, and political activism known as “Life and Work”
4. Exploring and answering doctrinal questions of unity known as “Faith and Order”\(^4\)

It is important to note that, while the World Missionary Conference brought together mostly Protestant faith communions, the Protestant churches were not the only ones interested and driven towards reconciliation and communion. In 1920 an encyclical from the patriarchate of Constantinople “expressed a desire for worldwide communion of Churches”\(^5\) bringing the Orthodox Churches into the Ecumenical Movement. The Orthodox Churches became involved in streams of “Life and Work” and “Faith and Order.”
Following the 1920 encyclical and the joining of the Orthodox Churches up until 1945, the Ecumenical Movement began to take shape as the various streams met individually throughout the world beginning to answer the questions of what it might look like to express Christian unity through joint missionary work, promoting peace and reconciliation, being engaged in social justice work, and by agreeing to joint doctrines. Each group working in their own little silos.

However, in 1948, the various streams converged yet again and formed the World Council of Churches, also known as the WCC. It was the goal of the formation of the WCC that this multilateral structure would be replaced with a “conciliar structure for member churches.” What ended up happening was that over time the WCC “became more of a forum for meetings and deliberations for ecclesial communities and movements of widely differing origins.” The WCC condensed the work of ecumenism from four streams into just two: “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work.” The WCC has met every six to eight years since the organizational meeting in 1948 continuing to develop doctrinal consensus and joint mission and ministry amongst its “349 member churches that represents 560 million Christians from [across] 110 countries.”

In 1965, at the conclusion of Vatican II, the Catholic Church also joined the Ecumenical Movement by “proposing common prayer, dialogue on matters of doctrine, and collaboration in service to the world.” While not an official member of the WCC, Catholic Church began participating in “Faith and Order” and created a special agency for ecumenical affairs known as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Following Vatican II, the church universal on an institutional level shifted away from past divisions and towards active, missional and doctrinal unity.

Yet, the vision of the Ecumenical Movement was not just at an institutional level. Remember it began as a movement amongst students and lay people. At the local and regional level, around the world, around 1945, Christians began to gather for worship and prayer across faith communions. Bimélé claims that “such work was sustained by the conviction that the unity of the Church is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus a spiritual reality given by God.” This led to the development of regional, national and some continental councils of Churches whose focus was to foster the Ecumenical Movement and spirit within their area. Many of these still exist around the world and possibly even within your own community. Each act of ecumenism, whether formalized in an institutional body or the informal gathering of lay people, gives witness the spiritual reality of unity that is our gift from God and thus is an integral part of our faith journeys.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How would you describe ecumenism and the Ecumenical Movement?
2. In your own words, how would you describe the two streams of ecumenism, “Faith and Order” and “Life and Work”?
3. Can you remember a time when there was an emphasis on Christian unity in your area? What specifically did that look like and what was the result of this time?
4. Of the two streams of ecumenism, is there one that you are more interested in? Is there one that is more important to Christian unity?

GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION
These points might be helpful to refer back to as the group discusses the questions above:

Ecumenism is “synonymous with the fullness and unity of the Church universal, comprising Christians of all nations as gathered and guided by the Holy Spirit.”\(^\text{10}\) Or for short, it is a term we use to mean Christian unity.

“Life and Work” is most often all that falls under the categories of joint engagement in social justice, ethics, and political activism.

“Faith and Order” is the work of finding doctrinal agreements.

While people may favor one or the other, both streams of ecumenism serve a role in helping to witness to Christian unity. For the last question it might be helpful to steer people in the direction of exploring the significance of each stream at every level of faith: personal, local, regional, institutional, and globally. For each of the levels of the church, there may be a specific stream that seems more important or seen more often as the focal point for unity.

GROUP ACTIVITY
For this lesson, instead of having a second instructional video, it is suggested that the class take the time to read and discuss together one of the resources that has come out of the World Council of Churches, the Unity Statement from the 10th Assembly held in Busan, Republic of Korea. The statement can be found at https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/unity-statement and also within the appendix.

It is suggested that the group take the time to read the statement together. While this might seem like an odd use of time, it is beneficial for discussion if you take the time to read and digest together. There are many ways in which to divide up the reading. One suggestion is to have participants take turns reading aloud the information. Another option might be to allow participants a set amount of time to read the document on their own. Or even perhaps, this document might be given to the participants at the previous session to look over as part of the optional homework, as suggested in the previous session.

