

# **Leader's Guide**

## **The Call: Living Sacramentally, Walking Justly**

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## Introduction to the Leader's Guide

The intent for this guide is to provide spiritual tools to individuals and groups so they can experience *The Call: Living Sacramentally, Walking Justly* more deeply. The exercises and tools presented here are to aid us on the journey. While we all want to start out running, it is helpful to remember the image of a child, who advances from rolling over as an infant, to crawling, to those first wobbly toddler steps, and then to running on legs that have been made strong and sturdy through the journey. In spiritual growth, we “strengthen our legs” by going back to the foundations of scripture and tradition, taking time to be alone with God to reflect and listen, so that we can go forth again. We need spiritual tools to help us ground ourselves in God and discern where God is calling us at this point in our lives. This daily discipline will help us to engage justly in God’s kin-dom—the term this text uses for God’s egalitarian realm.

Our authors present great examples and tools to deepen our spirituality in the text. We encourage you as the study leader to use this Leader’s Guide to provide you with ideas for exercises that you can use in the sessions and as a spark for your creativity as you lead. It is our hope that the exercises and discussions presented in the Participant’s Guide, as well as this expanded online Leader’s Guide, will augment your experience with the text. Deepening our understanding of the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion will help us to walk justly and engage in transformative action as individuals and communities.

### PREPARATION

Preparation for this study is a matter of doing the spiritual practices as well as the reading. We encourage study leaders to practice the exercises before leading them in the sessions. While preparing to lead the study, practice *lectio divina* with the scripture passages, spend time engaging in imaginative prayer with the scriptures, and remember your own baptism, including the naming reflection. Practice the Daily Examen for as long as possible before you lead the study. Reflect on your call and how God is stirring your heart. You will be prepared to effectively lead others only if you have engaged in the spiritual practices yourself.

You are encouraged to participate in Mission u to help you prepare for your role as a leader. This will help you to have the experience of being a participant, which is something you cannot do in the class you will teach.

## MATERIALS FOR EACH SESSION

There are suggested preparations at the beginning of each session to help you. In general, participants will need access to the following supplies and resources:

- NRSV Bibles
- Copies of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, and *The Faith We Sing*
- Paper for writing
- Paper for creating art (8.5" x 11" cardstock)
- Art supplies (e.g., pens, markers, colored pencils, old magazines, scissors, glue sticks)
- Flipchart (self-adhesive preferred) with markers or dry-erase board with markers
- Journal for each participant (provide them or ask participants to bring them)

*Optional:* If you have contact with participants before the class, invite them to bring a symbol of their baptism for use in Session 1.

When selecting materials and choosing activities, remember your audience as well as the following:

- Be intentional to include objects and photos that represent the full diversity (e.g., race, culture, age, gender, etc.) of God's great kin-dom.
- Be mindful that each person is an individual and we all learn and need to express ourselves in different ways. Techniques such as allowing for written words (journaling), verbal exchanges (group sharing), and the use of visual arts (art projects) provide avenues for persons to express themselves in the methods that are most valuable to them. Be creative in your planning and flexible by providing a variety of ways for persons to explore and express their experiences.
- Be aware that there are always more activities than time. Select the activities that will most support where you feel led to focus in the study. Change activities or methods with enough frequency to keep the attention of the participants.

## EQUIPMENT

The equipment necessary will depend upon your choice of media. Most often you will need a laptop with speakers (or sound system) that can project in the meeting space and an LCD projector with screen.

## HYMNS AND SONGS

Suggested Internet links to videos and music are provided in this online Leader's Guide. Some hymns are in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, *Upper Room Worshipbook*, and *The Faith We Sing*. Please remember that it is your legal obligation to gain copyright permission for any music, song, media, or print resource that you intend to reproduce either in print or show on a projection screen.

## WORSHIP CENTER

Set up a table with a beautiful cloth and a candle and matches or an LED candle. Additional items will be added to the table for each session.

## CHOOSING AND PLANNING THE SESSION EXERCISES

Approximate times for the exercises are given to guide the study leader in planning which exercises to do during the time allotted for each session. The actual times will vary, depending on the interaction among the groups.

More options for activities are offered in the first session. It is a time when people are together for the first time, getting to know each other and the study itself. People usually aren't in a reflective mode yet. By the fourth session, people have much more to reflect on and process. It is the last time they are together in this study and so fewer options for activities are offered. Study leaders can be intentional about allowing time for discussions, questions, and reflections about the spiritual growth participants have experienced during the study.

## SMALL GROUPS

The size of the small groups depends on the size of the larger group and how much time the leader plans for the exercise. When there are more people in a small group (five to six), more time should be allotted for their interaction. When there is a shorter time for sharing, allow for smaller groups (two to three).

## Session 1

# God's Gift: Named and Claimed in Baptism

### PREPARATION

In addition to the "Materials for Each Session" listed in the Introduction, select your music and make the appropriate hymnals and songbooks available or download your selected music (with permissions).

Some suggested baptismal songs follow:

From *The Faith We Sing*:

"I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry," no. 2051

"Wade in the Water," no. 2107

"Water, River, Spirit, Grace," no. 2253

From *Upper Room Worshipbook*:

"Water Has Held Us," no. 187 (to the tune of "Morning Has Broken")

Remember to get permission for use if you are printing or projecting these songs instead of using the songbooks themselves.

Also, have an envelope for each person in the group.

### OPTIONAL MUSIC

Download the song "How Can Anyone?" from iTunes (cost 99 cents) to be used following the reflection with the imaginative prayer with scripture.

Words and music are written by Libby Roderick and sung by Shaina Noll.

### OTHER OPTIONS

A table fountain or recording of water sounds could be played during the imaginative prayer about Jesus' baptism.

### WORSHIP CENTER

Place a bowl of water on the worship center table. You may also bring symbols of baptism and/or photos of baptisms. Symbols might include clamshells, baptismal candle, infant baptismal gown, and hymnal turned to the baptismal service.

If you do not have personal baptismal photos and/or you are seeking to illustrate greater inclusiveness, photographs may be found online. Be sure to check copyright before reproducing. You can start your online search for photos and images here: <http://tinyurl.com/c7ly3cl>.

## RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS

If you are searching for some ideas for children's materials or for an intergenerational group, consider the following resources that are available through Cokesbury:

- *Touch the Water, Taste the Bread: A Storybook About Jesus' Baptism*, by Daphna Flegal: A resource developed for children ages four through eight that offers a way for them to discover the importance of baptism through the story of the baptism of Jesus.
- *Water, Come Down! The Day You Were Baptized*, by Walter Wangerin, Jr.: A storybook that illustrates how all of creation joins family and friends to celebrate when a child of God is baptized.
- *I Belong to God*, by Carolyn K. Tanner: This text offers a six-session intergenerational study of baptism that explores concepts of God's love and grace that we experience in baptism through Bible stories, music, crafts, puzzles, and mission education.

## INTRODUCTION TO SESSION 1

The first two sessions of the Leader's Guide are companions to Chapter 1 in the study. The first session, about baptism, connects with pages 10–18. The second session, on Holy Communion, connects with pages 18–27.

At its heart, baptism is a bold act. We are marked with God's stamp that echoes the very story of creation: "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). God says a resounding yes to us in our baptism. Yes, I claim you as my own. Whatever happens to you, I will be there with you, seeking to redeem you, bringing you to your right mind, holding you in my arms, rejoicing in your beauty and uniqueness. (p. 12)

McClain and Norberg write that the "covenant of baptism is a crucial channel of what we call the grace of God." The United Methodist Service for the Baptismal Covenant is presented in detail in Chapter 1 and provides great clarity for the significance and connection that we are all called to represent Christ in walking justly. The goal of Session 1 is to engage in spiritual practices that invite



us to bring the experience of our baptism to heart so that we will deeply know our belovedness, and we can commit or recommit to the baptismal covenant we make in community with God and God's kin-dom.

## GATHERING

ONE VOICE: We are a people of the water!

**MANY VOICES: We worship God, whose love spilled forth and created this beautiful blue marble and water-rich planet that is our home.**

ONE VOICE: We are a people of the water!

**MANY VOICES: We worship God, whose uncontainable love falls like rain, flows like a river, and fills the oceans.**

ONE VOICE: We are a people of the water!

