

Session Three: Leader's Guide

Preparation

• Collect the following materials: newsprint, markers, paper, pencils, copies of “Session Three: Participant Material,” Bibles, *United Methodist Hymnals*, *United Methodist Book of Discipline –2012*, participant journals/notebooks and pens.

1. Introduce the Session

Remind the participants that this is the third 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 first session: The saving love of God 1) is meant for all people; 2) is transformative; and 3) creates community. Remind the group that the second session explored how our convictions about the church are expressed in our hymns and liturgy, found in official statements of doctrine and polity, and shaped by our historical journey.

Explain that in this session we will be examining some particularly United Methodist aspects of our understanding of the church including grace, the general and representative ministry, connectionalism, and our commitment to theological reflection as the task of the whole church.

When you have finished this introduction, **watch video “WLP Study: Session 3 Introduction” found at www.umc.org/CFOWonderLovePraise (English language only)**

Invite the participants to read silently Romans 3:21-31 and the sections in the participant material titled, “Priest, Prophet, King” and “The Scope of Grace,” and then discuss the following questions:

- What do we learn about grace from Romans 3:21-31?
- How do the ideas in the participant material relate to the Romans passage?
- When have you seen the grace of God result in the transformation of a person or a situation?
- Where in your local community and in the world community is grace particularly needed? How might the church be both a sign and a servant of God's grace in these situations?

2. Explore the Nature of Ministry

Divide into small groups of three or four. Give each group a paper and pencil and explain that they will have two minutes to record on the paper as many words or

phrases that come to mind when they hear the word *ministry*. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers.

After the two minutes, reassemble the entire group and ask each group to name one of the items on its list that has not been previously named by another group. As the groups report, record the responses on newsprint. Continue the reporting process until all of the items have been recorded. Then ask the participants to read silently the section “General and Representative Ministry.” Review the items that were listed and decide as a group if each item relates primarily to the general ministry of all Christians, to the representative ministry of ordained deacons, or to the representative ministry of ordained elders. Use different colors of markers to indicate the group's decision.

Invite the group to scan the newsprint, and then discuss the following questions:

- Is our list primarily related to the general ministry or the representative ministry? More related to individual ministry or corporate ministry? More related to ministry inside the church or outside the church?
- Are the items on the list more descriptive of characteristics or of activities?
- What does the list say about how we view ministry?

3. Discuss Connectionalism

Ask the group to read silently “Connectionalism” from the participant material. Use the following questions as a springboard for discussion:

- What is the difference between mutual support and mutual accountability?
- What conditions need to be present for true Christian conferencing to occur?
- Where in the church or outside the church have you experienced Christian conferencing? How did it affect your beliefs and your behaviors?

4. Reflect Theologically

Ask the group to read silently the section of the participant material titled, “Theological Reflection.” Remind the group that because we live in a complex world with varied contexts, faithful living cannot be reduced to a list of do's and don'ts. Theological reflection is the dynamic process that enlivens our faith. It helps us examine our experience in light of God's love and move forward in faith. Explain that there are a variety of models for theological reflection and that today they will be experiencing one of those

models.

Invite the participants to name a positive experience that has happened in the church recently. If possible select something that most people in the group would have participated in at some level.

Use the following steps to help the participants reflect theologically on the experience:

1. Describe what happened. Who was involved? What actions were taken? What feelings were expressed?
2. Identify biblical stories and images that relate to the experience.
3. Identify points where the Holy Spirit was active.
4. Discuss what the church learned from the experience and how that learning might affect future action.

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 a Hymn

Remind the group that hymns are theological reflections upon life and Scripture. Close the session by singing together, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” number 384 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*.

Encourage the group to read at home “Our Theological Task,” referenced in the participant material section “Going Further.”