

# Session Two: Leader's Guide

## Preparation

- Collect the following materials: paper, pencils, copies of “Session Two: Participant Material,” Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, participant journals/notebooks and pens.

## 1. Introduce the Session

Remind the participants that this is the second session in a study exploring how we as United Methodists understand the nature of the church. Recall the three distinctive United Methodist convictions that were discussed in the previous session: The saving love of God 1) is meant for all people; 2) is transformative; and 3) creates community.

Explain that today the group will be exploring how our Wesleyan heritage informs our convictions about the church, particularly how these convictions are expressed in our hymns and liturgy, found in official statements of doctrine and polity, and shaped by our historical journey.

Invite the participants to read aloud Psalm 95:1-7. Remind the group that the Psalms are hymns. Through hymns and poetry we are able to express important feelings and beliefs that cannot be adequately described through prose. Ask the group to reflect upon how this psalm speaks to them about the purpose of the church. Then ask each person to write a one-sentence definition of the church. Don't discuss the definitions but explain that they will be used later.

When they have finished, **watch video “WLP Study: Session 2 Introduction” found at [www.umc.org/CFO-WonderLovePraise](http://www.umc.org/CFO-WonderLovePraise) (English language only, no hyphen in URL)**

## 2. Explore Our Historical Journey

Distribute copies of “Session Two: Participant Material” and invite the group to silently read the first section, “Our Historical Journey.” Use the following questions as a springboard to discussion:

- Early Methodists and Pietists took the church to those that were on the margins of society. Who are at the margins of our community, and how is our congregation or community taking the church to them?
- In what ways are the values and priorities of our present culture in tension with our core convictions of witnessing to the radical aim and effect of God's grace?
- What are the practical circumstances that are pushing us to change the way we “do church?” What new opportunities do these circumstances create?

Based on your discussion, invite the participants to review their definitions of the church and make any additions or revisions.

## 3. Look at Hymns

Ask the group to read silently “Church as Community,” from the participant material. Distribute hymnals and point out that the hymns from pages 537 to 593 are in the section titled “The Nature of the Church.” Seven of these hymns were written by Charles Wesley (numbers 541, 550, 553, 554, 561, 562, and 566).

Divide into groups of three and assign each group one of the Charles Wesley hymns. Ask each group to examine the words to the assigned hymn, particularly looking for phrases that relate to the material they just read.

Give groups an opportunity to report the highlights of their conversation to the entire group. If you have time, sing some of the hymns. Once again invite the participants to review their definitions of the church and make revisions.

## 4. Discuss Definitions of Church

Ask the group to read silently the section of the participant material titled, “Definitions of Church.” Invite people to report the definitions they have been working on throughout the session. Discuss the following questions:

- What common themes do we see in our definitions?
- How do our definitions compare to the statements from the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith?
- Which definitions most accurately reflect the experience of our congregation?

## 5. Offer Advice to the Committee

Remind the group that one of the purposes of this study is to provide feedback to the Committee on Faith and Order. Discuss the following questions, and ask the participants to note their responses in their journal or notebook.

- In what ways do you recognize The UMC in the materials for this session? What themes or topics accurately reflect who we are as United Methodists?
- Is there anything essential to the life of The UMC related to the topics discussed in this session that is missing?

## 6. Close With Prayer

Use the first stanza of “See How Great a Flame Aspires” (UMH 541) as a closing prayer, and encourage participants to read at home the document listed in “Going Further.”