**MANY VOICES: We worship God, who through the water of our baptism showed us that we are loved.**

ONE VOICE: We are a people of the water!

**MANY VOICES: We worship God, whose love bubbles up in our hearts and overflows into the hearts of others.**

ONE VOICE: We are a people of the water!

**MANY VOICES: We worship God, whose love courses through our lives like the water that sustains all life, so that we may be life giving.**

**ALL VOICES: The love of God is like water. The justice of God rolls down like waters. We are a people of the water!**

## SONG

Sing a baptismal song of your choice.

## OPENING PRAYER (IN UNISON)

Most amazing God, in these days together, may I more deeply understand my baptism and Holy Communion. May my life flow from them as a sacrament in which you are always present. Through your naming me in baptism and nourishing me in Communion, may I come to understand my common call to be love and justice in the world. Help me to understand the unique way I am to live that call.

Through this study, open me to a deeper understanding of the freedom and joy of life in you, O God, Creator, Sustainer, Life-Giver, Source of Justice. May I live sacramentally and walk justly. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

## PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS FOR THE GROUP (30 MINUTES)

(This activity relates to Connecting the Scripture to Our Stories on page 139.)

Explain to the group that in our baptism, our names are spoken in community for the first time. And, as in the story of Jesus of Nazareth's baptism, we, who are made in the image of God, hear God say, "You are my beloved."

As a way of introducing themselves, invite class participants to think about the name that was spoken at their baptism: first, middle, last, and a shortened form or nickname, if that is the predominant way people refer to them. Invite them to share briefly the story behind their name: culture or family tradition, etc., and what their name means to them. If they have brought a symbol of their baptism, invite them to bring it to the worship center.

## GROUND RULES (5 MINUTES)

As a leader, part of your overall goal is to engage in efforts that build trust, reduce fears, and address the individual and collective concerns of each participant in a loving and supportive way. Establishing ground rules is often a helpful tool to accomplish this. Below are some suggested ground rules, or you may wish to facilitate the group as they develop their own.

The statements below reflect our best intentions regarding how we wish to treat one another during our time together:

1. We will maintain a safe and nurturing environment at all times, with the leader assuming the responsibility for facilitating this process.
2. There is never the intention or expectation that anyone should feel pressured to comment or participate in the discussions or activities if she or he is uncomfortable or unwilling to do so.
3. We will make a sincere commitment to listen to one another and to try to understand the other person's point of view before responding.

4. We will attempt to avoid assuming we understand what another says or means by seeking and asking for clarity when necessary.
5. What we discuss of a personal nature will be kept in confidence, unless there is an explicit agreement regarding who needs to know further information.
6. We will support the expression of dissent (the opportunity to agree to disagree) in an aggression-free manner.

#### SCRIPTURE: THE BAPTISM OF JESUS, MARK 1:9–11 (20 MINUTES)

Guide the group in a reading of this passage using *lectio divina*:

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

The leader can either read the scripture passage aloud to the group, or three people can each read the passage during a step in the process. Use the text as printed in the guide or use the same translation for all three readings if you are using personal Bibles.

Give instructions about how the *lectio* will proceed. Notice that the instructions include options for either journaling or verbally sharing responses. Any sharing should be held in sacred trust, and there should be no response (no cross talk) from other members of the group.

#### **LECTIO DIVINA INSTRUCTIONS**

*Lectio divina* is a “holy reading” of a passage—from scripture or another writing. We suggest that the leader explain all the three steps completely before beginning the first reading. Afterward, a gentle reminder for each reading will suffice (as written below). Emphasize that the response each time is an invitation and not a requirement.

Step 1. A reader slowly reads the passage aloud for listeners simply to hear it. Keep silence for a moment or two. After the first reading, the leader can simply remind participants by saying, “Let us sit together in silence with the words.”

Step 2. A reader slowly reads the passage aloud again. Let a word or phrase strike you. Notice the word or phrase that gets your attention. Keep silent for a moment or two, then invite hearers by saying, “Is there a word or phrase that spoke strongly to you?” Allow them to respond one at a time by saying aloud or journaling the word or phrase.

Step 3. A reader slowly reads the passage aloud for the third time. Then invite participants into two or three minutes of silence and suggest they ask God to show them the scripture's meaning for them at this time. Following the silence, invite hearers to respond one at a time by journaling or saying aloud the short phrase or a few words that seemed meant for them along with a brief sentence or two about why it speaks to them so strongly by saying, "What phrase seemed meant for you and please share why? What does it mean to you today?" This can be done in the larger group or in groups of two or three.

*Optional:* If group sharing took place, invite members to pray for the person on their right about the meaning they shared. You may also divide participants into pairs and have each person pray for the other.

### EXPLORING SCRIPTURE THROUGH OUR IMAGINATION (20 MINUTES)

Imaginative prayer is one way to pray with scripture in the Christian tradition. Read the script before the session to familiarize yourself with the words. In class, read the script aloud, giving the listeners time to picture the scene. It is important to honor the pauses as they are indicated in the script.

A table fountain may be turned on or prerecorded sounds of running water may be played at a low volume in the background during the reading.

Explain that one of the prayer methods the authors list in the sidebar "How to Enrich Your Prayer Life" is imaginative prayer (p. 54). Using our God-given imaginations, we can be with Jesus as John baptizes him in the Jordan River. Invite participants to listen, closing their eyes if they are comfortable, and journey to the Jordan River. Slowly and prayerfully read the following script aloud:

Imagine yourself, at the River Jordan. Burdened by life's challenges, you have come away from the city and traveled out into the wilderness with others. You've heard that there is a man who is dipping people in the river and helping them reclaim their closeness with God. That sounds hopeful to you, so you have come to the river. Smell the clean desert air. Does it smell dry? Dusty? Spicy? Sweet?

(Pause)

See the water. Notice its color. Is it blue and clear? Is it muddy?

(Pause)

Hear the breeze as it blows through the scrubby trees alongside the river. Can you hear the water moving in the river? Listen for the hushed voices around the river and see John, in the water, holding people and dunking them in the river water.

(Pause)

Hear the splash of water as another person rises out of the river, wipes her face, and slogs in her heavy clothing back to the shore.

(Pause)

You watch and consider if you are willing to walk into the water yourself. Notice how you are feeling. Do you want to go into the river, too? Are you resistant? Are you apprehensive, but feeling drawn to the water anyway? Are you eager?

(Pause)

Then one man goes into the river and walks toward John. Your attention is drawn to him. Maybe it's the way he approaches John or the expression on his face. Maybe it's the expression on John's face as he sees this man.

(Pause)

The man and John seem to have an exchange, and then John lowers him into the water. John raises him out of the water and you notice something different about the man. A certain feeling comes over you. What are you feeling?

(Pause)

You watch as the man comes ashore and walks along the riverbank until you can see him no more.

(Pause)

For some reason, you don't hesitate now, but walk into the water and approach John. John places his hands on your back and your head and lowers you into the water. Suddenly, you are springing up out of the water and are overcome with a sensation that you've never felt before. You hear a tender voice saying to you: "You are my child, my Beloved." You hear your name spoken: "\_\_\_\_\_, with you I am well pleased."

(Long Pause)

You somehow find that you have made it back to shore and you sit there on the bank, letting the sun and warm air dry you. You allow this experience to soak deeply into your being. You keep hearing the words, "You are my child, my Beloved." You hear your name: "\_\_\_\_\_, with you I am well pleased."

(Long Pause)

**Reflect (10 minutes)**

Invite participants to write about their experience with this imaginative prayer after reflecting on these questions:

- What did you experience?
- What impact did this prayer have on you?
- How did this imaginative prayer inform your understanding of baptism?

After they've had time to reflect through writing, you can also invite them to share in small groups and/or the large group.

*Optional:* Play the song "How Can Anyone?"

Words and music written by Libby Roderick and sung by Shaina Noll.

CONNECTING OUR STORY WITH GOD TO THE CHURCH COMMUNITY:  
THE COVENANT (25 MINUTES)

This exercise invites reflection so that participants can make a connection between their baptism, their covenant with God, and the church community.

In the Methodist tradition, sprinkling, pouring, or immersion have been allowed as modes of baptism. We believe that baptism is by water and the Holy Spirit. The congregation affirms it as full participants, not as onlookers, when a person is baptized.

