

**THE BIBLE
AND HUMAN SEXUALITY:
CLAIMING GOD'S GOOD GIFT**

LEADER'S GUIDE

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The Bible and Human Sexuality: Claiming God's Good Gift Leader's Guide
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United Methodist Women

PURPOSE

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

The Vision

Turning faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world.

Living the Vision

We provide opportunities and resources to grow spiritually, become more deeply rooted in Christ and put faith into action.

We are organized for growth, with flexible structures leading to effective witness and action.

We equip women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, workplaces, governments and churches.

We work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems.

We provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.

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Introduction

In writing our guiding text, Ellen A. Brubaker has issued a considerable challenge to those of us studying *The Bible and Human Sexuality*.

Brubaker invites us to explore the complexities of the biblical text, our varied understandings of the biblical text, the influence of theologians and church leaders throughout thousands of years of Judeo-Christian history, and the influence of family systems, heritage, and changing gender roles, along with the impact of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. She also invites us to explore how we were raised and instructed in our Christian faith.

Discussing sexuality is difficult for Christians for many reasons. Many of us were raised to avoid the subject, or deem it “too private.” Many of us have learned no vocabulary for talking about our own sexual experiences, our understanding of sexuality and what we do or don’t believe. Still more of us have complex personal, family, and church histories that have colored our notions of sexuality with shame, fear, pain, and frustration.

The good news, says Brubaker, is that human sexuality “is part of who we are as human beings, created by God and called good.” Sexuality, at its best, is a divine gift meant to enhance and strengthen relationships and draw us closer to our intimate partners, she explains. And there are many citations in the Bible that point to the good gift of sexuality, explicitly and implicitly, beginning with the creation stories in Genesis.

At the same time, Brubaker acknowledges that, like faith itself, our understanding and beliefs about sexuality are not informed and rooted in biblical texts alone. As she asserts, “Doctrines of the early church are a part of the story. What we were taught about sexuality, ourselves, and the church is also a part of the story. What were we taught about the relationship of men and women?”

In fact, early Christian philosophy (including notions about our bodies and our sexual selves) was heavily influenced by “spiritualistic dualism,” which was grounded in Hellenistic Greco-Roman practices. In *Body Theology*, theologian James B. Nelson explains that this dualism was foreign to early Jewish and Christian practices, but nonetheless influenced later Christian thinking, especially in terms of our understanding of the human body and sexuality. According to the doctrine of spiritual dualism, Nelson explains:

“[L]ife is composed of two antagonistic elements; spirit, which is good and eternal, and flesh or matter, which is temporal, corruptible, and corrupting. The sexual aspects of the body are the particular locus of sin.”¹

Brubaker also explores the impact of these philosophies on our historic traditional and current struggle with issues of sexuality, individually and collectively.

Further, Brubaker invites us, as people of faith, to lend our voices to the current debates in church and society about such issues as marriage, divorce, sexual orientation, gender identity, abortion, human trafficking, prostitution, and how the church should respond. How do we find a common language as Christians for discussing these questions?

- What do scriptures really say about human sexuality, and how can and should we understand them in today's world?
- What are the responsibilities of those who enter into (or are considering entering into) a sexual relationship?
- What are the responsibilities of those who are married?
- What constitutes a healthy, whole language, and theological framework for discussing human sexuality?
- Which, if any, "thou shalt nots" laid down by our forebears of the faith still hold true for us today?
- How does one live out "good sexuality" in the eyes of a loving God and the church?
- What are our corporate responsibilities for addressing individual and institutional sins of human trafficking, sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults, and sexual abuse and oppression that is rooted in sexism, racism, heterosexism, and abuse of power?

The world is watching and waiting for a relevant, compelling, loving, challenging and cogent word from the body of Christ. Our silence or simplistic "thou shalt nots" are no longer adequate for the people in our care—for those who claim Christian faith and/or church membership and those who need and are seeking spiritual community.

We are sexual beings. God made us that way. Sexuality can be celebrated, and it can be exploited. It can draw us closer to the one we love, or it can divide whole communities of faith. Yet, we are called to be the beloved community of healing, wholeness, reconciliation, and love. How we help one another make sense of the beauty and complexities of sexuality is the purpose of this study. Open your minds and hearts, and dive in.

Prepare to Lead This Study

Reading this Leader's Guide will help equip you to conduct adult participants through Ellen A. Brubaker's foundational text, *The Bible and Human Sexuality: Claiming God's Good Gift*.

It is essential that you read both Brubaker's text and this guide in advance of leading your classes. Highlight key passages and make notes in the margins. Begin to draft key points and potential questions participants might ask. Some key points are suggested throughout this guide. You should also consider reading "Our Theological Task" from *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, pages 78–89.

You will also find it helpful to read some books and articles and review some of the video resources listed in this guide. The goal is for you to become familiar with the contemporary questions and issues related to human sexuality that are being discussed and debated in church and society. As Christians rely heavily on scriptures, preaching, teaching, and church school to enhance our discipleship and biblical/theological understanding, we also lean heavily on news and entertainment media, family history and practices, and the influence of those in our social orbits to shape our beliefs about such social-ethical-moral issues as sexuality.

I would also urge you to read and become familiar with official statements of The United Methodist Church on such issues as human sexuality, homosexuality, pornography, human trafficking, abortion, and marriage. Even if you do not agree with the official stances of the denomination, it is important for you to be conversant about them.

As you prepare to lead this study, do your research and, starting in your own heart and mind, consider the questions that will be asked of the study participants, and answer them for yourself:

- What do you believe about yourself as a sexual being?
- What was your first sexualized experience with another person? (Can be kissing, seeing, touching, reading—not necessarily the first time you had sexual intercourse.)
- What do you believe about sexuality and marriage? What informed those beliefs?
- What do you believe about same-sex relationships? Why?
- What do you believe about human trafficking? Prostitution/sex workers? Pornography? Rape as a tool of warfare?
- Are there issues of your own sexual life (or that of someone you love) that have caused you shame, frustration, anger, or pain? What are they?
- How does your Christian faith and discipleship inform your understanding of your own sexuality? Your views about sexual abuse and exploitation?

It is important that you become aware of your own beliefs, feelings, biases, and understandings, not because you will share them or impose them during the group study (you should not), but because you will be a better leader if you are aware of them. One way to raise your self-awareness is to undertake a fast on the days leading up to your first class session. (Please consult a doctor before fasting.) Fasting is one way of clearing one's mind and inviting new revelations from God.

Remember that sexuality is not an easy topic for most of us. Many Christians have confusing and complicated notions of human sexuality, the Bible, our personal beliefs, and what the church should—and should not—teach and require. Much of this dis-ease dates back generations in our personal, family, and corporate lives.

There is good news. God is inviting us in this moment to consider both the goodness of sexuality in our lives and the challenges we face when sexuality is misused. And we are creating safe spaces to have these conversations. Through this study, participants are invited to deepen their individual and mutual understandings.

Further, through authentic and honest exploration, members of your group will become better equipped to address sexual exploitation, sexual violence, human trafficking, and other unjust and oppressive perversions of God's gift of sexuality, thus changing the lives of those who are crying out for hope, comfort, justice, and affirmation from God's people.

As you read and study, God is strengthening you, and the groups you will lead, to have these life-giving discussions. Pray for each person you will encounter. Each day of your study, start with prayer for openness, courage, compassion, and tenacity. Get ready for meaningful encounters!

Hymns and Songs

Use these during your times of corporate worship and for moments of reflection during your private and group study sessions.

From *The Faith We Sing*

- "Praise the Source of Faith and Learning," no. 2004
- "Let All Things Now Living," no. 2008
- "My Life Is in You, Lord," no. 2032
- "My Gratitude Now Accept, O God" (*Gracias, Señor*), no. 2044
- "God Weeps," no. 2048
- "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth," no. 2050
- "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry," no. 2051
- "Wade in the Water," no. 2107
- "Come and Find the Quiet Center," no. 2128
- "Forgive Us, Lord" (*Perdón, Señor*), no. 2134
- "Lord, Be Glorified," no. 2150
- "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me," no. 2153
- "Water, River, Spirit, Grace," no. 2253
- "Holy Ground," no. 2272

From *The United Methodist Hymnal*

- "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty," no. 64
- "What Gift Can We Bring," no. 87
- "For the Beauty of the Earth," no. 92
- "Creating God, Your Fingers Trace," no. 109
- "How Can We Name a Love," no. 111
- "*Cantemos al Señor*" (Let's Sing Unto the Lord), no. 149
- "I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light," no. 206
- "*Pues Si Vivimos*" (When We Are Living), no. 356
- "Blessed Assurance," no. 369

“There Is a Balm in Gilead,” no. 375
“This Is a Day of New Beginnings,” no. 383
“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me,” no. 521
“Child of Blessing, Child of Promise,” no. 611
“Let Us Break Bread Together,” no. 618
“Now, on Land and Sea Descending,” no. 685
“Marching to Zion,” no. 733

From *Worship & Song*

“All My Days,” no. 3011
“When Words Alone Cannot Express,” no. 3012
“Creation Sings,” no. 3018
“God of the Bible,” no. 3020
“God Is Speaking,” no. 3025
“Jesus Is a Rock in a Weary Land,” no. 3074
“Purify My Heart,” no. 3103
“Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone),” no. 3104
“If You Believe and I Believe,” no. 3121
“Peace for the Children,” no. 3125
“I Love the Lord,” no. 3142
“The Jesus in Me,” no. 3151

Scriptures

These scriptures may be helpful to you in understanding God’s love for all of creation—including God’s human creation—and how even our biblical forebears sometimes failed to care for the human creation.

