

# **A Guide for Small Group Study**

**Based On  
Wonder, Love, and Praise:  
Sharing a Vision of the  
Church**

Prepared by the Committee on Faith and Order of  
The United Methodist Church in response to the action of the  
2016 General Conference, petition #6033.

# Preface

During the 2008 quadrennium, The United Methodist Committee on Faith and Order received a request from the Council of Bishops to prepare a new theological study document on ecclesiology—that is, on a theological understanding of the church itself. In response to this request, a draft document titled *Wonder, Love, and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church* has been developed. It is intended to assist all of us in The United Methodist Church in gaining a clearer, more comprehensive vision of the reality of the church, and to place our life and work as United Methodists within the context of that vision. It engages with our Wesleyan heritage, with the common Christian tradition rooted in the scriptural witness, and with the contemporary ecumenical discussion.

It is the hope of the committee that, after a period of study, conversation, and reflection leading to whatever corrections and other improvements might be found needful, this present document might take a place alongside other official theological statements of the church. As a step toward that realization, the 2016 General Conference approved the resolution printed below.

This guide is the “brief study and response guide” mentioned in item 1 to be used in the “congregationally-based studies of United Methodist ecclesiology” mentioned in item 2, or other relevant small group studies.

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The Committee on Faith and Order proposes a period of study to stimulate and aid theological reflection throughout the church on the identity and mission of The United Methodist Church.

The Study and response process in the coming quadrennium will involve these elements:

1. A teaching document on ecclesiology will be made available electronically through [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org), [www.gbhem.org](http://www.gbhem.org), and [www.gbod.org](http://www.gbod.org) along with a brief study and response guide to facilitate study of the document. These documents will be translated into the language of the General Conference.

2. Each resident bishop will be asked to arrange for congregationally-based studies of United Methodist ecclesiology between June 2016 and December 2017 involving approximately ten percent of both the laity and clergy of her or his episcopal area. Resources for the study will be provided by the Committee on Faith and Order.

3. Responses will be solicited from specific groups who may have particular expertise in ecclesiology, including: faculty from United Methodist seminaries and schools of theology, general agency staff, pan-Methodist theologians and officials; and other selected ecumenical partners.

4. All United Methodists will be invited and encouraged to offer feedback on United Methodist ecclesiology.

5. The Committee on Faith and Order will design processes to solicit and receive these responses.

6. The Committee on Faith and Order will be responsible for evaluating the study process, considering the responses received, and will offer appropriate action to the 2020 General Conference. The Committee on Faith and Order will send to the 2020 General Conference a theological teaching document on ecclesiology for adoption as an official document of the church, comparable to *By Water and the Spirit* and *This Holy Mystery*.

Adopted by the 2016 General Conference of The United Methodist Church on May 19, 2016

# Preparing to Lead the Study

## Who Should Participate

This study is designed to be used by small groups in a variety of settings. This could include existing groups such as adult Sunday school classes, weekday groups, and United Methodist Women and Men. Some churches will want to use this as a churchwide study, creating a number of small groups that meet at a variety of times over a four-week period.

The study is four sessions long, with each session being approximately an hour and a half. Most groups will want to meet weekly, although it is possible to use this material in a weekend retreat setting or to extend it over a longer period of time. Groups such as adult Sunday school classes that may have less than an hour of meeting time may want to take two weeks per session.

## Who Should Lead

The sessions do not need to be led by a “content expert,” although it would be very appropriate for the church pastor to lead the sessions. The leader needs to be willing to do some preparation in advance of the setting, to facilitate discussion during the session, and to organize the submission of feedback at the end of the study.

## What Happens During the Session

Sessions include Scripture reflection related to the material that will be discussed. Each session also includes reading excerpts from the document, *Wonder, Love, and Praise: Sharing a Vision of the Church*. These excerpts form the “Participant Material” and should be printed prior to each meeting to be distributed to the study participants. While it is hoped that participants will read the whole document outside of class, it is not assumed that they will have read the “Participant Material” before the session in which it will be discussed.

In addition to the reading material, the leader’s guide suggests learning activities that will help the participants process what they have read and make connections with their own context. Introductory videos for each session are available at [www.umc.org/CFOWonderLovePraise](http://www.umc.org/CFOWonderLovePraise). These videos are available to stream on YouTube or to download

onto a device. They are only in the English language and are intended only as a supplement to the study. The study is designed to function without the use of the videos if these are not available or helpful in your context.

Also, each session includes suggestions for those who wish to do more in-depth study on their own.

The purpose of the study is not only to help participants think deeply about the nature of the church but to also assist the Committee on Faith and Order in developing an interpretive document to be taken to the 2020 General Conference. If approved by the General Conference, the document would become an official statement of the United Methodist understanding of ecclesiology. This is the reason that every session includes a time of evaluation that will inform the final collection and submission of feedback at the end of the study. The feedback collected will be very valuable in helping the committee formulate this interpretive statement.

## How to Submit Feedback

At the end of each session, participants will be asked to answer two basic evaluative questions and note their answers in a simple journal or notebook. These notes should be used when responding to the feedback questions upon completion of the study. Directions for submitting feedback can be found at the end of this document, after the Session 4 material. If possible, we ask that feedback be reported through the online survey (English language only) available at [www.umc.org/CFOWonderLovePraise](http://www.umc.org/CFOWonderLovePraise). However, if this is not possible for you or your group, you may simply answer the response questions included at the end of the study and e-mail them to [cfo@umc-cob.org](mailto:cfo@umc-cob.org).

Individual members of the class may want to offer specific comments to the committee. Encourage these people to e-mail their comments directly to [cfo@umc-cob.org](mailto:cfo@umc-cob.org).