You may use the following questions as the basis for large or small group discussion or for personal reflection and then have a large group discussion. After personal reflection or (small or large) group discussion, invite participants to write a letter to the Creator, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit expressing their current covenant in living out their God-given belovedness at this time in their lives. These covenants will be a part of the closing liturgy.

To invite discussion, you may say something like:

Now that we have remembered our belovedness and God's grace in claiming and naming us, what is our response? At the time of our baptism, our church family and loved ones brought us into covenant with God and one another, just as our biblical ancestors did. God initiated the covenant and gave us the grace to accept the promise of being faithful to God and one another. (See the discussion of our baptismal covenant in the text, pages 10–18.)

## Reflect

If you have been baptized, consider the following questions:

- What was your baptism like?
- Have you taken part in any service of reaffirmation of faith in which you were asked to “Remember your baptism and be thankful”?
- What does the covenant mean to you now?
- What would your life look like if every day you were aware of living as God’s beloved one?
- How does your life look if you are aware that God has named you, claimed you, and asked you to be love in the world?

If you have not been baptized, consider the following questions:

- What is your story as to why you were not baptized?
- How do you want to respond to being God’s beloved?
- What would it mean to you to be baptized today?

Ask participants to read Larry’s baptismal story that begins on page 10. Our stories are undoubtedly different. Invite participants to take a moment to journal about their baptism experiences. Affirm that there are no “right” answers. Invite them to a time of reflection and to write about the feelings and thoughts that best express their present state.

## RECOGNIZING THE CALL IN OUR BAPTISMAL COVENANT (20 MINUTES)

In our text we read:

We are graced by God with the gift of making decisions. We are called to join in God’s mission to resist what is not of God. How often we resign ourselves to injustice, thinking we are powerless! Our baptismal vows do not allow us to wallow in self-pity or our own perceived weakness, to give up in the face of what harms human life. Nor can we just give in to our own destructive patterns and compulsions. We don’t stop seeking God’s healing. We are never to reject the “freedom and power God gives you.” Wesley called this the imperative of “holy living.” In other words, we are called to walk justly! And in doing so, we place ourselves in the force field of God’s “amazing grace.” (p. 17)

Invite participants to realize the power of their baptism more deeply. Read these words from our baptismal covenant:

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?<sup>1</sup>

Consider the following questions:

- Do you hear in our baptismal covenant the responsibility to pay attention to injustice that results from “the evil powers of this world”?
- Can you recognize God’s call to face the forms of systemic injustice of which we are a part?
- Can you accept baptism as a source of power to “resist evil and injustice?”

### ***Lectio Divina* with the Baptismal Covenant (10–15 minutes)**

Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?<sup>2</sup>

Invite participants to use the *lectio divina* three-step process to pray with this part of the baptismal covenant: Listen to the words, let a word or phrase strike them, and ask God to reveal its meaning for them today. Encourage participants to record their experiences in their journals or share them in a small group.

### OUR RESPONSE: WRITING OUR COVENANT (20 MINUTES)

Invite participants to think about promises they want to make with God and the church to be God’s love and justice in the world. Provide paper and an envelope for each person and invite them to write a letter to the Creator, Jesus, and/or the Holy Spirit expressing their heartfelt covenant—their promises—in living out their God-given belovedness on earth at this time in their lives.

### CLOSING

Dip your fingers into a bowl of water, touch your heart, and pray your gratitude: “Thank you, most gracious God, for reminding me that I am your beloved, \_\_\_\_\_(name).”



Offer your letter of covenant to God. “I covenant with you, O most gracious God, and with the church to \_\_\_\_\_.”

## CLOSING HYMN

“I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry” (*The Faith We Sing*, no. 2051)

The words and music for “I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry” is written by John Ylvisaker (Website: [www.ylvisaker.com](http://www.ylvisaker.com)).

There are a variety of YouTube videos online such as [www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUIyM2RpDEY&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jUIyM2RpDEY&feature=related) that if used you will need permission to show publicly. If unsure about permission, you may suggest to individuals to view the video in the privacy of their home as a follow-up.

## HOMEWORK

Read Chapter 1 of the text.

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<sup>1</sup> “Congregational Reaffirmation of the Baptismal Covenant,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 50.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Session 2

# God's Gift: Nourished and Sustained in Holy Communion

Sometimes celebrated in secrecy amid political oppression, cruelty, and injustice, Holy Communion shines with a radical message of justice and dignity for all people. All are welcome here; all are fed. Around this table, the kin-dom is already come and God's will is being done on earth as it is in heaven.

Each time we come to the table, we can expect the grace of God to be manifested in a variety of ways. We can be confident that God will shape our attention and awareness to meet us where we are. Our job, then, is to be as open as possible and pay attention to God's movement in us. (p. 23)

## PREPARATION

Near the end of the session, there are two options for replicating the broken-yet-made-whole chalice. You can use a paper or pottery version. For the pottery option, find something inexpensive and breakable that looks like a chalice, such as a used stemmed pottery goblet. You will also need a plastic bag, a small hammer, and appropriate fast-drying glue. You will be breaking this chalice and putting it back together for the closing. (For safety reasons, do not use objects made of glass.)

Another option is to print the broken chalice image from the link below and cut it into pieces. Have tape available to put it back together.

## WORSHIP CENTER

Leave the bowl of water and/or the symbol of baptism and add the stemmed pottery goblet on the worship center or a framed image of the broken chalice pictured online at [www.cohope.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/chalice-fb-large.jpg](http://www.cohope.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/chalice-fb-large.jpg).

You may also use this link to print out a larger image of Community of Hope's broken chalice.

## RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS

If you are searching for some ideas for children's materials, consider the following resource, available through Cokesbury:

- *What Is Communion?: Learning About Communion in The United Methodist Church*, by G. Lynette Reed. An introductory series to the essential elements of worship for ages nine to twelve.
- *Come, Taste the Bread: A Storybook About the Lord's Supper*, by Daphna Lee Flegal. Offer your children a “taste” of The Last Supper with this retelling of the biblical story from the Gospel of Luke.

## INTRODUCTION TO SESSION 2

Session 2 is based on pages 18–27 in the text. Participants are invited to renew and deepen their experience of Holy Communion with Christ, for it is that sustenance that enables the body of Christ to continue its call to live the covenant of walking justly every day of their lives.

### GATHERING

ONE VOICE: God is with us in the vastness of the night sky, the translucent beauty of a lacewing butterfly, the elegance of a leaping gazelle, the magnificence of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

**MANY VOICES: God is really with us.**

ONE VOICE: God is with us in the hospital room, the jail cell, the violent home, at the deathbed, and in the throes of divorce.

**MANY VOICES: God is really with us.**

ONE VOICE: God is with us at the table—in the church sanctuary, in our homes, at the soup kitchen, and in the school cafeteria.

**MANY VOICES: God is really with us.**

ONE VOICE: God is with us in the struggle for justice, in the seeking of reconciliation. God is with us as we sit with those who have disappointed or betrayed us and as we stand with those who have no voice in our society.

**MANY VOICES: God is really with us.**

ONE VOICE: In the bread, in the wine, in the body of Christ, in the beloved community.

**MANY VOICES: We remember: God is really with us.**

## SONG

“One Bread, One Body” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 620)

## OPENING PRAYER (IN UNISON)

Most gracious God, your love for us is astounding. We see it all around us in your creation. We feel your loving Spirit in our hearts, and we know your call to us through the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. We are freshly aware of your grace given in baptism. We are freshly recommitted to live as a covenantal people. We come now to study what it means to be at the table with you. Through this study, deepen our understanding so that we may be in loving communion with you, one another, and with all of your creation. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE STUDY: THE LAST SUPPER, LUKE 22:7–20 (20 MINUTES)

As in Session 1, lead participants in a *lectio divina* reading of this passage. Afterward, you can invite personal reflection through journaling and/or small or large group sharing of its meaning for them today.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” They asked him, “Where do you want us to make preparations for it?” “Listen,” he said to them, “when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, ‘The teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’” He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.” So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; for

I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

## EXPLORING SCRIPTURE THROUGH OUR IMAGINATION (20 MINUTES)

The following is a script to be read to the participants so that they can imagine being at the Last Supper with Jesus, his friends, and followers. Familiarize yourself with the words and the pace before the class session. Invite the participants to relax, close their eyes (if they are comfortable), and listen as you slowly and prayerfully read the script. Follow the queues for pauses as they enter into the story with their imaginations.