Deuteronomy 7:9
Judges 11 (esp. verses 29–40)
Ruth 3:1–4:10
Psalm 136:1–3
Proverbs 5:15–23
Proverbs 30:18–19
Song of Solomon 4:3–6, 5:2–5, 7:6–10
Jeremiah 20:11–14
Zephaniah 3:17
Matthew 5:21–32
John 3:16–17
John 13:25–35

John 15:10–13
Romans 8:38–39
1 Corinthians 6:12–20
1 Corinthians 7:1–8
1 Corinthians 13:1–8
Ephesians 5:28–32
1 Peter 4:8

All Learners and All Teachers

Every week at worship, the members of Hobson United Methodist Church in Nashville, Tennessee, declare, “. . . we are all learners and all teachers; we all have gifts to share, and so we work to listen to and learn from each other, treating each other with respect and dignity.”²

In preparing to lead this four-part study, it is important to remember that all participants come with a piece of the story of our faith, the story of what we believe, and the story of who we are called to be as the body of Christ. This does not mean that you, the facilitator and teacher, do not play a vital role. You do. It does mean that more learning and teaching happens if you can extend a hand of invitation to mutual sharing and discovery for the group as a whole.

Be prepared to use materials and suggested exercises in a way that respects that some people learn better by discussing what they have read in a group, while others prefer to listen and consider what is being said by others.

Most people will come with some preconceived beliefs and feelings about the topics discussed. It is not your job to change minds. Rather, you are to invite all participants to engage the texts, consider the issues with new ears and hearts, and take away a new understanding of the complexities facing the church and individual Christians when it comes to human sexuality and articulating a Christian sexual ethic.

This study will undoubtedly evoke a level of fear, defensiveness, anxiety, and even conflict. Many of us have been reared and nurtured in an environment in which sexuality is just not talked about. Many of the participants will have never heard a sermon or engaged in a Sunday school discussion where sexual themes were discussed.

Cooperation Contract

Plan in advance how you will model and ask for mutual respect from and for all participants. One important tool is a “cooperation contract.” After members gather on the first day, say that you want to make sure that we all have an opportunity to participate in all discussions. Say that you

recognize that some of us may have a lot to say and may have a lot of information on the topic, while others may feel less sure of their thoughts.

Affirm the notion that “we are all learners and all teachers,” and that we will add to our store of knowledge through this study. Then, present the contract on a large poster-sized sheet of paper, which includes such sentences as:

- I will listen while others are talking, and allow them to finish their thoughts before I speak.
- I will read the assigned pages before class, and be as ready as I can to discuss the topic for the session.
- I assume that everyone around me is also a valuable member of the body of Christ, whose point of view may be helpful to the discussion.
- I will keep what is said in class in confidence and not share stories told here without the permission of the person speaking.
- I reserve the right to “pass” on participating in activities and discussions that are too painful or difficult for me, although I respect others’ right to continue the discussion and activities.

Emphasize the right of any participant to opt out—without fear of question or judgment—from discussions and activities that are uncomfortable or distressing. Remind persons assigned as group facilitators to invite participation, but not to insist on it. At the same time, gently remind participants that, if they opt out of a discussion, they should not discourage others from continuing.

Explain that everyone is urged to sign their names on the actual contract so that, when the conversation becomes exciting, lively, and compelling, we will still allow space for all people to be heard with respect and focus. Invite members to add three or four more points to the contract, then invite them to sign it. You might have participants sign it as part of the opening worship.

Feel free to refer to the contract throughout your sessions.

Even with the contract, you may note that some participants are speaking more, while others are saying little. Faye Wilson, an educator, offers these helpful statements³ you may use to increase the number of people who participate in the discussion, while keeping things on track:

- “I’d like to have a couple of people give me a one-minute response to this issue.”
- “This area [or this table] has been quiet. I don’t want to leave you out. Does someone here have an idea to share?”
- “Take 30 seconds to bring that thought to a conclusion.”
- “[Class member] has thrown down the gauntlet on this issue. Is there anyone else who would like to present another opinion?”

Thank each person who shares, and summarize the main points of the discussion. It is important for group members to feel heard and respected.

Wilson acknowledges that, despite signing the contract and hearing your instructions, occasionally one person will attempt to dominate the conversation, shout another speaker down, or exceed the time limit you offer. If this happens, Wilson recommends that you:

- stand near the person,
- make eye contact,
- thank her or him for sharing, and
- direct the person to write down further thoughts to share later, if there is time.

You may also provide a specific colored, self-stick notecard or notepad where you direct all class members to write down further thoughts about the day's discussions.

Prepare in Advance

To create a safe, hospitable environment before the first session:

1. Prepare an opening worship that celebrates God's creation, including humanity. See the suggested hymns and songs listed in this guide. Choose songs that are relatively easy to sing. Gauge the group; save more unfamiliar or more difficult pieces for after people start to get to know one another. While hymns and songs are suggested throughout this guide, feel free to make changes—after consulting with your song leader/accompanist—as needed.
2. Ask two participants or staff persons to serve as “compassionate listeners” for your group throughout the sessions. These persons will make themselves available during established times to meet with, pray with, listen to, and comfort any person for whom the study topic becomes challenging or evokes strong emotion. (In the best-case scenario the chaplains are not integral members of the class, but are there as listeners/supporters.)
3. Visit your classroom and consider the setup. Again, the most effective arrangement is to have the group meet at tables or in a circle of chairs. This study requires working mostly in smaller groups, preferably with no more than five to eight persons in each group. Try to arrange the room so that all participants can see the main writing board, video monitor or screen, and can hear you from wherever they are sitting.
4. Test your audiovisual equipment to make sure it is working, and learn how to use it. Or, if possible, have a tech assistant at the ready. Make sure PowerPoint presentations or materials written on posters are readable.
5. If possible, recruit a music leader for the entire time or for each day. Review with them the hymns and songs you plan to use. It is also fine to plan to sing *a cappella*; however, you will want to choose more familiar songs that are easy for most people to sing.

6. Write a brief job description for table facilitators, recorders, and reporters, which are roles that may be rotated among members over the course of the class. Post these descriptions in the room or make copies for each table.
 - a. *Facilitators* should keep their small groups on task, insure that every person who wants to speak gets an opportunity, and keep their comments to a minimum during the discussions. If members of the group have questions about their assignment, the facilitator should ask the instructor for the answer and report to the whole group, to insure accuracy.
 - b. *Recorders* should keep notes of key observations made by members of the group, either on a personal notepad or on a larger, more visible poster-style sheet. Recorders should review those notes with members to make sure they accurately represent what was said.
 - c. *Reporters* (the recorder may also serve in this role) should share with the larger group, as requested, the key observations or answers to assigned questions from the whole group. After reporting, it is always helpful to ask group members, “Did I miss anything?” to give all members a chance to share any thoughts they may have neglected to share.

Session Organization

Each lesson is organized as a two-hour session, which includes:

- *Salient Statement*: A summary and/or direct quote from the assigned chapters for the day.
- *Biblical Teachings*: Scriptures pertaining to the topic for the day. This may include an assignment to read an entire biblical story as the foundation for the concept or quotation. (Unless otherwise designated, all biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.)
- *Centered by God’s Teaching Spirit* (20–25 minutes): This includes the welcome, introductions, worship, introduction of assigned compassionate listeners, and the objectives for the day. For the first session, this section might run longer because of extended introductions and signing the community contract.
- *Reel Life—Real Life* (10–15 minutes): Ask a participant to read aloud the short story on an issue of the day (included). Then (optional) show a preselected video from YouTube or another source related to the issue. (This could be a spoken-word performance, news story, or first-person account.)
- *The Word and THE Word* (40 minutes): At tables or in small groups, invite participants to review the day’s chapters and the biblical concepts (or read excerpts or a few of their homework notes). The last 10–15 minutes should be spent making notes for the report back to the entire community.

Discussion Questions:

- What key points were raised in the reading?
- What was new information to me? What had I not considered before this moment?
- When was the last time this issue was discussed or mentioned in my home church's worship, Sunday school class, or United Methodist Women group?
- What have I learned through my upbringing, friendships, intimate relationships, and from news/entertainment media—including books—that shaped my opinion?
- *Discovery* (15 minutes): Each group reports back to the community, using the suggested questions for that session. Additional questions (optional):
 - What was one thing that was new to one or more group members?
 - Where is the church? Where is United Methodist Women?
- *God Speaks and We Respond* (15 minutes):
 - The leader reviews key concepts, lessons, hard questions, and a word of challenge from scriptures.
 - The leader invites participants to spend 10 minutes in individual prayer, and/or writing in their journals.
- *Idea Wall* (5 minutes): The leader invites all participants to write ideas or statements on self-stick notes, including what God may be saying to us individually, our congregations, United Methodist Women, or the global United Methodist Church (or to the whole body of Christ) about this topic. (*Explain that some of us think and act locally, while others may have the opportunity to extend our reach farther; but each of us is called to action.*) Offer some examples for notes, such as: "Invite our local Girls, Inc., leaders to talk with our circle about what girls in our community are facing." "Cosponsor, with district United Methodist Men, a panel discussion on sexual/domestic violence." "Pray each day at noon—or fast each Friday—for the next month for children living with sexual abuse."
- *Assignments* (5 minutes): Review the assigned reading and other homework for the next session. Include a reminder about the compassionate listeners' availability, any housekeeping matters, and references to additional material available for participants' use between sessions.
- *Closing Worship/Reflection* (10 minutes): Ahead of time, ask two participants to be readers or song leaders or, if you have a piano or guitar, to be accompanists. (In some cases, several readers or a group litany is suggested.) Avoid making routine announcements at the end of worship. Leave with the ring of scriptures or song sending everyone forth as the last thing that participants experience.

Materials and Supplies

Please make the items listed below available for all sessions.

