

Session Four: Leader's Guide

Preparation

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

1. Introduce the Session

Remind the participants that this is the final session in a study exploring how we as United Methodists understand the nature of the church. Invite participants to recall key points from previous sessions.

Ask participants to read John 17:18-23 and remind them that this is part of the prayer that Jesus prayed immediately before he was arrested. Invite participants to describe what they think the world and the church would look like if Jesus's prayer for unity were fully experienced.

When they have finished, **watch video “WLP Study: Session 4 Introduction” found at www.umc.org/CFO-WonderLovePraise (English language only, no hyphen in URL)**

Read aloud the section, “Search for Unity,” from the participant material. Use the questions posed in the section as a springboard for further discussion.

2. Consider the Church—Visible and Invisible

Ask participants to read silently the participant material sections “Visible and Invisible” and “The Church Community.” Invite participants to think about times in their own lives when they experienced *koinonia* inside the visible church and outside of the visible church. Then ask them to remember times when they experienced hypocrisy inside the visible church and outside the visible church. Without necessarily revealing specific details, allow those who wish to name aloud the feelings that were evoked in the various instances and to reflect on how the experiences affected their faith.

3. Explore Diversity and Conflict

Ask participants to read silently the section “Diversity and Conflict” in the participant material. Ask the group to name the Christian and other faith communities that are found in your area. Record the groups as they are named.

Divide into small groups and assign each group one or more of the faith communities named. Ask them to list the differences they perceive between each faith community and their own congregation.

After about five minutes, ask the groups to report their

findings and make a list of all the differences mentioned. Review the list, and discuss whether each difference is a difference that aids the church in its mission to a diverse world or a difference that reflects opposing beliefs on a matter that is vital to the church's identity and mission. Choose one of the items that falls into the latter category and discuss how our understanding of grace, Christian conferencing, and theological reflection as the work of the whole church might provide a way to deal with the conflict in a redemptive manner.

4. 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?

Then ask the participants to consider the study as a whole. Follow the directions from “Wonder, Love, and Praise Response Questions” at the end of this study guide to report the group's responses.

If participants have particular feedback on any aspect of the document or the study, encourage them to send it directly to the Committee on Faith and Order of The United Methodist Church at cfo@umc-cob.org.

5. Close With a Hymn and a Prayer

Read each petition below, pause for silent prayer, and then together respond, “May we all be lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

Gracious God, we pray for your church that all may find welcome, experience community, and be transformed.

We give thanks for the saints that have gone before, leaving us hymns, writings, and a legacy of holy living.

We acknowledge that all are called to ministry, to proclaim Christ as priest, prophet, and king.

We pray for the unity of your church, so that the world may be transformed.

Close the session by singing together, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” number 384 of *The United Methodist Hymnal*.