Jerusalem is busy. It's Passover, the time when pilgrims come to the city to remember that God led Moses to bring the Hebrew people out of captivity in Egypt. Jesus of Nazareth has made arrangements for this Passover meal. The room is furnished with cushions and carpets and a low, U-shaped table at which the disciples will recline for the meal. The wine, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs are already provided. Peter and John sacrificed the lamb at the temple, slitting the lamb's throat at the appropriate time during the liturgy. It has been roasted on a pomegranate wood spit. The lamps have been filled.

When all is prepared and the lamps in the dark room are lit, Jesus joins the disciples. Imagine the private gathering in this dark but warmly lit room.

(Pause)

Notice the colors of the cushions and carpets.

(Pause)

See the faces of the disciples. Notice their robes, their sandals left at the door, the wine and plates of food.

(Pause)

Imagine how they greet one another as they enter.

(Pause)

Smell the combination of scents: lamp oil, roasted lamb, and bitter herbs.

(Pause)

See Jesus there with them. How does he look? What is his demeanor? How does he interact with his friends?

(Pause)

Observe them as they recline around the low table. What is the mood in the room? Are they laughing and talking? Are they subdued?

(Pause)

Imagine the tension in the room as Jesus says: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

(Pause)

Watch as Jesus takes a cup, gives thanks for it, and tells those at the table to divide it among themselves. Watch as each of the disciples drinks from the cup.

(Pause)

Then see him take the loaf of unleavened bread—the symbol of the old covenant between God and the Hebrew people—and give thanks for it. Watch as he breaks the bread, as is the custom during the Passover meal, and then says this surprising thing: “This is *my body*, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

(Pause)

Watch the faces of the disciples as they pass the flatbread and eat it, having heard Jesus’ words. What is the mood in the room now? What do the faces of the disciples show you?

(Pause)

After supper, see Jesus take the cup and say: “This cup that is poured out for you is the *new covenant* in *my* blood.”

(Pause)

How do the disciples respond as the cup is passed to each of them?

(Pause)

Now, see yourself at the table, reclining next to Jesus. As the unleavened bread is passed, see yourself taking a piece of it. As the cup of red wine is passed, see yourself drinking from it. Look at Jesus and ask him any questions that you have. Perhaps you want to know what this means for your life. What does this *new covenant* mean to you? What does it mean to remember Jesus in the bread and wine? Let yourself ask any question or say anything you want to Jesus. Then be still and quiet and give him time to respond in some way.

(Allow three to five minutes of silence. Invite them back into the space where you are together.)

### **Reflect (10 minutes)**

After the prayer, invite participants to journal their experiences with this imaginative prayer using the following questions:

- What did you experience?
- What impact did this prayer have on you?
- How did this imaginative prayer inform your understanding of Communion?

Choose whether to invite participants into small groups or remain in a large group for sharing and/or to create a piece of poetry or art depicting their experiences.

### PREPARING THE TABLE: EXPLORING COMMUNION (15 MINUTES)

While the elements of Communion are commonly recognized to be the bread and wine or juice, what else contributes to your experience of Holy Communion? Invite participants to discuss the pieces that are part of our experiences of Communion in the large group or in small groups.

- Is a table or some central focus during Communion important?
- Are open hands a part of Communion?
- Is the willingness of your heart to receive God's love and grace in Communion a part of your experience?
- Are the words you say when you receive the bread and the juice integral to Communion? (Traditionally, we say "Amen" after receiving the bread and "Amen" after receiving the juice.)
- And what of the bread, the juice, the cup? Think about how and where the grain and grapes were grown; the earth or material from which the cup was crafted—the soil, air, rain, sun.

Think of those who harvested the wheat and grapes, who milled and crushed, who transported, who baked, who made the chalice, who filled the chalice.

- What else in creation brings God's love to us in Communion?

Invite participants into small groups and ask each group to create a piece of art or poem that illustrates or tells about all the parts of giving and receiving that take place in Holy Communion.

### CONNECTING HOLY COMMUNION WITH OUR LIVES (15 MINUTES)

What happens in this meal with Jesus? In the text, we read that, "Each time we come to the table, we can expect the grace of God to be manifested in a variety of ways."

- We experience how the Holy Spirit makes the presence of Christ come alive in Holy Communion.
- We receive God's gifts of growth, healing, forgiveness, and wholeness.
- We participate in Communion as an act of gratitude. We experience unity by laying aside differences and embodying our fundamental oneness in Christ as we share one loaf and one cup.
- We taste the radical hospitality of Jesus and want all to come to the table and sit in the presence of Jesus.
- We receive the affirmation that love and justice are the will of God. We receive food for our souls as well as the strength to do the work of caring with others and challenging injustice.
- We experience relationship with Christ.
- We prepare for the larger banquet to come when we participate in Holy Communion.

Invite participants to think of specific times when they have experienced these gifts of God's grace in the Lord's Supper. Choose whether you want them to write or draw their memories or share them with another person in a small or large group.

### HOLY COMMUNION AND LIFE IN COMMUNITY (20 MINUTES)

In our text we read:

Paul had invested a year and a half to establish this pioneering community of believers. He instructed these new Jesus followers to be a colony of God within the emperor's colony. They were to be God's alternative to the ways of greed, social climbing, status seeking, and worship of rank and position.



But within a couple of years, Paul learned that this new commonwealth of God was being infected by the prevailing disease. They were dividing into factions, and some were living by the “wisdom of the world” instead of the “wisdom of God.”

This disease, Paul learned, was even infecting the Lord’s Supper. At that time, the sacred ceremony was genuinely a full meal, a kind of church potluck. Because of an ongoing famine, some of the poorer congregants counted on the common meal to stave off starvation. But the better nourished were getting to the house church earlier than the workers, peasants, and slaves and were eating up the food and drink. Some were even getting drunk (1 Corinthians 11:17–34). (p. 20–21)

**Read: 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 (20 minutes)**

In his letter, Paul angrily holds the haughty, selfish ones responsible that many “are weak and ill and some have died” (verse 30). He sternly reminds the Corinthians that the table of the Lord is all about sharing.

Lead a discussion around Paul’s writing. Invite participants to talk about how they respond to Paul’s harsh words? Do they want to say anything back to him? What new insight does this offer for their communities today?

Invite the class to think about what they just shared regarding the times they received growth, healing, radical hospitality, or other gifts from the list above in Holy Communion. Ask them to think about Paul’s words to the Corinthians and call to mind those who are not at the table in our church and in the homes of our neighborhoods. When are we like the Corinthians Paul is addressing in our churches and other areas of our lives? Where do you see the diseases of division, fear, greed, and exclusion at the tables of your life?

Divide the class into small groups to plan a meal of Communion with those “not at the table.” Where in their communities are those who are not at the table? A park, a sidewalk, a community center? How could a Communion meal be brought to them? What would be the elements of that meal? What food? A pot of soup? A three-course meal? A potluck? What would the table consist of? Would there be chairs? Would it be a blanket on the grass? Who would sit at the table together? The invited? The invited and the cooks and servers? What other elements would be intentionally included to express inclusion and sharing?

Ask each group to share what they learned about Holy Communion as they planned this meal.

CONNECTING OUR BAPTISMAL COVENANT AND HOLY COMMUNION  
TO WALKING JUSTLY (20 MINUTES)

To bring these reflections together, offer this summary:

What is the connection between our baptismal covenant, having supper in community in communion with Jesus, and walking justly? In the text, we read:

All the gifts of God are to be shared with all the people of God.

When you participate in Holy Communion, reaffirm to yourself that love and justice are the way and will of God. Even if it is painful, open your eyes to the ways of the world that benefit some people and leave so many on the margins. Remember, too, the systemic destruction of the natural world that is occurring. Ask God to make clear what your part in loving the world is. (p. 25)

Now, invite participants into a time of personal reflection in which they write a paragraph-long statement, poem, or create a collage that represents their understanding of what it means to live sacramentally and walk justly at this moment.