- Bibles (at least three versions, including the *New Revised Standard Version* and *Common English Bible*)
- A Bible concordance (to help find scriptures that may come up in discussion)
- *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*
- *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012*
- Hymnbooks, including *The United Methodist Hymnal*, *The Faith We Sing*, and *Word & Song*
- Name tags
- Newsprint (preferably the self-sticking kind)
- Butcher paper or bulletin-board paper, for creating the “Idea Wall”
- Markers
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Photocopy of a puzzle (line drawing) with pieces large enough for participants to color (at least 5" x 5")
- Ballpoint pens
- Self-sticking index cards of different colors
- Small self-stick notepads
- Masking tape
- Handheld mirrors, one for each table (large enough for participants to see most of their faces)
- Pushpins
- Scissors
- Yarn
- Straight pins
- Cloth, cross, candles, etc., to create a permanent worship center/altar

Endnotes

1. James B. Nelson, *Body Theology*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville: KY, 1992, 30.
2. “Hobson Community Covenant,” Hobson United Methodist Church, Nashville, TN, online at: <http://hobsonumc.org>.
3. Faye Wilson, *Transformative Learning Plenary for Mission u*, United Methodist Women, 2014.

SESSION 1

The Word of God . . . and Words about the Word

CHAPTERS 1 AND 2

Salient Statement

“God created the process of sex, love, and birth. We may continue to discuss and discern in different ways. This is essential to growth in the faith. We need not determine right and wrong in ways that separate believers from one another. More significant is our oneness in the truth and love of the God who has created us and called us good.” (Brubaker, Chapter 2)

Biblical Teachings

“Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle doe that graze among the lilies. Before the day breeze blows, and the shadows flee, I will be off to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense. You are utterly beautiful, my dearest; there is not a single flaw in you.”
(Song of Songs 4:5–7, CEB)

“You have heard that it was said, *Don’t commit adultery*. But I say to you that every man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart.” (Matthew 5:27–28, CEB)

Objectives of the Lesson

- Understand sexuality as a gift from God.
- Identify the complexity of biblical teaching about sexuality, including what constitutes “bad” sexual conduct.
- Examine our own feelings and understanding about sexuality—and where those beliefs and feelings come from.

Preparation

- Have hymnals and copies of worship guides (our list of suggested hymns and songs) on each table, or displayed on newsprint or PowerPoint.
- Put copies of the puzzle and scissors on each table, one for each participant.
- Arrange the cloth, cross, candles, and other items to create a permanent worship space.
- Tack a length of butcher paper or taped-together newsprint on the wall and title it “Idea Wall.” This is where class members will post ideas and concepts for the entire session.
- Arrange chairs in groupings, if the room is not already arranged with chairs around tables.
- Make name tags or have enough name tags and markers on each table so that participants may create their own.
- Provide notecards, pens, colored pencils, photocopies of the puzzle, straight pins, and printed sheet with job descriptions at each table.
- Copy the “Real Life” story, and ask a participant to present it at the assigned time.
- Cue the video, “Sex in the Bible,” Part 5 (https://youtu.be/j5__0e7T-8o?list=PLDE_hlOiWJM2QPGbGJ4EZnrP948Gr7khf).
- Ask two participants to serve as readers during opening and closing worship.

Centered by God’s Teaching Spirit (20 minutes)

Welcome participants and ask them to take their seats. Introduce yourself and ask participants to take five to seven minutes to introduce themselves to everyone at their table and to make and put on their name tags.

Introduce the topic in your own words, or use the following talking points, taken from United Methodist Women’s purpose for developing this mission study:

Human sexuality is fundamental to life. As Christians we desire to live faithfully in this aspect of our lives. Holy Scriptures are our guide, yet the scriptures have been interpreted and used in ways that are contradictory, confusing, and harmful.

This study will examine both Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament for insights concerning human sexuality. Through this exploration participants will learn what the Bible does and does not say about sexuality in order to find guidance for faithful living.

We will also:

- Examine scriptures both Hebrew and New Testament, including Jesus’ teachings, in the cultural context of the times and the “big picture” message concerning sexuality today.
- Explore the messages and practices of the church through the ages regarding human sexuality, including what the church is teaching today.

- Seek to understand what it means to be a person of sacred worth created in the image of God.
- Discuss current issues including the idolization, and demonization of sexuality and factors that contribute to such (advertising, trafficking, power, shame, economics, etc.)
- Discuss such issues as reproductive health and fertility issues, domestic violence, sexual ethics in ministerial relationship, homosexuality, marriage, rape as a tool of warfare, and sex trafficking as they impact overall sexuality.¹

IMPORTANT: As the leader, you should be explicit in saying to participants that some topics and exercises may be painful or distressing to some participants, and that anyone has the right to “pass” on participation in a particular exercise. Say also that if a number of persons express discomfort with a particular exercise, a small group or the entire group may decide to skip it and move on. Assure them that “passing” is acceptable. You may have to repeat this invitation to pass more than once during the lessons.

Pause for a moment, then invite the group into a time of worship.

Ask the assigned readers to stand where they are. The first one should announce and read from the Song of Songs 4:1–5. (As the passage is read, light one candle on your altar.)

The second reader should announce and read Matthew 5:27–30. (As this passage is read, light the second candle.)

Pause, and then pray:

Wondrous Creator of all good things, we come to you humbly asking for your wisdom. In your Word, we hear both celebration of our sexual selves and warning about misuse of our sexuality.

We read stories of our forefathers, whom you adored. Some had many wives and many children by those wives. But we see in Jesus’ earthly parents two people alone, joined together as partners.

Our history includes those who would name all fleshly things as bad, while the Song of Songs clearly is a scriptural celebration of sexual delight between two people.

We want to know more from you, O God, about how we can honor our sexual selves and purify our souls, how we can stop sexual abuse and exploitation of the vulnerable, and how we can say to the church and the world that God has given us both a gift and a responsibility in creating us as sexual.

And so we invite you in, Great God and Light of our lives, as we work together to know you better and to follow you more faithfully. Help us to see as you would have us see. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

Real Life—Reel Life (10 minutes)

The following is a personal experience that has given me perspective as I approach the topic of human sexuality in my writings and talks. Read the following story aloud:

About ten years ago, I was invited to lead a workshop for the staff at a United Methodist–related agency about sexual ethics and the church’s policies on prevention of sexual misconduct and sexual harassment. I began my presentation, as I still do, by asserting that sexuality is a part of who we are as God’s creation, and that sexual behavior is natural—even good for us—in the right context.

I further said to the participants that each person had some stake in sexual behavior, if only because their birth mother had had sexual contact in order to conceive them.

At that point, one participant—a woman of about 50—got up and stormed out. She did not come back to training, and headed straight to the human resources office to complain. Later in the day I ran into her and asked her if we could talk about what happened. She was extremely agitated and angry, but she finally told me, “My mother did NOT have sex. The way you said it was an insult to my mother.”

I asked her if she could help me understand. She was furious, but she explained. “My mother did NOT have sex. She did her wifely duty and she made love with my father—her husband, by the way. It was Godly and my birth was a blessing. It was NOT sex.” And with that she walked away.

That story stuck with me, and it has informed my writing and speaking on issues of sexuality, justice, and faith. For many, many of us, sexuality is difficult to discuss, particularly in the context of our faith, so much so that even talking about it gets our hackles up.

The good news, though, is that the church is beginning to talk more. We don’t have all the answers. But we are willing to ask the questions. One good example is that in the last quadrennium the Connectional Table of The United Methodist Church sponsored a series of conversations among diverse members about their feelings, theological viewpoints, and cultural perspectives on the issue of homosexuality.

The members were not there to convince one another about the “rightness” or “wrongness” of one viewpoint or another; they were there to engage one another about biblical interpretation, love, and grace, and what people in their congregations and contexts were saying and struggling with. These dialogues were a humble step in a positive direction, they were confessional in nature and allowed everyone a voice and assumed everyone at the table was an ardent disciple of Jesus Christ with a hunger to do God’s will and live out God’s light in the world.

—M. Garlinda Burton

Show the video clip, “Sex in the Bible,” Part 5 (stop at 07:10).²

The Word and THE Word (40 minutes)

Ask class members to get their puzzles and colored pencils ready. Invite participants to think about their own sexual history, experience, and what they have been taught by the church. Without challenging one another, ask them to call out short phrases in their own group about what they've been taught to believe and do or don't do regarding sex. To prompt them, ask:

- What were you taught about what age was the “right” age for sexual activity?
- What did you believe as a 20-year-old about who should initiate sexual intercourse?
- How were women supposed to feel about sex?
- How were men supposed to feel about sex?
- If you ever heard a Sunday school teacher or preacher talk about sex, what were some of the things they said?
- What constitutes “good” or appropriate sexual contact? What institutes “bad” sex?
- What did your parents tell you about sexual contact, sexual behavior, or who should have sex?
- What might make one consider her or his sexual encounter “shameful”?

For each “positive” answer a person gives about sexuality (“Sex was a gift.” “Sex was something sacred.” “I was taught that a sexual relationship was special and once-in-a-lifetime.” “I learned to respect my body as a temple,” etc.), direct that person to color one piece on their puzzle. Explain that this is not a judgment of “right” or “wrong”; rather, it may give us some insight into how people may talk about sex or connect to sexuality as a gift from God that we should celebrate.

Before starting the exercise, emphasize that no one should reveal why he or she chooses to color (or not color) a piece of the puzzle. At the same time, it may be helpful to recognize by sight that we all come from different perspectives, backgrounds, family teachings, and even Christian teachings about sexuality. Also, some of us have been harmed and shamed because of our feelings, our roles, our sexual lives (or lack of sexual lives), which affects how we see ourselves and how we believe God sees and judges our sexual selves.

The goal of this exercise is to make visible some of those positive feelings, histories, teachings, and behaviors, so that when we're talking together at tables, we are sensitive to the fact that not every Christian person sees, feels, or considers sexuality the same way.

As participants finish coloring and cutting out their puzzles, ask them to place the pieces in the middle of their table or circle. Direct the groups at each table to take turns reading Chapter 4 of Song of Songs.