However, while not ideal, there are some ways to hold a meaningful conversation without having everyone read the entire document. For instance, you might choose to break the participants up and assigned them a section to read together. Then, each group of participants
would be responsible for summarizing the information in their section. In their summary, you might suggest that they include the following information:

1. key points of the section
2. the core values that they think influences the section
3. biblical texts used throughout the section
4. specific ways that they agreed with the text and ways that the text challenged them

The point of the summary is to draw out the important information while helping one another put the information into our own words. It is suggested that the summaries of each section be between 1-3 minutes long, depending on the length of material each group has to cover.

After using some process to read the document together, the group can move on to the discussion questions. At this point, though, the facilitator should feel free to take questions of the group, in addition or in place of the final discussion questions. The goal of the time is to have a meaningful conversation engaging the work that is the direct result of the Ecumenical Movement and trying to see the ways in which it effects Christianity on an institutional level but also how it effects our faith on a local and personal level.

**FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are your initial reactions to the document?
2. According to this document, what is the desired result of cooperation among churches? Is it theological uniformity or something else?
3. Does this document, and by extension the Ecumenical Movement, have any relevance for the local and personal level? Is this work only relevant at the highest levels of faith institutions or does it have the potential to transform relationships between individual people?
4. Can you name an example of positive local influence that has been the result of ecumenical cooperation?

**GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR DISCUSSION**

When discussing question number two, it might be helpful to refer back to the prayer given at the very end of the document:

“O God of life,  
lead us to justice and peace,  
that suffering people may discover hope;  
the scarred world find healing;  
and divided churches become visibly one,  
through the one who prayed for us,  
and in whom we are one Body,  
your Son, Jesus Christ,
CLOSING
Before the next week, as usually, you could invite to participants in voluntary homework assignments, so they might engage the topic beyond the class session. This week’s homework assignment follows the theme from the lesson and invites participants to explore the two streams of the Ecumenical Movement: “Faith and Order” and “Life and Works.” Each person is invited to think about these two categories and think of something that interests them that falls into each of those two categories.

For the “Faith and Order” category, it might be helpful to suggest that people think of the burning questions they have about other faith communions. One example might be that someone is really curious to know what each faith communion things about ordination and who is able to be ordained and after what training. Another example might be that someone is really curious to know about the different ideas of baptism or communion. There are many types of questions and theological issues that might be important to individuals and now is just an opportunity to ponder and explore.

For the “Life and Works” category, it might be helpful to remind people that this could be something that already happens in the community or in various places around the world. This does not have to be something totally new. It might be interesting to think about what already happens within the category of “Life and Works” and then try to figure out that which someone is most passionate about.

For both categories, it would be helpful for people to try to articulate what in particular makes them interested in those specific things for those categories. It might be helpful to note if there is a particular pattern or theme to the suggestions and questions one has. All of this can help participants identify their core values, wandering questions, and overwhelming passions that will make the work of witnessing to ecumenism much more fulfilling and worthwhile.

To close the session, it is suggested that you pray all together the prayer from the Unity Statement to close out the time. Before ending in the unison prayer, it might be helpful to allow others to share joys and concerns that could be lifted up in prayer by participants between the sessions:

“O God of life,
lead us to justice and peace,
that suffering people may discover hope;
the scarred world find healing;
and divided churches become visibly one,
through the one who prayed for us,
and in whom we are one Body,
your Son, Jesus Christ,
who with you and the Holy Spirit,
is worthy to be praised, one God,
now and forever. Amen.”
Session 4

United Methodism and Ecumenism: Wesley’s Grounding for Ecumenism to the Current Book of Discipline

KEY FOCUS
Our United Methodist history, through Wesley’s writings provide us with a theological grounding in ecumenism that continues to be expressed today in our faith and order through the Book of Discipline along with our life and works.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Learn about the Wesleyan grounding for ecumenism
2. See how Wesley’s belief in ecumenism is expressed in the United Methodist Church today
3. Wrestle with the notion of right hearts over right beliefs.

SCRIPTURE
The underpinning scripture passage for this lesson is 2 Kings 10:15 from the Common English Bible:

15 “Jehu departed from there and encountered Rechab’s son Jehonadab. Jehu greeted him, and asked, “Are you as committed to me as I am to you?” Jehonadab responded, “Yes, I am.” “If so,” said Jehu, “then give me your hand.” So Jehonadab put out his hand, and Jehu pulled him up into the chariot.”