Introduce this activity by saying something like:

Remembering your experience of being God's beloved in baptism, recalling the covenant you made with God, considering the gifts of communing with Christ and community in Holy Communion and being aware of the brokenness in our world, let us prepare for our closing."

At Community of Hope Church, an "open and affirming" congregation of the United Church of Christ in Tulsa, Oklahoma, a "broken-yet-made-whole" chalice is always present on the Communion table. Instead of being discarded, this broken chalice was put back together as a symbol of this community's experience of not being discarded themselves, of coming together as community and being made whole in Holy Communion.

### **Broken-Yet-Made-Whole Chalice (20-25 minutes)**

"The broken-yet-made-whole chalice beckons from the table—always there to sustain and to challenge. Following Jesus, we are called to dialogue and discernment—leaving room for the prophetic voices that are hard to hear—as we seek to love kindness, do justice, and walk humbly with our God," writes Elizabeth Box Price about Community of Hope's chalice in *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations*.<sup>1</sup>

There are two options for this activity. Both are to be done reverently, without words, as a worship gesture. You may choose some fitting music to play in the background.

1. Use a printed, paper version of the broken-yet-made-whole chalice. In front of the class, tear the paper chalice into enough pieces that each person in the class can have a piece of the chalice. As you do so, ask the following questions:
  - How do we all break the chalice in our daily activities or interactions with one another and in our failures to live out the life of the beloved?
  - How is justice represented by taking responsibility for our own part in bringing wholeness back to the chalice?

Invite participants to reflect on these questions silently.

Distribute the pieces of the paper chalice and invite each person to write on the back of their torn piece of the chalice a word or two from their silent reflection. It is what they bring to the table. Then invite each person to come forward and tape their piece of the chalice to the others.

2. Ask the group to reflect on and discuss the questions in option 1. Then choose a person or two to help with this activity, which is done as part of the closing of this session.

Put the chalice in a plastic bag and break the chalice into a few pieces, then glue it back together.

Place the group's broken-yet-made-whole chalice on the worship center.

### CLOSING LITANY (IN UNISON)

O most gracious God, thank you for naming and claiming us as yours; thank you for nurturing and sustaining us always. Grace us with all that we need to be ever more open to your presence at the Communion Table.

May we rush to the table to be with you, to be made whole, to experience unity and inclusive community, to be reminded of your loving communion with all, to say thank you, and to be strengthened for our walk in justice. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

### CLOSING HYMN

“Together We Serve” (*The Faith We Sing*, no. 2175)

### HOMEWORK

Read Chapters 2 and 4 for the next session.

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<sup>1</sup> Janet Forsythe Fishburn, ed., *People of a Compassionate God: Creating Welcoming Congregations*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

### Session 3

## Answering the Call Part 1: Living Each Day with God

### PREPARATION

Choose recorded instrumental music to be played during the quiet time of preparing the Life Discipline. Make extra copies of the Life Discipline Worksheet in the Appendix on page 46.

### WORSHIP CENTER

Leave the items from the previous two sessions in the Worship Center and add a Bible turned to Luke 10:38–42 and/or a United Methodist Women’s Prayer Calendar as a representation of chronological time and the Life Discipline that will be developed during this session.

### INTRODUCTION

The first two sessions helped us deepen our understanding and move into our hearts our experiences of baptism and Holy Communion. They also gave us spiritual exercises to continue to deepen our lives in these sacraments. These last two sessions will facilitate how we can live out those sacraments and come to know how to continue to discern God’s call to walk justly. Based on chapters 2 and 4 in the text, this session provides spiritual tools for “works of piety.” Session 4 will offer spiritual tools for discerning the “works of mercy” God is calling us to at this point in our lives.

[John] Wesley was a methodical person—so much so that his detractors nicknamed him a “methodist.” But Wesley embraced the epithet, and he nurtured followers, showing them a method for accessing God’s grace and the Christian life. He called these the “works of piety” and the “works of mercy.” These are reliable disciplines through which we receive the “grace sufficient” to meet the challenge to walk faithfully and justly. (p. 37)

### RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN AND INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS

If you are searching for some ideas for children’s and intergenerational materials, consider the following resources that are available through Cokesbury:

- *Parent-Child Retreats. Spiritual Experiences for Children Ages 7–10 and Their Parents*, by Mary Ann Figlino. Retreat titles include Eucharist, Good Friends, Great Commandment, Respect, Shining Light, and Presence
- *Retreats for Renewal. 5 Models for Intergenerational Weekends*, by Nancy Ferguson. This text offers five complete retreats for all ages centered on themes that relate to biblical texts and to an element of nature or life that will be relevant to all ages and to growing in the Christian faith. Themes include Follow the Good Shepherd, Come to the Waters, Shine the Light, Sow Seeds of Faith, and Claim Your Name.

## GATHERING

ONE VOICE: God calls us to the better part.

**MANY VOICES: God wants to be with us. Let us spend time with God.**

ONE VOICE: God calls us to the better part.

**MANY VOICES: God wants us to grow in God's love. Let us share our experience of God with one another in spiritual friendship.**

ONE VOICE: God calls us to the better part.

**MANY VOICES: God wants to nourish us. Let us worship and receive Holy Communion.**

ONE VOICE: God calls us to the better part.

**MANY VOICES: God wants us to be for the world the body of Christ. Let us declare God's kin-dom in word and deed. Let us deepen our understanding of God's ways, revealed through scripture.**

One Voice: God calls us to the better part.

**MANY VOICES: God wants us to experience God's constant showering of love. Let us fast from our distractions.**

**ALL VOICES: Let us choose the better part and experience God's abundant grace.**

## SONG

“Come and Find the Quiet Center” (*The Faith We Sing*, no. 2128)

## OPENING PRAYER

O God of unlimited grace, we thank you for calling us to live our lives in constant awareness of your love and grace. Through this study, help us to grow in our commitment to the means of grace offered through prayer, scripture, Christian conferencing and conversation, fasting, worship, and Holy Communion. Through our faithful practice, may we come to know the joy of living consciously in your ever-present love. Let our lives become a sacrament and give evidence of your presence with us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## HOW TO READ SCRIPTURE (15 MINUTES)

In Chapter 2 of our text, Norberg and McClain make some suggestions for taking scripture to heart. Direct the participants to these questions on pages 40–41 (listed below) and engage participants (in small or large group) in a discussion about how such questions can enrich, and even correct, some scriptural understandings that the church currently has or has had in the past.

- What is going on in the world at the time, and what is the mindset of the text’s author (assumptions, needs, crises, joys, anxieties)?
- What does the passage mean to the original audience for which it was composed?
- What does it mean to understand the particular passage through the mind and heart of Jesus Christ and the reign of God?
- How do our life experiences, including cultural assumptions, affect the meaning of the passage for us?

Following the discussion, ask participants to hold these questions in their hearts as they meditate on the story of Mary and Martha.

### **Scripture Study: The Better Part, Luke 10:38–42 (20 minutes)**

Bring the group’s attention toward a time of prayer through scripture. You can say something like:

Before we begin, pause to ask God to shape your prayer, to help you to be open to receive what God wants for you in this prayer time.

(Pause for one minute.)

Invite participants to listen as you or someone else slowly and prayerfully reads Jesus' story about "the better part" three times (Luke 10:38–42). Using the script here, invite the hearers to "sink down into the truest part of yourself—to that place where you are naked, honest, and thirsty. Be quiet and rest for a moment. Let your mind be still, thinking about nothing except resting in God's presence."

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

(Pause for two minutes.)

Let thoughts or images come to you. If they do, notice their qualities. Are they about confession? Praise? Inquiry?

(Pause for one minute.)

Maybe no words or images come. Instead, perhaps there is a sense of peace and contentment, a welcoming into the presence of God. It could be a simple invitation to be still and let God love you.

(Pause for three minutes.)

Let the feelings come. Notice what you are feeling. Are they feelings of doubt? Fear? Rage? Sadness? Emptiness? Love? Peace? Something else? How would you name what you are feeling?

(Pause for three minutes.)

Whatever the feelings are, acknowledge them and let them be. God can speak to us through our feelings. Simply notice what you are feeling and what God is revealing to you.

(Pause for three minutes.)