Ask each table's recorder to use the same color index cards for each person. Invite each table member to offer something new, interesting, or challenging they heard in the reading. The recorder should write these down and set them to one side.

Now, ask each table to discuss Brubaker’s Chapter 1, particularly the sections on “The Song of Songs/The Song of Solomon” and “Human Sexuality and the Development of Israel,” and Chapter 2, particularly “The Birth Narratives” and “The Life and Ministry of Jesus—The Misfits.”

Ask participants to discuss the following questions, guided by the table leaders. The recorder should take notes to share with the larger group.

1. What is the purpose of sexuality, according to the Bible?
2. Are there behaviors and norms practiced by God’s people in the Old Testament that match or affirm your own views of “good” sex? What are they?
3. Are there behaviors and norms practiced by God’s people in the Old Testament that run counter to your own views of “good” sexual behavior? What are they?
4. What changes, if any, do we see in the New Testament with the teachings of Jesus?
5. What information did Brubaker present that was new to you?
6. What, if any, ideas for what the church or United Methodist Women could do to better address sexuality have surfaced for you?

At about ten minutes before the end of this activity, ask recorders to review what they will share with the larger group, to make sure they are representing what their tablemates intended. Suggest to recorders that they should start by reporting those ideas or reflections shared by a majority or more than one participant. If there is time, they can receive other ideas or statements.

Discovery (15 minutes)

Invite recorders to report. Don’t let one reporter take all the time. You may ask one table at a time to share and continue to rotate until all have shared. If there is additional time, ask if individual table members have comments to share.

God Speaks and We Respond (15 minutes)

Review some of the key concepts in the readings, including:

- We start from different places in our understanding and comfort with the topic of sexuality, depending on our upbringing, our own histories, any trauma or abuse we’ve experienced, and how the subject has been engaged in our churches.
- The Bible contains both celebrations and condemnations of sexual behavior. There is also polygamy, sex outside of marriage (Abraham was not married to Hagar), rape, and sexual abuse in the Old Testament. Jesus talks about adultery and lust, briefly, but he also talks about forgiveness being more powerful than “sin,” and questions why the adulterous woman was denounced and the men she “sinned with” were not (John 8:1–11)
- If we are part of God’s creation and we are sexual, then our sexuality is part of who we are. We need to ask ourselves how we can celebrate it, practice it, enjoy it justly, honorably, and the way God intended.

Idea Wall (5 minutes)

Invite participants to write in their journals or to engage in personal prayer. Explain the “Idea Wall,” telling them that it is the place to write suggestions for what the denomination or the United Methodist Women at the congregational, conference, or church-wide level should be doing, saying, creating, and resourcing in reference to sexual issues, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, etc. Give examples: “Invite our local Girls, Inc., organization to talk to my circle about sexual issues facing teen girls in my community.” “Create a church-wide curriculum on sexual abuse prevention in churches.” “Join United Methodist Men in fasting each Friday for victims of sexual/domestic violence.” “Plan a marriage enrichment retreat for our congregation, during which sexual intimacy is the main topic.”

Give participants a signal when three minutes are left to finish posting their ideas and then call them back to their tables.

Assignment (5 minutes)

Remind class members of the reading and assignments for the next lesson, which are Chapters 3 and 4 of Brubaker’s work. Invite them to bring their puzzle pieces to the altar, where they will remain throughout the study as a reminder of the varied experiences and points of view among them. Remind participants, too, who the chaplains are and their availability. Make any routine announcements or housekeeping advice now. The session should end with worship.

Closing Worship/Reflection (10 minutes)

Call the group together saying, “We are God’s creation and we are created in God’s image. God’s own child was sent to save us. How much more do we need to know about how beloved we are, how special we are, how marvelously made we are?”

Let’s sing together, “How Can We Name a Love,” no. 111 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Litany

After the hymn, have a reader lead this closing litany:³

Leader: It is by our love that we are known to be followers of Christ.

ALL: It is by trusting that we become fully human.

Leader: It is by changing that we hope to grow.

ALL: **What we were when we came here, we will not be when we leave,
for we have met each other in the presence of God.**

Leader: Let us therefore show love for one another.

Invite the participants to share the peace of Christ with one another, then go in peace until you meet again in the next session.

Endnotes

1. Ellen A. Brubaker, *The Bible and Sexuality: Claiming God's Good Gift*, United Methodist Women, 2016.
2. Used with permission. "Sex in the Bible," Part 5, YouTube video, 09:59, posted by "Slyfox [King of Fools] Channel 1," July 3, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j5__0e7T-8o&feature=youtu.be&list=PLDE_hlOiWJM2QPGbGJ4EZnrP948Gr7khf.
3. Litany by Brian Wren, 2004, *Worship & Song: Worship Resources for the 2012 General Conference*, no. 197 (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 201. Adapted for leader's guide.

SESSION 2

Paul, Church Patriarchy, and Fear of Flesh

CHAPTERS 3 AND 4

Salient Statement

“At times, Paul seems to fall back on his old interpretations. Paul was human and like all of us was a person of his culture and context. At the same time he is able to forge ahead with new understandings as God is revealed to him. Perhaps these new insights are in part due to the leadership of the women he encountered in the development of the church.” (Brubaker, Chapter 3)

Biblical Teachings

“All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:27–28, CEB)

“For example, wives should submit to their husbands as if to the Lord. A husband is the head of his wife like Christ is the head of the church, that is, the savior of the body.” (Ephesians 5:22–23)

Objectives of the Lesson

- Identify writings of Paul for clues about cultural context and possible conflicts of interest that impact Paul’s teachings about sexuality.
- Reflect on how pluralism, ideological controversies, culture wars, non-Christian philosophies, and conflicting beliefs about “flesh” versus “spirit” have impacted our Christian understanding of sexuality and sexual mores.
- Examine the message of Jesus, as recorded in scriptures about sexuality, sexual “sin,” and how we are to live.

Preparation

- Place hymnals and worship guides (our list of suggested hymns and songs) on each table, or displayed on newsprint or via PowerPoint.
- Prepare worship space.
- Tack up the “Idea Wall,” if you had to remove it previously.
- Place lengths of yarn (cut into two-foot pieces) on the table, enough for each participant to take one, with a few strings left over.
- Put the same three colors of sticky notes on each table.
- Copy the “Real Life” story and invite a participant to read it at the assigned time.
- Cue the video, “John Franks: Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy” (<https://youtu.be/zwaqjsBbBJE>).
- Cue discussion questions via PowerPoint, or write them on newsprint or poster board so that they are ready.
- Ask one participant to serve as a reader during opening worship and another to read during the closing worship.

Centered by God’s Teaching Spirit (20 minutes)

Ask participants to take their seats and ask each person to take one or two sheets of each of the three sticky notepads. Decide which color you will use for each of these three questions. Tell them, “Without looking in a Bible or searching for a Bible passage electronically on your phone or asking your neighbor, answer the following questions on the ____ (color) pad.”

- Write one thing you recall that Jesus says about sexuality. Try to pinpoint where it is written in the Bible.
- Write one thing you recall that Paul says about sexuality. Try to pinpoint where it is written in the Bible.
- Write any scriptures or idea you recall from the Bible that refers to sexuality. Try to recall the biblical book or part of the Bible where the scriptures may be recorded.

Tell participants to move through the room without speaking, engaging in silent meditation as they exchange a sticky note of the same color with another person. They are to take that note back to their tables and meditate over the words they read as we prepare for worship. Remind them that we will use those sticky notes later, so they should keep them.

Join in singing the opening hymn, “Come and Find the Quiet Center,” no. 2128 in *The Faith We Sing*.

Ask the first reader to lead the following centering prayer.¹

Leader: When we pray, we are opening ourselves up to God, creating the possibility of being swept up off our feet by a great life-changing flood of grace.

ALL: **Today, O Loving God, help us to pay attention to your Word.**

Leader: Part of what we ask, Teaching God, is that you shape our prayers, and empty us to the place where we are naked, honest, and thirsty. You show us our true selves.

ALL: **Today, O Nurturing God, clothe us in your love, fill us with your living water, and endow us with the power to see deeply into your heart.**

Leader: Take charge of us, O Guiding Spirit.

ALL: **Take charge, O Revealing God. We are ready to listen. Amen.**

Real Life—Reel Life (10 minutes)

Show the video, “John Franke: Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy” (<https://youtu.be/zwaqjsBbBJE>).² This three-minute video by a Presbyterian theologian who is one of the authors of *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy* offers his view on biblical inerrancy. Ask one or two persons to offer an understanding of what it means to believe in inerrancy, and what the challenges are for Christians, both those who believe in inerrancy and those who question that idea.

Introduce today’s topic in your own words, making the following points:

- The earliest scriptures written were not the stories of Jesus, his birth, ministry, death, and resurrection. Paul’s letters, the one that scholars are sure were written by Paul, began to appear in 50 CE; the Gospels did not show up until 70 CE, which is 40 years after the death of Jesus. So Paul is a major influence on our theology, our perceptions of who we are to be, and what God would have us do.³
- Our forebears in the faith struggled with the same issues we struggle with today within and beyond their communities. There were same-sex couples, women and men arguing about what Paul said about women in church, married couples not having sex, and unmarried couples having sex. One reason for writing down the Gospels and Paul’s teachings was to bring order to a very diverse Christian community, which included Jews who now followed Christ, Gentiles converted to Christianity, people from other religious practices who tried to blend Christianity with what they already knew, and those who were completely new to any kind of faith experience.
- Beliefs about the value of women versus men and of people in power versus those who were enslaved had a direct impact on how God’s word is interpreted and applied to different people. Even the early church fathers demonstrated that it was the people in power who got to write and enforce church law. They were human, and humans often tend to lay

down laws that benefit those with the most power. That is why Jesus was so controversial and so threatening to the people in power in church and society. You don't want to hear, "The first shall be last and the last shall be first," when you're a first! So, we have to keep in mind who benefits and who loses when a philosophy or an interpretation is put forth.