PRAYER
For this fourth session, we begin with the prayer offered every meeting of Vatican II, as recorded in the booklet, Prayers before Meetings: Immaculata University Prayer Book by Immaculata University. Vatican II was called by Pope John XXIII and place in Room from 1962 until 1965. This historic gathering as described in The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology “brought together over 2000 bishops from all parts of the world, and produced a wide-ranging corpus of documents of major importance for the renewal of the Church in its mission today.”¹ The wide-ranging documents lead the Catholic Church to be more open and inclusive to other denominations and faiths. As the prayer is read, take note of the place from which each gathering begins:

“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 decision 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.”

ICE BREAKER
Following the prayer, to start this session, it is recommended that you begin by reminding everyone of the previous session, giving a short recap of the key ideas. To end the review, you might consider concluding by reminding everyone of the homework assignment and inviting the participants to share their responses and discoveries from the previous week’s homework with the group. This week, as it is building towards a final project with the group, the responses of the individuals should be recorded for future reference.

There are multiple ways in which you might chose to record the responses of the individuals which are best determined by the make-up of the group and the medium in which you are meeting:

For an in-person classroom:
If you are within a classroom setting, one thing you might consider is beginning the class in a circle. By placing everyone in a circle all participants will be able to see one another and share openly with each other. Within the circle, you could have each participant write down their responses to the homework and as they share them, place them in the middle of the circle to be collected at the end. However, if you cannot sit in a circle with one another but have access to a place to write which everyone can see, you could have individuals come and write up their responses and present them or you write them down as individuals present them to the class.

For a virtual classroom:
If you are meeting via a virtual meeting platform, it can be difficult to make sure that everyone gets to share in a timely manner. One of the ways you could facilitate sharing is by calling individuals one by one. This works best if you have a large virtual meeting. Another way to facilitate sharing is to allow people to organically share as they want. This works well with a smaller virtual meeting. In order to capture everyone’s response, you might ask people to share them out-loud and in the chat for either of these methods of sharing.

However, if you have found that something else works better for your specific group, feel free to use that instead of the suggestions that we give.
LESSON MATERIAL AND VIDEO SCRIPT

Being United Methodist and ecumenical. How are the two interconnected?

The founder of the Methodist movement, 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 catholic, meaning universal, church. He starts with a scripture lesson from 2 Kings 10:15:

> 15 When he left there, he met Jehonadab son of Rechab coming to meet him; he greeted him, and said to him, “Is your heart as true to mine as mine is to yours?” Jehonadab answered, “It is.” Jehu said, “If it is, give me your hand.” So he gave him his hand. Jehu took him up with him into the chariot.

Now this passage of scripture is not often discussed as it is in the middle of one of the most violent sections of the Bible. However, Wesley noticed something about this one section within the story that he thought was worth elevating. In this passage of scripture, Jehu who has been proclaimed king is out on a mission to secure his place as king and to fulfill a prophecy by making sure there were no other heirs of the house of Ahab and then to make sure that there are no more worshipers of Baal, another god. However, along the way in his battle to secure the kingdom, he encounters Jehonadab who is only mentioned in this passage as Rechab’s son. Some scholars point out that this mention could mean that he was part of the Rechabites who were considered as “conservative worship[ers] of the Lord who advocated a return to the faith in its pristine purity, as in the wilderness days.” If this is the case, these two, Jehu and Jehonadab, would not have had many of the same beliefs and yet something happens between them. Jehu from his chariot 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, “then give me your hand,” 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, 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.

Centering on this interaction between Jehu and Jehonadab, Wesley suggests when Christians relate to one another, they would do well to avoid focusing upon differences in belief. He even 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, is true for everyone. For instance, one Christian may believe in believers’ baptism and while another may believe 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.
Let’s be clear, the sermon is not about blurring boundaries between different Christian communities. Wesley believes each person relates to others from their own adherence to their own tradition, so each person is encouraged to go deeper into the community of their tradition. Instead, the sermon is about love among Christians. It is not a love of our own but one that is given to us by Christ. This love, the one Christ gave us, is the catalyst for a catholic spirit, and so our Wesleyan heritage strongly encourages us to love Christians not because of each other’s beliefs but because our hearts have taught us of that same love divine, all love’s excelling.  