Notice what happens next. Does a memory surface? Does the image of a person come to mind? Do you feel a nudge to do something—make a phone call, send an e-mail, tell someone something, or take some other action?

(Pause for three minutes.)

Sometimes God speaks to us by urging us to do something. Ask God to make you aware if there is something important you need to do. If there is, double-check with God and ask for affirmation.

### **Reflect (15 minutes)**

Give the participants time to reflect on the following questions:

- Was my prayer full of God or full of me?
- Am I expecting or insisting my prayer to be answered a particular way, or am I open to something new that God is doing in me?
- Ask God to keep showing you what is from God. Trust that God will honor your desire to hear and do as God desires.

(Pause for three minutes.)

Invite participants to write in a journal or create a piece of art that describes the feelings, thoughts, questions, answers, and insights that came during this prayer time. Also invite participants to consider the thanks they want to give to God as well as the areas they want to ask God to continue to help them change, heal, and grow.

Let participants know that sometimes there is discomfort or confusion in prayer. We may not know what is really going on or what to ask for. Or perhaps we don't feel gratitude for anything. If so, feel free to simply ask God by writing in the journal or creating art that expresses, "Please help me!"

### **Group Reflection on the Prayer Process (10 minutes)**

In small groups or in the large group, invite participants to share what they experienced in this prayer process.

## LIFE DISCIPLINE (30–40 MINUTES)

Explain that the authors discuss several works of piety that "open the window" to means of grace: Holy Communion, worship, scripture, prayer, Christian conferencing and conversation, and fasting. These works help us live life as a sacrament and aware of God's presence.

In this activity, participants have the opportunity to consider each work of piety and how they want to commit to them. This is a "Life Discipline."

A Life Discipline sets out the works of piety that you want to commit to daily, weekly, monthly, and annually. For instance, some people commit to daily spiritual or scripture reading, prayer, meditation, or journaling; weekly Sabbath-keeping, worship, Holy Communion; weekly or monthly Christian conferencing; monthly fasting; and an annual spiritual retreat. Participants can set out their plans in a Life Discipline and update it on a regular basis (perhaps annually) or as they feel God's urging to do so.



Invite participants to take some time now to consider what works of piety they want and to practice and to begin forming their Life Discipline. A Life Discipline leads to and supports works of mercy.

You may play recorded instrumental music during the quiet time while participants are working on their Life Disciplines. Invite participants to work through the following questions and suggestions starting at “Holy Communion and worship” and through the “works of mercy” as they consider what their Life Discipline will be:

- Holy Communion and worship: How often do you want to commit to practicing these, and how do you want to experience them? Daily? Weekly? Do you want to seek out new worship or Communion experiences on a planned basis?
- Prayer: How often do you want to commit to spending time in prayer? How long each day? What prayer practice do you want to explore? *Lectio divina*, imaginative prayer with scripture, or another form of spiritual reading and meditation?
- Christian conferencing and conversation: Do you want to commit to meeting with a spiritual friend or a group of spiritual friends? Do you plan to participate in spiritual sharing during United Methodist Women gatherings or other church meetings? How often should you meet?
- Fasting: When do you plan to fast? Will it be a fast from food or something else in your life to strengthen your connection and openness to the presence of God?

Works of mercy: Works of mercy are the result of our connecting more and more with God through works of piety. They are also a spiritual practice, facilitating our connection with God. As a spiritual practice, works of mercy increase our ability to be a vessel of God’s love to put us in touch with our belovedness, with God’s grace, and with others in community. In the next session, we will focus on how to continue to discern God’s call in our lives. Notice now if there’s a work of mercy that has been on your minds and hearts. To help you think about works of mercy, look at this list of possibilities from Brian McLaren’s book *Finding Our Way Again*:

- Forgiving those who wrong us.
- Showing hospitality to strangers—or “the other.”
- Praying for the sick.
- Not judging but showing mercy and compassion.
- Confronting evil, seeking to overcome it with good.
- Serving.
- Listening.

- Associating with the [marginalized].
- Giving “the holy kiss” [eating with marginalized].
- Speaking truth in love.
- Practicing neighborliness, including toward enemies.
- Preferring the poor rather than showing favoritism to the rich.
- Speaking and working for justice.
- Proclaiming the good news in word and deed.
- Giving to the poor.
- Throwing parties for poor and forgotten.
- Walking to the other side of the street to serve those in need.
- Showing empathy.<sup>1</sup>

### MAKING YOUR LIFE DISCIPLINE (30 MINUTES)

Now invite participants to write their Life Disciplines. Encourage them to choose the works of piety that they are ready to commit to on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis. Suggest that they think about what is realistic and how any new time commitment will work into their lives.

Encourage participants to review their Life Disciplines periodically, such as on their birthdays or for the New Year, to affirm and update them as needed. This is similar to the fire department reminding us to change the fire alarm batteries whenever there is a time change.

Suggest that as they look over the possibilities, to pay attention to the ones they feel drawn to, ones that “have their name on it.” And encourage them to consider why they are drawn to a discipline: Does it seem like it will offer growth or balance?

Explain that sometimes we’re attracted to spiritual methods that suit our personality and that sometimes we are resistant to others that might contribute to our spiritual growth. Invite participants to spend some time aware of God’s presence, asking God for guidance about which practices would bring growth and balance; why there is resistance; which works of piety to commit to at this time on a daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly basis.

Hand out copies of the Life Discipline worksheet in the Appendix on page 46 of the text, or suggest they use a journal or the actual worksheet in the Participant’s Guide.

**Daily practice:** Choose the time of day you will pray, read, journal; where you will go for your prayer period (e.g., a corner of a room, a favorite chair, a place outdoors); what resource you will use for the reading; what method of prayer (e.g., *lectio divina*, imaginative prayer, silent

meditation, intercessory, contemplation of the passage); whether you will journal, create art, or identify some other outlet to process your prayer time.

**Weekly practice:** Your weekly practices may include worship, Holy Communion, Christian conferencing, fasting, or Sabbath-keeping (spending a day enjoying God through time in nature, with family and friends, reading, walking, etc.).

**Monthly practice:** Possibilities for your monthly practice could include Holy Communion, fasting, meeting with a spiritual director, Christian conferencing, and a day set aside to be with God.

**Annual practice:** If you plan to have an annual spiritual retreat, set aside three to eight days to spend time alone with God, either guided by a spiritual director or a retreat leader. If your local, district, or conference United Methodist Women has an annual or biannual spiritual day apart, plan to attend it. The Upper Room offers several opportunities for annual retreats, including the Academy for Spiritual Formation and SOULfeast, see [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org) for more information. Contact retreat centers in your area or an area you'd like to visit.

**Commitment:** Changes in lifestyle are not easy or convenient. Think about how you can make it possible to incorporate your Life Discipline into your life. Would it help to put your daily prayer time and weekly commitments on your calendar? Would it be helpful to schedule next year's annual retreat? Be specific in naming what you need to do to be skillful at keeping this commitment.

## CLOSING

For the closing, invite participants to stand in a circle, each holding their written Life Discipline.

### **Offering Your Life Discipline to God (in unison)**

O God of unlimited grace, thank you for showing us the works of piety that open us to your means of grace. We need your grace even to stay faithful to the works of piety we commit to now. And we do commit to these spiritual practices, to the better part.

*(Hold your Life Discipline in the silence with God.)*

Bless our intentions as we dedicate time to be with you daily, weekly, monthly, and annually, so that we can live sacramentally, as evidence of your love, and walk justly in your loving kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## CLOSING HYMN

“Take My Life and Let It Be” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 399)

One option among many available on YouTube for this hymn may be found at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0Byp7aK2DA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0Byp7aK2DA). This particular version is by Chris Tomlin.

If you choose to use such videos, you need to gain permission to show them publically. If you are unsure about gaining permission, you may suggest to individuals to view the video in the privacy of their home as a follow-up.

## HOMEWORK

Read Chapters 3 and 5 in preparation for Session 4.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian McLaren, *Finding Our Way Again: The Return of the Ancient Practices* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 119.