- Review Brubaker's introduction, which states:
"Over the centuries, there have been many interpretations of what the Bible says about sexuality and how we should live in our bodies as persons of faith. Some people believe that the Bible is to be understood in a literal way. They believe that God dictated the laws and teachings that tell us what to do if we are to be faithful to God's word. Others believe that the Scriptures are inspired by God because the spirit of God was at work in the faith of the writers. Inspiration left room for further interpretation by those who have read the Scriptures over the years. The Protestant Reformation was in part about the freedom and responsibility of Christians to read, pray, and seek the meaning of Scripture."

Ask for questions or comments. Allow two to three minutes, then call the groups back to order.

The Word and THE Word (40 minutes)

Observe about five seconds of silence, allowing group members to think about what they have heard so far.

Ask team members at each table to arrange themselves in a circle, and to place one sticky note that someone has written on at each place at the table. Tell them to sit in front of someone else's note. Give out a piece of string to every participant at each table.

Tell group members they have about twenty minutes to review and discuss Brubaker's Chapter 4, using the questions they answered on the colored sticky notes to get the discussion going. Tell them that, before they look up answers in a Bible or use a search function on a computer, tablet, or phone, they should check the sticky notes on their tables for some answers. They should also discuss whether or not the answers on the sticky notes are accurate or inaccurate, relevant or irrelevant, or just plain contradictory, and ask the recorder to jot down the group members' observations.

Review the following scriptures:

- Matthew 19:1–9 (Jesus discussing marriage and divorce),
- Hebrews 13:4 (Honoring marriage),
- 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 (Meeting each other's sexual needs),
- Romans 13:13–14 (Opposing "sleeping around"), and
- Matthew 5:27–28 (Having lust is the same as acting on one's lust).

Give a signal when there's just three minutes left for the groups to wrap up their conversations, and ask each group leader to bring any sticky notes on which the information was found to be inaccurate or contradictory up to the front of the room. Stick them on the newsprint sheet labeled "Misinformation."

Now, invite groups to do a similar exercise using the string. Assign one person in each group to look up the answers to the following questions, using Brubaker's Chapter 4.

- What did early Gnostic Christians, like Pontus, say about sexuality? About women? Did they view sexuality as a gift from God? Were women viewed as equal to men in intellect or basic worth? Were women viewed as capable of making rational, mutual decisions?
- What did Augustine say about celibacy? What did Thomas Aquinas say about virtue? How does that connect with your understanding of biblical stories, people, and teachings?
- What difference does it make to have these emerging voices enter the discussion about biblical teachings, sexuality, love, and intimate relationships:
 - Women?
 - People of color?
 - People from outside the United States and Europe?
 - Young people?
 - People who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, questioning their sexuality, or those who consider themselves their allies (parents, friends, siblings, prayer partners, etc.)?
- How have some of these above teachings influenced what Christians believe, say, do, and discuss today?

Instruct each group to review the sticky notes that they agreed had accurate information, and discuss briefly how they inform or reinforce what the church believes and does.

Call a three-minute signal for wrapping up.

Discovery (15 minutes)

Ask the reporters at each table to take turns, giving one answer at a time, sharing inconsistent or inaccurate information that may impact a Christian's understanding of sexuality and who we are as God's human, sexual creations. For each of these answers, ask someone from that table to come and tie a length of yarn on your (the leader's) wrist. By the end of the session, the leader should have several pieces of string hanging from her or his wrists.

You should have several pieces of yarn tied to you very soon. Make the point that the teachings of The United Methodist Church have been informed by centuries of biblical teaching, theological struggles that predate the church, the desire to follow God's will, and the realization that the social location—sex, gender, social or economic status, education, marital status, and ability to influence the message—all must be considered when trying to convey the gospel message.

Explain to participants that, for many of us, what we have heard or learned from family, individual churches, philosophers, debates through the years in church and society, and our own personal

experiences can sometimes leave us feeling tied up, confused, and unclear. (Keep the strings on your wrists for the remainder of this session.)

The same can be said for The United Methodist Church, as we continue to listen for God's voice on these ever-emerging issues. These are some of our beliefs or Social Principles found in *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012*:

- “We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God.” (§161E)
- “We affirm that sexuality is God’s good gift to all persons. We call everyone to be responsible stewards of this sacred gift.” (§161F)
- “We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage.” (§161B)
- “Although all person are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relationships are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous, heterosexual marriage.” (§161F)
- “The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers it incompatible with Christian teaching.” (§161F)
- “Violent, disrespectful, or abusive sexual expressions do not confirm sexuality as God’s good gift.” (§161H)
- “We deplore all forms of the commercialization and exploitation of sex, with their consequent cheapening and degradation of human personality.” (§161F)

Tell the group that the General Conference of The United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women have long spoken out against:

- sexual harassment in church and secular workplaces;
- sexual abuse and misconduct in ministerial relationships (for which a layperson or clergy can be formally charged in a church court);
- child sexual abuse;
- child marriage;
- sexual and other violence against women and children, including rape as a weapon of war;
- use and proliferation of pornography;
- human trafficking and sexual slavery; and
- heterosexism and homophobia.

NOTE: While The United Methodist Church does not ordain homosexual persons, it does not condone discrimination against them or doing harm to them in our churches and other settings.⁴ For some in the church, however, this stance is still seen as harmful, discriminatory, and unbiblical, while other United Methodists view this stance as compassionate and biblical. Some people see this as contradictory.

Ask group members to respond to these questions:

1. What was new information to you?
2. How does the concept of biblical inerrancy (belief that every word of the Bible is the complete, unaltered Word of God) impact the beliefs of some Christians, specifically about sexuality?
3. For Christians who are unsure or who don't subscribe to the idea of inerrancy, how might their beliefs about sexuality be influenced by what we've talked about today?

After five minutes or so of discussion, thank everyone for their participation. Ask participants to keep their answers to these questions in mind as they delve deeper in the next session.

God Speaks and We Respond (15 minutes)

Ask the group to think for a couple of minutes about the key lessons found in Chapters 3 and 4 and their discussions about them. Invite member to write these ideas in their journals. They could include the most salient concepts, questions or ideas, or ideas about what their church, circle, small group, district, conference, or national United Methodist Women or other body should be doing about this issue.

Idea Wall (5 minutes)

After ten minutes, invite all participates to jot down an idea on the "Idea Wall," reminding them that these should be suggestions for studies, resources, programs, and worship ideas related to the topics in discussion.

Assignment (5 minutes)

Review the next session's assignment, which is to read Chapter 5. Remind participants of the compassionate listeners' availability. Make any needed housekeeping announcements at this time.

Closing Worship/Reflection (10 minutes)

Ask the reader to accompany you as you walk to the front of the room in silence, still wearing the strings tied to your wrists. Take a deep breath and lift your arms to allow the strings to dangle. Signal the reader to light candles on the altar, then read the following:

God, we are just starting to understand how powerful sex is. What a gift it is. And how much we have yet to understand about how we are to use this precious gift. And we are not the first. The rape of Dinah. The love between Elkanah and his barren wife, Hannah. The lovers in Song of Songs. The redemption of Rahab. All these are stories of the sexuality of human beings.

What we need from you, O God, is help in understanding our sexual desire as one message about who we are, and to interpret that message in a way that is pleasing to you. Denial, repression, fear, and self-loathing are not your ways. But neither are abuse, exploitation, selling and buying sex, and using the Bible to shame those we may not understand. What we need, O God, is your Word written in our hearts every day and every hour. Otherwise [*pointing to yourself, with strings hanging from your wrists*] we will forever be tied up in knots, confused and confounded, and unsure about the gift of intimacy, union, and release that are your gift of sexuality.

Speak, Loving and Edifying God. And we'll keep listening.

Loving God, you created us for beauty, for happiness, for one another. Forgive us when we allow ugliness and abuse to obliterate the gifts of body, mind, and spirit. Help us to confront abuse and injustice. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Endnotes

1. Liturgy adapted from *The Call: Living Sacramentally, Walking Justly*, by George McClain, Tilda Norberg, and Nancy Kruh (editor). United Methodist Women, 2013, 43–45.
2. “John Franke: Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy,” YouTube video, 02:52, posted by Zondervan, February 2, 2014, <https://youtu.be/zwaqjsBbBJE>. Used with permission.
3. This information was adapted from *Engaging the New Testament: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*, by Russell Pregeant, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 4–7, 331.
4. See *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*, Resolution 2042, which calls for the church to oppose “all forms of violence or discrimination based on gender, gender identity, sexual practice, or sexual orientation” (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 130–131.

SESSION 3

Developing a Holistic Sexual Ethic for Today's Christians

CHAPTER 5

Salient Statement

“We, as United Methodists, also believe that every person of faith who seeks to know more of Christ and God’s desire for humanity should take upon herself or himself authority regarding the discernment of God’s Word for God’s people.” (Brubaker, Chapter 5)

Biblical Teaching

“You are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother’s womb. I give thanks to you that I was marvelously set apart. Your works are wonderful—I know that very well.” (Psalm 139:13–14)

Objectives of the Lesson

- Further discern why we, as individuals, believe what we believe and how our faith practices inform those beliefs.
- Determine how power dynamics, life experiences, privilege, and various styles of Christian education and biblical teaching may inform the church’s sexual ethics and how they are applied.
- Consider how other people of Christian faith might see things differently. Is it possible for Christians to believe and act differently and still be faithful followers of Jesus Christ?

Preparation

Prepare enough cards for each participant. Write one of the following descriptions on each card. (Try not to have duplicate descriptions within a table group.)