“On a Catholic Spirit” is not the only place that John Wesley addresses this idea, this belief is echoed in many other places in other writings we have. 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.” This kind of bigotry, he believed, gives Christians rigid hearts and does not allow free will to exist in the church. Free will must exist in the church because without free will individual Christians will not be able to come to their own understandings and mature in their faith.

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.”

As one of the church traditions that came out of the Methodist movement, The United Methodist Church clearly reflects John Wesley’s foundation of love among other Christians. Over time, we have formalized that ecumenical tradition in our shared document, *The Book of Discipline*. Within the Constitution, 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...*”

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." 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.\(^\text{10}\)

Finally, in The United Methodist Church, our leaders are called upon to shepherd the church in ecumenism. Paragraph 403.1 in the Book of Disciplines outlines the six necessary disciplines of a bishop. Section e names one of those passions as “a passion for the unity of the church.” The section says: “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.”\(^\text{11}\)

Grounded in Wesley’s understanding of love among Christians, The United Methodist Church is steeped in an understanding of the necessity of receiving and expressing the gift of Christian unity and has certainly formalized ecumenism within its written faith and order.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Wesley describes declares it is more important for hearts to be right than for beliefs to be right. What does it mean to have right hearts?
2. Describe a time (with family, friends, or a church group) when you had to put aside differences in belief to maintain unity.
3. How does the Wesleyan concept of free will fit into Wesley’s caution against bigotry and help Christians to stay in unity despite opinions?
4. Of the statements within the Book of Disciple as part of the sub-section entitled “Ecumenical Commitment,” which one(s) are you drawn to and why? Are there any that you wrestle with and why?

GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR THE DISCUSSION

These points might be helpful to refer back to as the group discusses the questions above:

\textit{Wesley defines bigotry as “too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, Church and religion.”}^\text{12}

\textit{Statements from sub-section entitled “Ecumenical Commitment:”}

- 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.

MORE INFORMATION
In addition to the material already presented in this session, it is suggested that the group reviews the video created by the Council of Bishops staff discussing the current expression of ecumenism in The United Methodist Church. If the video is not cooperating, another option is to peruse the website, https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org. When internet connection is not available in the classroom, it might be helpful to print off a few news stories from the website to discuss recent or old ecumenical projects of The United Methodist Church.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION
1. How do you see The United Methodist Church living into unity today? How do you see your bishops working towards unity?
2. In your ecumenical experiences, how and what have you learned about your own denominational identity?
3. What ways can you imagine your faith orienting towards Christian unity now?

CONCLUSION
As a way to end the session this time, it might be helpful to pause for a moment for an imaginative reflective exercise. Perhaps, ask everyone to close their eyes. Begin by thinking about unity as defined as a gift. Imagine embracing the gift for yourself. Then, imagine giving that same gift to another. What does it look like? What does it feel like? How do you feel? Take a moment to linger on each question. Share with the group any deep insights you might have gained in this exercise.

Finally, close in a moment of prayer. For the prayer this week, consider using the prayer hymn “They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love” because our Christian love takes on a whole new meaning when we consider Wesley’s understanding of Christian unity.
SESSION 5
Growth in Love: The Limits of Acceptable Diversity and Constructive Conversations

KEY FOCUS
So far, the curriculum has provided theologically grounded background information from a myriad of foci, all building upon the point that unity is a gift found in Christ that we help to express within the world. Instead of focusing on developing a theological point or providing background knowledge, this session will provide practical skills to help us witness to the gift of unity as we engage ecumenically.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Provide practical and applicable tools to engaging in the work of ecumenism.
2. Help people identify their own limits of acceptable diversity.
3. Invite people to practice constructive conversations in the spirit of holy conferencing

SCRIPTURE
The underpinning scripture passage for this lesson is Ephesians 4:1-7; 11-16. The words of this scripture lesson will undergird all aspects of the lesson.:

“I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. 14 We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people’s trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. 15 But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body’s growth in building itself up in love.”
PRAYER
Today’s prayer comes from the Moravian Daily Texts 2017, a yearly publication which provides a daily devotional guide of the Moravian Church. It is one of the oldest daily devotional guides and has been published yearly since 1731. The Moravian Church (Northern and Southern Provinces) is one of the faith communions with whom we have a full communion agreement. The prayer was offered on October 31, 2017 for the 500th 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.”