## Session 4

# Answering the Call Part 2: Following Jesus in Caring for God's World

### PREPARATION

To prepare for the Love Feast at the end of the session, provide a plate with something simple to eat and drink with quantity enough for each participant. Food should be something other than grape juice and bread to distinguish it from Holy Communion. For example, it could be mild cookies or graham crackers and apple juice. It could be dates or other dried fruits indigenous to Jesus' culture. Or consider what is indigenous and meaningful to the people who would be sharing it; perhaps something grown in your region, something that gives life—perhaps water, perhaps some potatoes. Provide small plates and/or napkins and small cups. Provide songbooks or hymnals. If possible, invite a piano player or guitarist to help lead music.

Decide how you want the class to read the Book of Jonah. It's a short book and a compelling story. You can read it in several ways: Read it aloud yourself; ask four participants to read aloud a chapter each; or members of the group can read it aloud paragraph by paragraph. You could also divide the participants into four groups, assign them each a chapter and ask them to read the chapter silently, then tell that part of the story or act it out as a group. If acting it out, you may wish to organize this as an additional homework assignment following Session 3.

For the activity of planning a prayer vigil, you may want to copy the list of questions for the group to work through, or you can write them on a whiteboard.

Decide if you want to have recorded instrumental music to play softly during the writing of the obituaries.

### WORSHIP CENTER

Set the plate of food, a pitcher of juice, plates and/or napkins, and cups on the worship center space. Cover the items with napkins or a cloth.

## INTRODUCTION TO SESSION 4

Christian discernment rests on the assumption that God wants to communicate with us, has a plan for us, and claims and empowers us for living sacramentally and walking justly. Through discernment, we can begin to sense how, even in our seemingly inconsequential lives, God is still making all things new. We can catch glimpses of God's greatness, as God reveals God's self to us. (p. 77)

Our commitment to practicing the works of piety in our Life Disciplines helps us to live Wesley's teaching about the means of grace. As we seek to live sacramentally, we also acknowledge Wesley's teaching that the only holiness is social holiness, and we work to deepen our understanding of how God calls us to walk justly.

In this session, we will contemplate God's actions in a call story from scripture, call stories of others in our time, and learn spiritual tools to help us discern and affirm our call to walk justly.

## GATHERING

ONE VOICE: Jesus calls us to follow the path he walked: living sacramentally, walking justly.

**MANY VOICES: But how do I know what God wants me to *do*? How do I know God is calling me to "walk justly?" What does it mean *for me* to walk justly?**

ONE VOICE: Jesus calls us, and Jesus will show us the way.

**MANY VOICES: I am ready to watch and learn and listen. Who do I watch? Who do I learn from? Who do I listen to?**

ONE VOICE: Ourselves, each other, God.

**MANY VOICES: I am ready to watch, to learn, to listen, to discern God's call for me.**

**ALL VOICES: Let us study together.**

## SONG

“Lord, You Have Come to the Lakeshore” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 344)

## PRAYER (IN UNISON)

O God of astounding hope, you call us to help you bring your kin-dom to completion. We are always amazed, and sometimes perplexed, by your ways. And we are increasingly willing to help you. We come now to learn the ways of discernment so that we can walk with you each day. We want to answer your specific call to each of us to give our lives for the world that you have created. We want to live so we may all share in your love and justice. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

## SCRIPTURE STUDY—THE BOOK OF JONAH (10 MINUTES IF READ ALOUD, 20 MINUTES IF ACTED OUT)

Tell the participants:

In Chapter 3, McClain and Norberg remind us that, “God calls each of us to join the healing stream of God’s love and justice, and our baptism is the symbol of that call. But how exactly does God call?”

How do we recognize God’s calling? One way is through stories. The study provides numerous examples from the Bible and from the lives of historical and modern-day people. Let’s take a fresh look at a familiar story from the Bible that many of us first heard during our childhood, the story of Jonah.

Read or tell the story of the Book of Jonah in the group.

### **Reflect (20 minutes)**

Invite discussion in the large group or in small groups on the following questions:

#### **Jonah’s Story**

- What do you find most interesting in this story?
- How would you characterize Jonah and God’s relationship?
- Why do you think Jonah doesn’t want to answer God’s call?
- Does God give up on calling Jonah?
- How does God stay in relationship with Jonah?
- How does God work with Jonah? Is there a pattern in the way God calls Jonah?
- How does Jonah know what God is doing with him; that it’s God calling and engaging him?

### **Connecting Jonah's Story to Our Story**

- Do you identify with Jonah? In what way?
- What are the reasons we don't want to do what we think God might be asking of us?
- Have you ever turned the other way or been silent and not responded to something you felt God was calling you to do?

### EXPLORING CALL STORIES (20 MINUTES)

Remind participants of this quote in Chapter 3 of the text: "The biblical accounts of God's call are perhaps the most familiar, but God has never stopped finding unlikely times and places to call us by name." Invite participants to explore call stories.

In the large group, read aloud the story of how Maggie Liechty (p. 75) received a call, as McClain and Norberg put it, "in the crucible of her own great weakness and suffering." Then discuss in twos or threes how you may have received God's call in the "crucible of [your] own great weakness and suffering." Invite participants to look at additional stories in Chapter 4, or the call stories of others they know, and discuss what they observe about how God calls us.

### TOOL FOR DAILY DISCERNMENT: THE DAILY EXAMEN

"Openness to God's prompting on a daily—even hourly—basis can lead to a lively ongoing conversation with God. Discernment can enable us to order our lives in accordance with God's invitation to live sacramentally." (p. 77)

In their helpful discussion of discernment in Chapter 3, McClain and Norberg offer several questions on pages 80–81 to consider in our lifelong process of discernment:

- Could my own need for healing be getting in the way of clarity and effectiveness? Many a social movement has been harmed by participants using it for personal ends or gratification.
- Does my discernment square with the God of the Bible? Is it being true to Christ's spirit? In Wesley's terms, is it in keeping with "the whole scope and tenor" of scripture?
- Does my discernment have the ring of common sense? If not, it would be good to carefully look for confirmation from other sources.
- Is my sense of call consistent with the best human wisdom? Have I bothered to inform myself adequately?
- Does my call fit in with the thinking of the church over time? With the Wesleyan tradition? With the mission and teaching of Jesus (as in Luke 4:18–19)? With the spirit, if not the letter, of *The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church*? (At the same time, we cannot



deny that God is still speaking and could be leading the church in a new way.)

- Is my call consistent with special concern for people who are marginalized, poor, and victimized?
- Do those whom I trust the most find my call plausible and consistent with how they see God at work in my life?
- Does my sense of call grow stronger over time, or does it go hot and cold? Does it receive confirmation from many directions?
- Is there an element of surprise? Although surprise is not always present, it can point to a genuine call.
- Does my sense of call possibly make me look good or feather my own nest? If so, it's important to be doubly cautious.
- Am I putting up roadblocks to real discernment? For example, am I already certain of what God wants even before I ask? Is part of me unwilling to receive God's attention? Is some sense of shame inhibiting me? Am I stuck, waiting for the *perfect* call or discernment?
- Am I physically able to follow a certain calling? Can I follow this call and also care for my health?
- Am I in danger of taking on more than I can handle? Am I pridefully assuming that my energy is limitless and everything depends on me? How do my family and immediate community accompany me in this discernment process?
- Does my sense of call represent a real challenge? Does it excite me and give me a sense of peace in following it? Or am I doing it out of guilt or some inner or outer compulsion?
- Does my sense of call embrace the practice of the means of grace in word and sacrament so that I can continually feed on Christ's real presence?
- Does my sense of call make me want to become better prepared to do and be what's necessary?

Invite participants to look at those questions. Ask them to share the question they think is the most helpful to them at this time.

Explain to participants that the Daily Examen is another spiritual tool in the Christian tradition that helps us discern and affirm God's call. As we practice it each day (it only takes ten minutes), we can see a pattern in our lives. It's a daily check-in to see how we're doing with our call or if God is tweaking our call or calling us in some other direction.

Describe to participants how to do the Daily Examen:

At the end of the day, set aside ten minutes to ask God to bring to your mind the answers to two questions. (Let participants know that they can adapt the questions as needed.)

1. When did I most contribute love and justice to God's kin-dom today? Make note of the answer and give thanks to God.
2. When did I least contribute love and justice to God's kin-dom today? Make note of the answer and ask God to help you.