- An 11-year-old child bride of a 40-year-old man.
- The 7-year-old boy held in sexual slavery.
- The 45-year-old lesbian United Methodist Women president.
- The 32-year-old man who raped his wife.
- The wife who survived that rape.
- The married pastor having sex outside marriage.
- The woman church secretary, 40, having sex with the 35-year-old married male pastor.
- The 69-year-old widow who had a good and fulfilling marriage, but is now lonely and longing.
- The single, straight man, age 30.
- The 15-year-old who has been taught to abstain, but whose girlfriend, also a Christian, wants sex now.
- The girlfriend.
- Transgender woman who is new to this church.
- The gay teen, 16, who is afraid to tell his parents about his orientation.

Anyone may opt out of this activity. You may choose other scenarios or have participants suggest other scenarios, including generally accepted norms, but remember this exercise is meant to push our comfort zones, and to promote a wide diversity of experiences.

- Copy worship readings for three readers, and select readers in advance.
- Repost the “Idea Wall,” if needed. Make sure all the previous day’s cards are still there.
- Distribute hymnals and worship sheets or cue worship resources on PowerPoint.
- Place mirrors and index cards on each table.
- Cue the videos: “Sex Is a Decision” (<https://youtu.be/VVVgIXWrii0>) and “Girls Talk TV—Human Trafficking Part 1” (<https://youtu.be/-YVS7EL1oC4>).

Centered by God’s Teaching Spirit (10 minutes)

Greet participants, inviting them to gather in a large circle in the room, as space permits. Readers 1 and 2 should be in the center; you, the leader, should be part of the circle.

Reader 1: God calls us to health and wholeness, to present ourselves as living sacrifices—including our sexual selves. We are to celebrate, take joy in, and love our bodies and their pleasures.

Reader 2: Yet, when we are ashamed of nakedness, fearful of sexuality, unsure that sex can be good, we shame and blame others and ourselves.

ALL: **But shame doesn’t help us and it doesn’t honor God. What we need are new conversations, new eyes, new visions, and new appreciations.**

Reader 1: I will replace blame with prayers for and prayer with . . . (*invite participants to fill in the blank*).

Reader 2: I will replace shame with celebration of God’s good creation: Me!

ALL: I will study the Bible and dare to challenge myself and others around me to risk hearing the Word of God in new ways and from new voices.

Reader 1: I will repent of misusing scriptures to privilege my beliefs and my way of life at the expense of others.

Reader 2: I will invite the Holy Spirit to show me new things.

ALL: Starting now. Starting today. Starting in this room. Starting with these friends in Christ. Amen!

Invite all to sing, “I Will Call Upon the Lord,” no. 2002 in *The Faith We Sing*.

Real Life—Reel Life (10 minutes)

Show the video, “Sex Is a Decision—Marriage Messages,” featuring Laura Brotherson, talking about healthy sexuality in heterosexual marriages (<https://youtu.be/VVVgIXWrii0>).¹

Ask a recorder to be prepared to write down answers. Then ask participants to give one- or two-word answers to the following questions:

- From what we just heard, what are the characteristics of a healthy, mutual sexual encounter? What is required?
- What about the equality of the parties involved?
- Comfort level?
- Safety and trust?
- Who benefits most from the encounter Brotherson describes?

Show the video, “Girls Talk TV—Human Trafficking Part 1” (<https://youtu.be/-YVS7EL1oC4>), stopping the video at 04:50.²

Ask the same recorder to write down participants’ one- or two-word answers to the following questions:

- What struck you about the state of human trafficking in the United States?
- How is power being used/abused?

- What is being communicated to these girls about the God-given gift of sex and sexuality?
- About power in relationships?
- Who benefits most from the encounters depicted?

Make the point that a good place to start with articulating a sexual ethic for Christians is to consider the following:

- The maxim, “first, do no harm”: This is often the theme of the sexual ethics symposiums for the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women.
- The parties involved: Sexual contact should not be coerced or forced by either party, but mutually desired.
- The power dynamics of the parties involved: One reason that we say clergy, therapists, doctors, etc., should not become sexually involved with parishioners and clients is that, most times, there is an extreme power differential. The same is obviously true of an adult who engages in sexual behavior with a child.
- The beneficiary: Who benefits from the sexual encounter, spiritually, emotionally, physically, or even financially?
- Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience: The Wesleyan quadrilateral should inform the ethics to which we subscribe.

The Word and THE Word (40 minutes)

Hand a card to each participant with one of the character descriptions listed in the “Preparation” section written on it (there may be duplicates around the room). Tell participants that we will be using these in the day’s lesson. Add that they should try to speak and act from that particular voice and perspective for the next 40 minutes.

Explain again that all people are created by God and come to decisions and beliefs about their lives based, at least in part, on their generation, social location, upbringing, racial-ethnic identity, culture, age, ability, gender, sexual preference, and many other intersections of identities. Say that we often forget that much of what we declare to be truth may only be my truth or your truth, not THE truth or God’s truth. This is not to say that we are bad people, it is only to affirm that we know only what we know.

This exercise is an invitation to stand in someone else’s shoes and to try to hear the voice of God, the teaching of scriptures, the impact of tradition, the reasoning, and the experiences of those who are not like us. God invites people of the Christian faith to embody faith, trust, and respect as they come together in Jesus Christ. This does not mean that we will always agree. The question is, can we hear one another and learn from one another in a way that further builds and empowers the body of Christ?

Explain that the printed cards and mirrors are to help us all try to hear the different voices and stories that are represented among the faithful followers of Jesus Christ who are United Methodist. Remind them to become, as much as possible, the characters described on their cards, and to hold up a mirror FACING OUTWARD as a reminder that the love of God and the divine face of God shines in every face in their group. Ask them to use the mirrors and speak into the mirrors to remind them that they are to be as authentic and faithful as possible with the responsibilities of stepping into someone else's shoes. Ask the table leaders and others to use gentle reminders if they feel that a speaker is stepping out of character.

IMPORTANT: Remind participants that they may opt out of this exercise if they feel uncomfortable, or they may choose another index card with another character description if they desire. Invite anyone opting out to sit in their groups and listen and watch as others engage in the activity; or they may wish to read and review the assigned reading.

Tell the group that they will be presented with a series of discussion questions based on the assigned reading of Chapter 5, which talk specifically about how Christians can and should begin to develop both a corporate and personal sexual ethic, based on love of our human bodies as part of God's creation, the desire to celebrate sexuality as a gift, and the call to prevent exploitation and sinfulness because they demean what God intends as the joy of sexuality.

Invite the group to grapple with the following questions at their tables. Remind them again that those with character cards should, as much as possible, speak in the voices of the characters assigned to them.

Questions for discussion (provide a photocopy of these questions to each participant or display them via a poster or PowerPoint):

1. What do church laws and beliefs say about your character's situation? Is it helpful? How or why not?
2. How do you, as this character, feel about your body? Does shame play any role in how your character may feel about her or his body? About your current sexual situation?
3. How are biblical stories and/or language used to support or denounce your character's sexual situation? What about the language of The United Methodist Church?
4. Has your pastor, lay leader, Sunday school teacher, or United Methodist Women president offered you any resources or guidance on this specific situation? If so, describe.
5. *The Book of Discipline*, our law book, affirms sexuality as "God's good gift to all persons," while affirming sexual relationships only "in monogamous, heter sexual marriage." What message does this give to your character?
6. What is the struggle over same-sex marriage in this country all about? How does this issue affect your character?

Give a signal when there are three minutes left for this exercise; ask recorders to make sure they have captured the answers for their report. When people are ready, move on.

Discovery (15 minutes)

Invite one or two individuals around the room to share their experiences through the eyes of their assigned characters. Ask them how well they felt they succeeded at speaking in someone else's voice (Scared? Empowered? Reflective? Responsible? Angry? Frustrated?). Invite their reflections and responses.

Affirm that this was a difficult and challenging request, and reiterate that the goal was not and is not to change someone's mind about what they believe; rather, the goal is to engage those whose experiences and beliefs may be very different, and to remind us that the struggles we have are age-old Christian struggles. Tell them that God walks with us in our struggle to be our best spiritual, emotional, physical, and sexual selves.

Ask recorders to report on the answers to the questions, one table at a time. Take note of tables that may not have had time to report previously, and call on them first. If there is additional time, ask individual table members to add any thoughts they might have.

God Speaks and We Respond (15 minutes)

Review key concepts from the readings and discussions, including:

- How we read and understand scriptures affects how we understand ourselves as humans, as sexual beings, and as Christians. If we lean only on those places in Paul's letters where women are told to submit, and have the understanding that lust is bad and marriage is only for those who can't fight the urge to have sex, do we have sufficient information to teach us what God wants for our relationships? Why or why not?
- The words of early church fathers, all faithful men, also have the misfortune of having no input from women, the sexual slaves of that day, the young men, and concubines still held by the ruling class. We have some people telling us that anything of "flesh" is bad on the one hand, and the biblical book Song of Songs celebrating fleshly delights on the other. We don't hear from same-sex partners, from child brides, from survivors of incest—all of whom were around and part of the family of faith from the Old Testament through the Corinthian church to St. Augustine and until today.
- Our sexual ethics must consider the ones who are left out and move us from shame to faithful living and relevant theological stances. Brubaker calls for us to seize our Wesleyan quadrilateral³ to hear the voices of the left out and oppressed, and draw upon the best of our tradition and experience. Most of all, she invites us to turn to Jesus for new insights. Jesus said many times, "You have heard it said . . . but I say." Brubaker

says the question, “What would Jesus do?” is a good place to start. Jesus, God With Us, is clear about caring for children. Jesus is clear about doing no harm to other children of God. What are examples of Jesus’ love, justice, kindness, forbearance, and invitation concerning our bodies and ourselves?

As a way of closing, ask participants to prepare for worship by walking around and scanning the “Idea Wall” with the perspective of the persons they represented in the last hour. Tell them to hang on to their cards, because we will use them during closing worship. At the end of the time, ask everyone to return to his or her seats.