ICE BREAKER
Since the substance of this lesson is mostly focused on practical steps, it is helpful to center everyone with scripture. It is suggested that you begin the lesson by doing a contemplative reading of the focus scripture.

There are a few steps to the process of contemplative reading which will help everyone slow down and focus on the text. First, to begin, it is suggested someone read the passage slowly. After a few moments of silence, invite someone else to read the passage once more. While it might seem unusual, it is helpful with contemplative reading to allow silence and space after each step. After allowing the scripture reading to settle, it may be useful to ask a few questions to engage and reflect upon the hearing of the Word. Here are a few questions that might help with reflection:

- What is a word or phrase that sticks out?
- What is this text speaking to us, in this moment?
- What might God be calling us to do?

While you might not have enough time to talk through each of these questions, select the question or questions that works the best within your timeframe and with your class.

Perhaps end the time by thanking everyone for their contributions as a way to remind us all that we all matter in the Body of Christ before moving on to the lesson material.

LESSON MATERIAL AND VIDEO SCRIPT
We have learned unity is a gift we simply receive. Once we have received it, though, we may need some practical suggestions on how to give 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 one another. True dialogue, in which we listen with the goal of understanding, can be quite challenging.

In his book, *More Light, Less Heat*, the Rev. Dr. Joe Phelps reminds us just how challenging it can be. Most people are naturally defensive. We tend to have a limited ability to tolerate disagreement, particularly disagreements about our faith and religion. And, many people have scars from past wounds inflicted by “adversaries.”¹ In the midst of all of this, we do not do a good job of teaching and practicing the art of careful listening and speaking. All these issues come together to make dialogue today a difficult calling. As Wesley Ariarajah once wrote, “True dialogue is a challenging encounter; it is not for the faint-hearted.”²

But, even in spite of all the challenges, true dialogue can also be quite rewarding.

So how does one begin to learn the art of careful listening and speaking?

It starts small, with a little preparation and practice. In order to engage in a serious, open, and vulnerable exchange of ideas, opinions, and beliefs some basic groundwork must be laid. A source you might not think to turn to for advice on the topic of dialogue provides an excellent, basic foundation—The Federal Highway Administration in the United States of America. They have 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 conversations 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 participant’s role is to give personal insights and perspectives.³

These suggestions are a significant shift from how we think of meetings and conversations. Most often, we prepare to present or defend our position. And yet, that is the exact opposite of what these suggestions invite us all to do.

This invitation to dialogue is a part of our DNA as Methodists. From the beginning of our Movement, the people called Methodists have known the power 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 process of dialogue in which we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, “holy conferencing.” John Wesley felt strongly about conferencing. He saw it as a spiritual practice and named it as “a means of grace,” alongside: Bible study, fasting, prayer, participating in the Sacraments, acts of mercy, and worship attendance.
It was through the process of “holy conferencing” that the Methodist movement became its own faith communion in America, known in the beginnings as the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Over the years, “holy conferencing” has shaped the faith communion.

During the summer of 2007, The United Methodist Church hosted its global gathering of young people ranging from ages 12-30 in South Africa, known as the Global Young People’s Convocation. The young people in attendance employed 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 as we have said, they didn’t just say this, they set forth rules by which they would organize their conversation on the difficult topics 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 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 the 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.4

The young people knew something that John Wesley believed and something that we have already discussed once before. John Wesley believed, that in general, he might not be right about everything and that he must be mistaken about some respects of his faith. He was convicted about his own faith but yet approached others with humility.

It was this same approach that Bishop Sally Dyck took prior to the 2012 General Conference with the guidelines set forth for our difficult conversations:

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

These lists are just examples of the work that must go into setting up holy, constructive conversations with others. The dialogue doesn’t have to be a global gathering of young people or a general conference; it can be a gathering among people in our own churches and even our communities. Setting up guidelines and principles will help us learn how to collectively speak even when we disagree.

And this is part of the work of being an ecumenist and building ecumenical relationships.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Have you previously seen conversation guidelines? How are they similar and/or different from those presented in this session?
2. Which guidelines spoke to you most? Which are most challenging? Most helpful?
3. How do you see conversation guidelines fitting into the work of witnessing to unity?
4. If you had to create your own list, what would you include?

**GUIDING THOUGHTS FOR THE DISCUSSION**

For reference, here are the lists of guidelines set out by the three groups or individuals discussed in this session:

- **The Federal Highway Administration in the United States of America:**
  1. a carefully crafted agenda, with five or six major questions at most;
  2. emphasis on gathering perspectives, insights, and opinions of participants through conversations 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 participant’s role is to give personal insights and perspectives.