Even though this is simply a look at our daily lives, it seems that God's desires for us become known to us through the patterns revealed by the exercise over time. The Daily Examen brings awareness in our answers to the two simple questions.<sup>1</sup>

Offer the group the opportunity to experience the Daily Examen. Invite them to be silent for a moment, to center themselves in the presence of God, and to let the events of the day before come to mind.

Invite participants to ask themselves: "When did I most contribute love and justice to God's kin-dom yesterday?" Keep silent for a couple of minutes. Suggest that they offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the way they were able to contribute love and justice today.

Next, invite them to ask themselves: "When did I least contribute love and justice in God's kin-dom yesterday?" Keep silent for a couple of minutes. Suggest that they offer a prayer requesting God's help, that today they would be able to contribute love and justice to God's kin-dom.

Invite them to share (as an option, not a requirement) their answers in groups of two. Or invite them to journal their answers.

Facilitate a large group discussion on how they think the Daily Examen might help them discern what God desires for them in their lives.

## THE CALL TO LOVE AND JUSTICE (20 MINUTES)

This is a time to bring the elements and experiences of sacramental living together toward our call to love and justice. Invite participants to remember the covenant of our baptism and the letter they wrote to God in the first session. Invite them to recall the experience of God's sustaining love in Holy Communion. Remind them that we commit to disciplines of spiritual practice that more fully open us to live sacramentally and that sacramental living leads us to action.

Suggest to participants that while we are individually called to bring love and justice, God's call to action on our lives is to be accomplished in community. Invite the group to find examples of United Methodist churches and groups that are working toward making systemic changes in Chapter 3.

This discussion may also lead participants to share how they are a part of actions as individuals or through organizations such as United Methodist Women. United Methodist Women members join together locally, nationally, and globally in various forms of prayer to create change. For example, United Methodist Women are keeping vigil for the DREAMers, children brought to this country illegally and who now are in college. The DREAM Act would give them a path to citizenship. As part of their witness, a group of people fast and pray each day for the DREAMers.<sup>2</sup>

Invite someone to read Ephesians 6:11–12. The author of Ephesians writes about the necessity of confronting unjust systems: “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Emphasize to participants that prayer is one form of community activism. In a public space, it can be a transforming testimony.

Many believe that years of peace prayers offered every Monday night in a church in Leipzig, Germany, resulted in the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Tell participants about the women of Liberia who brought peace to their country after years of civil war. Leymah Gbowee, a thirty-nine-year-old Lutheran mother of six and Liberian peace activist, showed Christian and Muslim women how to break down the stereotypes so that they could find common goals to work for peace in their country.

In 2003, after years of civil war, she called these women of faith in Liberia to peace building, and they established a public witness of prayer for peace. The women’s movement eventually led to the ousting of President Charles Taylor and the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, with whom Gbowee said she has a “mother-daughter relationship.”

President Johnson Sirleaf is a United Methodist and the first female to be elected a head of state in modern Africa. Gbowee’s struggle for peace in Liberia is documented in her memoir, *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changes a Nation at War*, and the documentary *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*.<sup>3</sup>

## PLANNING PRAYER AS COMMUNITY ACTIVISM (20 MINUTES)

Invite small groups to plan a prayer vigil. Ask those who have participated in these vigils to share their experiences. How were they organized and what were the graces received during and as a result of the vigil?

To help the groups plan prayer vigils, invite them to discuss these questions (have them written on a whiteboard or available in handouts):

- What injustice do you feel God is calling you to pray for?
- Why do you think praying will help?
- With whom can you combine forces to help make a difference?
- Will the prayers be said individually by a network of pray-ers, or will the pray-ers come together and pray?
- If individually, how will there be communication among those who are praying? (Telephone tree, Facebook page, e-mails?)
- If the vigil is to be done in a gathering, how often will participants come together to pray? Where will they pray? Will it be in a private or public space? Discuss the pros and cons of

that decision. Is it important that other people besides the participants know about the vigil? Why or why not?

- What is the best public space to bring awareness to this issue? If the vigil is in a public space, what will happen during the prayer vigil? Is that different than if the vigil were in a private space?
- What are the elements of a prayer vigil? What will be the structure of the prayer time, or will there be a structure? Will there be fasting, silent prayer, voiced prayer (spontaneous or written), singing, walking, candles, signs, banners, artwork?
- How long will you continue to pray? Imagine your goals and the steps necessary for change to take place.

In the large group, share the discoveries or insights about prayer and community activism for love and justice that have emerged in this activity.

### WRITING YOUR OBITUARY (30 MINUTES)

As facilitator, reassure participants that while this activity may sound unsettling, it is not meant to startle or scare anyone, but is a vehicle to discern what's at the bottom of our hearts, our life's purpose, and the acts of love and justice to which God is calling us.

Invite people in the group to imagine that they are coming to the end of a long and fruitful life and that it is time to write their obituary. This obituary is a little different from the ones they read in the newspaper. This is a review of how they answered God's call to be love and do justice in the world. It should list the ways they have helped others, the people they loved, and the actions they took with their community to address injustice and bring about systemic change. It contains the ways they helped bring God's kin-dom further into completion.

Suggest that they let their hearts lead them in writing their obituaries. Participants should write from the bottom of their hearts without regard for any limitations. Encourage them to write with passion and urgency for the "least of these" or the injustice in the world that they most want to see changed. Let their obituaries record what they hope their lives will accomplish from this moment on.

Give them time to complete this exercise. You might want to softly play some recorded instrumental music in the background.

Then invite participants to compare their obituaries with where they are in their lives right now. How can they take the next step to accomplish these goals for social justice in their lives? What would be the next, or first, step?

Invite them to pair with another person or to gather into small groups and share their obituaries.

Now, while it's fresh in their minds, invite participants to prayerfully transfer the hopes for their lives written in their obituaries into a covenant and make a promise to God to take action in one area of injustice or one system in need of change.

## LOVE FEAST (25 MINUTES)

Prepare now to share in a Love Feast,<sup>4</sup> a special expression of deep Christian fellowship that is rooted in the Methodist tradition and extends back to John Wesley's experience with the Moravians, who introduced the feast to him. Through sharing stories about how we perceive God in our lives, singing, and sharing food, the Love Feast is marked by the tenderness of enjoying community as the family of Christ.

There is no strict structure to the Love Feast. It is a Spirit-led time of prayer in which participants are invited to share impromptu readings of scripture passages, give personal witnesses, pass a plate and cup of simple food and drink, and sing songs, chosen spontaneously.

Clear an area in the room of all barriers and place chairs in as intimate a circle as possible.

One suggestion is to begin with singing "Here I Am, Lord," (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 593), which points to God's call to serve and witness and to our heart's response.<sup>5</sup> As the food is passed, the reflections and witness are shared, participants can spontaneously suggest other songs for the group to sing.

Food is passed quietly without interrupting the flow of the service. It is merely passed as the other sharing proceeds. It may be passed more than once. Designate a couple of people to begin offering or passing the food, and pay attention to when to pass it again. It is passed with the love and hospitality we experience in God's gift of Holy Communion.

During the final sharing time in this Love Feast, participants are invited to talk about how they have felt God calling them during this study and how they are committing to social justice.

A suggested closing is to prayerfully recite together the words to the hymn "God of Grace and God of Glory" (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 577).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah/New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>2</sup> See [www.facebook.com/groups/176134225738078/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/176134225738078/).

<sup>3</sup> Linda Bloom, "Peace Prize Winner Shines Her Light," (New York: United Methodist News Service, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 581.

<sup>5</sup> "Here I Am, Lord," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 593.

<sup>6</sup> "God of Grace and God of Glory," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, 577

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## About the Authors

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Previously, Hoerth compiled and edited the stories and recipes of *Oklahoma Cooks* for the Oklahoma Folklife Council and co-authored *The Life and Times of Henry Bellmon*.

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Previously, Louter coordinated a recruitment, education, and crisis-support network for foster and adoptive families in Kentucky. Her career also has included work at a United Methodist retirement community and a United Methodist-affiliated college.









**What additions and planning steps do I need to make (e.g., scheduling of annual retreat, deciding on a regular time period to review Life Discipline such as on my birthday, etc.)?**

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WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO MAKE TIME FOR THESE PRACTICES?

Daily:

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Weekly:

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Monthly:

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Annually:

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