Assignment (5 minutes)

Ask the class to scan their notes, reviewing salient class notes and notes from Brubaker’s text, and to read Chapter 6. Remind them of the compassionate listeners’ availability, and offer any housekeeping or routine announcements. Invite them to remember and pray about the diversity of experiences as represented by the puzzle pieces on the worship table. Then call them to worship.

Closing Worship (10 minutes)

Sing “Take, O Take Me As I Am,” no. 3120 in *Worship & Song*.

Reader 1: Love heals. We recover ourselves in the act and art of loving. As it is written by the apostle John, “Anyone who does not love is still in death.”

Reader 2: Injustice kills. Shame kills. Christ came into the world not to condemn and shame us, but to give us love and life in abundance. That includes a life of healthy, good sex—a life free of exploitation, violence, pornography, and lust for overpowering the vulnerable.

Reader 1: We, the church of Jesus Christ, declare a sexual ethic of obedience, justice, health, affirmation, and love. We declare an ethic that is a wide doorway that receives all who need human love and fellowship.

Reader 2: But it is narrow enough to keep hatred, envy, pride, shame, and loathing out. The doors of our church will be a gateway to your eternal kingdom, O God.

Reader 1: We may not be ready to agree on every issue surrounding sexuality. But we know that we, your church, must be home to—and I’m asking you with the following cards* to stand—(*ask each group holding these cards to stand in turn*).

- An 11-year-old child bride of a 40-year-old man.
- The 7-year-old boy held in sexual slavery.
- The 45-year-old lesbian United Methodist Women president.
- The 32-year-old man who raped his wife.
- The wife who survived that rape.
- The married pastor having sex outside marriage.
- The woman church secretary, 40, having sex with the 35-year-old married male pastor.
- The 69-year-old widow who had a good and fulfilling marriage, but is now lonely and longing.
- The single, straight man, age 30.
- The 15-year-old who has been taught to abstain, but whose girlfriend, also a Christian, wants sex now.
- The girlfriend.
- Transgender woman who is new to this church.
- The gay teen, 16, who is afraid to tell his parents about his orientation.

* If you have adapted the cards, you will need to alter the litany to reflect the cards.

Reader 1: Jesus taught us, and our denomination has declared, that all people are of sacred worth. As we continue to talk about and struggle with sexuality, we are sure of this: that every person created by God is of sacred worth. And there is a place at the welcome table for each one.

Close with “Blessed Assurance,” no. 369 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*. Invite participants to acknowledge one another as they depart by saying, “I see the love of God in you!”

Endnotes

1. Laura M. Brotherson, “Sex Is a Decision—Marriage Messages,” YouTube video, 03:20, posted by StrengtheningMarriage.com, July 30, 2014, <https://youtu.be/VVVgIXWrii0>.
2. Lisa Williams, “Girls Talk TV—Human Trafficking Part 1,” YouTube video, 13:22, posted by Girls Talk, January 19, 2013, <https://youtu.be/-YVS7EL1oC4>.
3. To learn more about the Wesleyan quadrilateral, read “Our Theological Task” in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2012*, 78–89.

SESSION 4

Countering Shame and Blame with Love and Ethical Action

CHAPTER 6

Salient Statement

“We need to develop a sexual ethic for our time that covers individual and family sexuality, but goes on to address the desperate need for sexual justice for innocent persons who are victimized day after day. Some of these victims live closer to us than we want to believe.” (Brubaker, Chapter 6)

Biblical Teaching

“Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ Then he said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’” (Luke 7:44–48, CEB)

Objectives of the Lesson

- Continue to examine how biblical/theological teachings are used—effectively and ineffectively—to shape Christian sexual ethics.
- Examine the role of shame in misdirecting our beliefs about our bodies, our sexual selves, and in sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Create an ethical, just framework for discerning God’s Word and will regarding human sexuality.

Preparation

- Place hymnals and copies of worship guides (our list of suggested hymns and songs) on each table, or displayed on newsprint or PowerPoint.
- Arrange altar and worship space.
- Hang up the “Ideal Wall” if necessary.
- Place sticky notes and index cards on each table.
- Invite a reader at each table to participate in worship. Give them their sentences on slips of paper, numbered so that they will know when they should read. Alert the first reader to light a candle before speaking. (If there are more sentences than there are tables, ask Reader 1 to read the last sentences.)
- Have some lights off (leave enough to read by) as people enter the room. Don’t turn the lights on until after the candle is lit for worship.
- Cue videos: “My Sexual Abuse Story” (<https://youtu.be/WJnnOIhHVhA>) and “Reinventing Our Approach to Sex” (<http://tedxmuskegon.org>).
- Provide a copy of the “Real Life” story for participants at each table.

Centered by God’s Teaching Spirit (15 minutes)

Stand still and don’t speak until all are silent. Signal Reader 1 to light the candle and begin reading the scriptures, taking care to be sure there is enough light to read:

Reader 1: The people walking in darkness have seen a great light.

Reader 2: On those living in a pitch-dark land, light has dawned.

Reader 3: The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

Reader 4: Jesus said to them, “I am the light of the world.”

Reader 5: Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of God shall be your rear guard.

(Pause for three seconds.)

Reader 6: God With Us, Emmanuel, your word gives light, and imparts understanding to the simple.

Reader 7: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

Reader 8: I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground.

Reader 9: In Christ is the light of humanity.

Reader 1: Bear witness to the light. In all you are. In all you do. In the healthy, loving sexuality you share. When you shine the light on the sexual sickness and exploitation and injustice that we battle as God’s people, we bear witness to the light.¹

Turn on the lights and invite participants to sing, “I Want to Walk as a Child of the Light,” no. 206 in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Ask members to greet each other with signs of peace.

Introduce the topic for the day, reminding the group members of the characters they portrayed in the previous session. Make the following points about discussions thus far and the assigned reading, Chapter 6:

- Brubaker reminds us that shame has historically colored or even stymied our ability to have open conversations about our sexual selves and our bodies. We are descendants of people who covered up naked statues and even required furniture legs to be covered during the Victorian Era, because we have made “shame” and “shaming” central to our sexual ethics. She quotes the Reverend Karen A. McClintock as saying, “A pervasive sense of shame is the ongoing premise that one is fundamentally bad, inadequate, defective, unworthy, or not fully valid as a human being” (Brubaker, Chapter 6).
- Based on your portrayals yesterday, what are some reasons why “shame” may be a harmful foundation for developing our Christian sexual ethic? (*Allow some people to answer, and repeat and clarify their answers. Ask a recorder to assist you.*)

Real Life—Reel Life (15 minutes)

Show the video, “My Sexual Abuse Story” (<https://youtu.be/WJnnOIhHVhA>).²

Ask participants to answer the following in their groups:

- Why do you think the girl made this video? What did she want?
- Why did she choose not to show her face?
- What do you believe her outlook on her sexual self is now? In other words, is this experience she describes likely to make her feel good about sexual intimacy?
- What are the sources of shame in this story?

Now, show the video, “Reinventing Our Approach to Sex,” with Barbara Lee, stopping the video at 09:06. (https://youtu.be/LNuBXUMwjBI?list=PLDE_hlOiWJM2QPGbGJ4EZnrP948Gr7khf).³ Tell participants that there will be some discussion of the points in the video later in the session, so they may want to jot down notes or questions about it.

The Word and THE Word (40 minutes)

Ask each table leader to read the following list of statements from *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church*:

- “We encourage women in counsel with husbands, doctors, and pastors to make their own responsible decisions concerning the personal and moral questions surrounding the issue of abortion.”⁴
- “Therefore, be it resolved, that The United Methodist Church dedicate itself to a ministry of Christ-like hospitality and compassion to persons of all sexual orientations.”⁵
- “Any sexually explicit material that depicts children is pornographic.”⁶
- “The vast majority of pornography is inextricably linked to oppression of women. . . . Female bodies are treated as objects and commodities. . . .”⁷
- “It is estimated that more than 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, primarily in Africa and, to a lesser extent, in some countries in the Middle East.”⁸

NOTE: Female genital mutilation is most often used to insure the chastity of brides and to remove the clitoris to prevent women from enjoying sexual pleasure, thus becoming loose or wanton.

- “Rape during wartime constitutes many individual and group acts of violence perpetrated by soldiers against girls and women of the enemy countries, or opposing sides, often under orders. Thus, rape, in effect, is used as an extension of warfare.”⁹

Remind the recorders to take notes. Ask group members to discuss the above statement by the church, using these questions:

1. Where in our church’s pronouncements can we find messages that sex can be enjoyed and celebrated?
2. What, then, do our church’s sexual ethics tell us about power, consent, and shame? What do your personal ethics—not just what you believe, but how you live—tell you about those things?
3. What do we need more of in the church regarding sexuality?

About ten minutes before closing, invite participants to each write a statement on a notecard (same color for all), suggesting an issue or statement that they would like to see among The United Methodist Church’s statements on sexuality, sexual violence, pornography, etc. Or they can write statements explaining why they strongly agree (or disagree) with a particular statement. Ask participants to write only one idea per card, but to use as many cards as they like.

Then, instruct facilitators to ask participants to read and discuss a few of the statements in their groups. The purpose is not to force agreements, but rather to allow people to share their ideas. Remind everyone that sharing is optional.

If there is time, invite participants to write on another card one thing they have discovered about themselves during this study about their own sexuality, beliefs about sexuality, or general sexual ethics. Remind them that anyone can opt out of writing on a card if he or she does not want to share. Say that you will collect the cards as the group transitions into discussion time.

Discovery (15 minutes)

Invite recorders to report, one table at a time, in random order. If there is additional time, ask if individual table members have additional comments to share. Keep them on task by repeating the questions from the discussion, adding any of the questions below as follow-up:

- What has the church agreed upon regarding what constitutes a misuse of sex?
- Where are we growing as a church?
- What information has been new to you today that will keep you thinking for a while?