- **The 2007 Global Young People’s Convocation:**
  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 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 the 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.7

Bishop Sally Dyck’s List Prior to the 2012 General Conference:
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 8

LESSON MATERIAL AND SECOND VIDEO SCRIPT
As we have said, Christian unity isn’t always easy. It takes preparation and practice. It is deep, internal work to which we must all commit and to which we must help hold one another accountable. And sometimes, when we finally, actually start engaging in true dialogue, it gets confusing. It can feel like we are simply engaging in conflicts with people who hold strongly held opposing beliefs.

So, what do Christians who want to walk in unity with other Christians do either when the theological beliefs they hold conflict with others’ beliefs or 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.9 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 they do, they 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. It is part of the beauty and difficulty with engaging deeply in relationships with each other.
While it cannot remove the difficulty or conflict, there are two foundational ideas that may be helpful.

First, we must constantly return to the question of 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 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.”

In other words, unity is not something we judge on belief. It is simply a gift to the church, whether we like it or not.

Having stated 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, for this was Jesus’ instructions to his disciples. In his book Kinnamon sets two such possible limits:

1. The absence of love, and
2. Idolatrous allegiance to things that are less than ultimate.

When we strip away personalities and politics, what truly are the things we believe are core to Christians being Christians? Once we discern the answer to that question, then we are able to see those things about which we hold as opinion, as opposed to those things we hold as foundational to faith in Christ. Perhaps another way to think about it is by turning to the familiar saying, “In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.” With this mindset of being charitable, all things not core to our beliefs becomes those things about which we hold as opinion, but over which we do not truly separate.

**FINAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. **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?
2. **Can you put the two foundational ideas about dealing with ecumenical conflict into your own words?**
3. **Let’s revisit the homework assignment from last session. What are your top values?** How did you come to that decision?
4. **What do you believe is the core of Christian belief?** How does that belief factor into your ideas about Christian unity?
CLOSING
After such an intensive discussion around beliefs and values in relation to Christian unity, it might be good to end with a brief thank you to the whole group for their participation. Perhaps, even allow other people to pass along their thanks to members of the group. There may also be a need for people to seek forgiven during this time for words that might have had an impact that they were not anticipating. Now would be an appropriate time to seek amends. After everything that needs to be said has been said, allow for a few moments of silence. Finally, we suggest that you spend some time in prayer for one another and for all those whom you do not find acceptable diversity.

Before leaving, invite the participants to participate in their last optional homework assignment. In preparation for the final session, each person is invited to reflect on all the previous sessions and begin to think about what they see their next step being in exhibiting the gift of unity. One suggestion is that each individual make a list of the actions or steps they want to take. Another suggestion is that each individual brainstorm the ways in which this group or any group that they are connected to might begin to exhibit unity in their life.
SESSION 6
Embarking on the Journey: Reflecting on the Past and Commissioning for the Future

KEY FOCUS
While most of the sessions have focused on providing information and having constructive dialogue, the focus of this session is to celebrate the journey that the participants have been on throughout the sessions. As it is the end of curriculum, the goal is to help individuals to be able to articulate the ways they might incorporate this learning into their lives beyond the sessions and also to mark the end with worship.

LEARNING GOALS
1. Celebrate the learning and growth that has occurred over the course of the curriculum
2. Articulate the ways that each person might begin or continue to be involved ecumenically
3. Mark the end of the curriculum through a meaningful, guided worship service

SCRIPTURE
The scripture underpinning this lesson comes from Psalm 133:1.: 

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

PRAYER
As this is the end of the curriculum, it is fitting to use this prayer which 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.”
ICE BREAKER
Since this is the last session, it might be helpful to do a quick review of each session to celebrate the journey the class has taken together to grow in their knowledge of Christian unity. It is suggested that you might list each session by the name. Then, open the floor and have participants list the main points or the thing they found to be the most impactful for each session. In doing this exercise, it might be helpful to have someone record the responses of all the participants in a way that could be shared after the session for them to keep for reference. As the last session, there is plenty of time to spend on this exercise. Think of it as a celebration of all that the group has gone through over the last five sessions.