God Speaks and We Respond (15 minutes)

Review some of the key concepts from the readings, discussion, and teaching media used in today's class.

- Shame has no place in a healthy sexual relationship, and the church needs to stop using shame as a weapon or backup when we get to a place of disagreement about human sexuality.
- When sex hurts, wounds, humiliates, dehumanizes, and exploits, however, the church should and has spoken forcefully and clearly. Maybe not clearly enough for some, and we could add more money and action at all levels to address human trafficking, sexual violence, etc.—but there are places of agreement within the church. And one of those areas of agreement is that sexual slavery, exploitation, and violence are wrong.
- Change is always occurring and change within the church is no exception. Marriage has moved from being a business transaction to get a man free sex and sons and another man cattle and land, to what it is considered today—at its best—a sacred connection. And this change happened within the church. Our sexual ethics have changed and are changing and will continue to change. The key is to stay focused on what Jesus, God's love, and God's grace in the flesh, would have us do and be in this moment.
- There are people we are not hearing from when we talk about the spectrum of sexual issues. United Methodist Women members have been exceptional in hearing from and working with organizations around the world that are addressing human trafficking, reproductive health, and stopping rape as a weapon. But there are others whose stories we refuse to hear, people we fear, people we loathe because we don't want them to challenge our biases. Part of creating a sexual ethic for ourselves and for our church is asking who should be at the table and which voices should be valued. Then, we need to listen.

Ask each table to create one or two statements that summarize what they learned, what they have struggled with, what they appreciate about The United Methodist Church's stances, or what they suggest the denomination spend more time discussing with regard to sexuality. Ask facilitators or reporters to be prepared to read one or two of those statements during closing worship.

Also, invite participants to hand in their index cards as you transition to worship. Explain that you will be sharing a summary of ideas from the "Idea Wall" with the leaders of United Methodist Women for possible future resources and action. Say also that these summaries will be shared with participants in a follow-up mailing or e-mail, so that they may put their faith into action in their local settings.

Closing Worship (10 minutes)

Sing together the hymn, "Balm in Gilead," no. 375, *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Litany

Leader: Discussing sexuality is difficult for us, O God.

ALL: **We know we don't have all the answers, but we keep trying.**

Leader: We want to do the right thing. We want to be open. We want to be holy. Help us, O God.

ALL: **From the cowardice that does not face new truths, from the laziness that is content with half-truths,**

Leader: From the arrogance that thinks it knows all the truth,

ALL: **Deliver us today, good Lord.**

*Last 4 lines of litany adapted from a prayer "From the Church in Kenya" (Wild Goose Resources Group, admin. by GIA Publications, Inc., copyright 1999), no. 179, *Word & Song: Worship Resources for the 2012 General Conference*. Abingdon Press, 2011.

(Invite facilitators or recorders to share at least one summary statement from their groups. After each statement, invite participants to repeat these words, "Thank you, Loving God, for your continuing revelation.")

Pause for about 10 seconds, then continue with the litany.

Reader 1: We've struggled with a lot. We've laughed. We've disagreed. We've challenged. We've been challenged. And yet we are still the church, together and separately. We better understand and can celebrate the gift of sexuality, which we received at our creation.

Reader 2 As beings made in the holy image of God, we celebrate bodies built for work and pleasure, voices made for worship and praise, and ears made to hear all that God in Christ would teach us.

ALL: **God is still breathing life into human beings and declaring us good! Good! And so, as sisters and brothers sanctified in Christ, we will go forth from this place, and work for wholeness, peace, justice, right relationships, and reconciliation, so that all people may discover their goodness.**

Leader: In the name and for the sake of Jesus the Christ, who brings healing and hope to us all.
Amen.

Closing with the song, "I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me," no. 2153 in *The Faith We Sing*.

Collect and later transcribe the "Idea Wall" offerings and send them to United Methodist Women office via e-mail to the Office of Spiritual Growth.

Endnotes

1. Prayer inspired by Isaiah 9:2, Psalm 27:1, John 8:12, Isaiah 58:8, Psalm 119:105, Isaiah 42:16.
2. "My Sexual Abuse Story," YouTube video, 04:56, posted by Stay Strong Baby, July 25, 2014, <https://youtu.be/WJnnOlhHVhA>. Used with permission.
3. Barbara Lee, "Reinventing Our Approach to Sex," YouTube video, 14:19, posted by Tedx Talks, November 15, 2013, https://youtu.be/LNuBXUMwjBI?list=PLDE_hlOiWJM2QPGbGJ4EZnrP948Gr7khf. Used with permission.
4. *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2012* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 120.
5. *Ibid.*, 130.
6. *Ibid.*, 156.
7. *Ibid.*, 157.
8. *Ibid.*, 248.
9. *Ibid.*, 873.

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Other Resources from United Methodist Women

On Maternal Health:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/maternal-child-health>

(See Appendix B for additional information.)

On Reproductive Health as a Global Issue:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/stumbling-over-reproductive-health>

On Contraception:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/first-time-anyone-talked-to-me-about-contraception>

On Human Trafficking:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/human-trafficking>

On Domestic Violence:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/domestic-violence>

On HIV/AIDS:

<http://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/treating-hiv,-aids-and-stigma>

About the Author

M. Garlinda Burton, a United Methodist deaconess living and working in Nashville, Tennessee, is a writer, editor, and director of the Nashville Freedom School Partnership, a summer literacy and cultural enrichment program for low-income children of color. She has her own consulting ministry called *MotherWit*.

Consecrated a deaconess in 2014, Burton is a frequent contributor to print and audiovisual resources on justice for women, people of color, children, and the poor. She retired in 2012 after 33 years working for United Methodist Church agencies, most recently as general secretary of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. Shortly after, she began work with Freedom Schools, a program created by the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C.

A popular speaker and retreat leader, Burton enjoys cooking, reading novels, road trips, graphic design, traveling with her mother, and learning from young people, particularly her grandchildren.

APPENDIX A

Compassionate Listener's Guide

Mission u provides an opportunity for encouraging transformative learning, addressing critical issues, and growing spiritually. Individuals sometimes bring personal struggles to these events and unexpected feelings or concerns are triggered that need to be addressed. Discussions in this setting sometimes have an emotional impact on individuals. When that happens we often need someone with compassion and gifts to listen to us.

Thus the planning team has identified a few people who will be available as compassionate listeners throughout this Mission u event.

Compassionate listeners are not psychiatrists or psychologists. They may be clergy or lay people. They are good listeners who care. During the opening worship, these individuals will be identified. Anyone who wishes to speak with one of them can contact them directly during free times or speak to the leader of this study group about connecting with them. And any team member should also be able to help.

The Role of a Compassionate Listener

1) Listen and be there. Our focus as compassionate listeners will be listening to what those who seek us out have to say.

- A few kind words on our part may be important to help a person feel comforted, safe, and/or understood. They are the ones to talk. We are there to listen.
- As a conversation draws to a close, we may need to speak up to help individuals think about possible next steps such as prayer, counseling, and/or support groups, if appropriate.

2) Take note of any issue in a conversation that needs immediate attention during Mission u.

- Is there something the person might need?
- Is there something that the leadership needs to respond to immediately?

3) Encourage people to reflect on appropriate resources that might be helpful after the event ends.

- Support from individuals.
- Support from networks.
- Pastoral follow-up.
- Therapy (ongoing or new).
- Grief counseling.
- Divorce recovery.
- Other resources as they apply.

Privacy for a Compassionate Listener

There will be confidentiality for anyone who seeks out a compassionate listener, unless:

- Someone is in danger.
- The person specifies otherwise.

There can be debriefing for the compassionate listeners, if needed. This can also be informal as the need arises. Seek out the event leader for this kind of support.

Much appreciation to Bob Hoover and Wendy Minnix and the Planning team for Do No Harm 2011 who willingly shared this information. Do No Harm is an intentional gathering of people recruited to promote sexual safety and to respond to sexual abuse in The United Methodist Church. For more on The United Methodist Church Sexual Ethics Task Force, go to www.umsexualethics.org.

APPENDIX B

United Methodist Women Maternal and Child Health Initiative

Abundant Health for Women and Children

“I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”— John 10:10

Sexual health is a precursor for maternal health. Sexual health issues, such as sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, rape, or lack of health care, all impact the health of the baby and mother. A woman’s overall health problems, such as diabetes, heart disease, or obesity, could also affect her unborn baby and her own chances of survival.

Each year, nearly 300,000 women around the world die during pregnancy and in childbirth, many due to above-named causes. Over 90 percent of these deaths can be prevented through access to health information, well-equipped hospitals, and skilled workers. United Methodist Women, as a faith-based and women’s organization, recognizes this issue as a critical area of concern and priority.

For 2015 alone, United Methodist Women is providing more than \$250,000 in grants for women’s and children’s health worldwide. Two of the countless success stories include the training of 60 birth attendants in Haiti, who in turn delivered more than 848 babies and provided support for a midwifery school in Zimbabwe, which trains nearly 100 midwives per year.

Programs we support include the following services:

- comprehensive reproductive health education,
- family planning and contraceptives,
- safe births and quality healthcare, and
- programs eliminating gender-based violence.

We encourage all United Methodist Women members to join us in raising awareness around maternal and child health needs, advocating for policies and programs that improve health outcomes, and supporting and strengthening programs that have proven track records.

Keep the Work Going! Give to Maternal and Child Health!

Your gift to **project 3001176** will support life-saving care for women and children around the world! The web link to donate online is:

www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/donate/umwprojects/maternal-and-child-health

Alternatively, checks can be mailed to:

United Methodist Women National Office
Supplementary Giving (Maternal and Child Health)
475 Riverside Drive, Room 1503
New York, NY 10115

Visit **www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/maternal-child-health** to learn how your mission giving supports maternal and child health worldwide.