LESSON MATERIAL
Throughout the last five weeks, we have been on a journey learning and growing in our knowledge of ecumenism. Most importantly, we have learned that our unity is a gift.

However, we have learned that this is a gift isn’t exactly what we think about. One way to think about it that might be helpful is to return to our Methodist roots and another one of our gifts from God, grace.

This grace comes in many forms: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying.

Prevenient grace is that grace which comes before we even know God’s love. It is “not something we do under our own power”¹ which is why it is a gift.

Justifying grace is that grace which occurs after our acknowledgement of God’s work within our life. It is the grace that as Wesley says causes “the forgiveness of all ours sins... [and] our acceptance of God.”²

Sanctifying grace is that grace which “shapes us more and more into the likeness of Christ.”³ It is a never-ending process in which we are always growing. At moments, we will feel more like Christ than others, and sometimes these moments are very fleeting.

Our understanding of grace also parallels our understanding of Christian unity. It is a gift that sometimes we don’t even know or see. Yet, at some point, we finally see it and our eyes are opened to the gift. Once we see it, we hope and try to work to make it manifest in the world. Christian unity is not something that will be perfect all the time. However, there will be fleeting and brief moments of beautiful and perfect unity that make it all worth it.

For the rest of the class, we hope that you each will share the ways that inspire you to work to make the gift of unity manifest in the world. For inspiration, check out our YouTube playlist of young adults sharing their stories of how they embrace ecumenism in their lives.
CLOSING WORSHIP
Our closing is more extended than other sessions. It is a final worship service.

If meeting in person, it might be helpful to light a candle and set in a circle at this point. A shift in the space with signal the change towards worship. The following is a suggested order of worship. However, feel free to adjust to fit the group.

Opening for Worship—The Bells of Taizé
Opening Prayer
Scripture—John 17:20-23
Silent Reflection
Sharing Hopes and Dreams
Closing Song—"They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”
Closing Prayer and Commissioning—Video from Bishop Sudarshana Devadhar

May this time of worship not be an ending but the beginning of a long journey of a life of ecumenism.
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.

4. Endnotes for Each Session:

**Session 1: Christian Unity in a Divided World: Our Scriptural Calling**


4 Jaime Clark-Soles, “‘That They May Be One’ Or, ‘Unity, Jesus-Style,’” Ministry Matters¹, last modified August 8, 2017, accessed July 9, 2020, https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8326/that-they-may-be-one-or-unity-jesus-style

5 Clark-Soles, “‘That They May Be One’ Or, ‘Unity, Jesus-Style.’”


7 Mackie, “What is the Shema?.”

8 Willem Visser t'Hooft at the World Council of Churches Fourth Assembly in 1968.

Session 2: Context: Divisions and Christian Conversations Through the Ages from the Protestant Reformation All the Way Back to the Early Church


4 Cameron, “Reformation,” 435.


8 Everett Ferguson, “Chapter 19: Decline and Renewal of Vitality in the West: The Ninth to the Eleventh Centuries,” in Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 400.

9 Ferguson, “Chapter 19,” 400.

10 Ferguson, “Chapter 19,” 400.

11 Ferguson, “Chapter 19,” 402.
Session 3: The Ecumenical Movement: From Division Towards Missional and Doctrinal Unity


15 Ferguson, “Chapter 19,” 401.


Session 4: The Ecumenical Movement: From Division Towards Missional and Doctrinal Unity


4 Birmelé, “Ecumenism,” 158.

5 Birmelé, “Ecumenism,” 158.


8 Birmelé, “Ecumenism,” 158.

9 Birmelé, “Ecumenism,” 158.


**Session 5: Growth in Love: The Limits of Acceptable Diversity and Constructive Conversations**


5 “Holy Conferencing: Bringing Grace to Tough Conversations” Interpreter, September/October 2012, (Evanston, IL: United Methodist Communications Joint Committee on Communications, 2012).


8 “Holy Conferencing: Bringing Grace to Tough Conversations” Interpreter, September/October 2012, (Evanston, IL: United Methodist Communications Joint Committee on Communications, 2012).


10 William Temple, a message delivered at the second conference on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, 1937.


12 Rupertus Meldenius

Session 6: Embarking on the Journey: Reflecting on the Past and Commissioning for the Future


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.ncccusa.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

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,**

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

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

**Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement,**

**Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart,**
Christena Cleveland, InterVarsity Press: Downers Grove, IL, 2013

**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)

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

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

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

“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