

2014

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION WEEK

Partners in Faith Formation and Discipleship

Small Group Leaders Form Vital Disciples

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:42-47

The Purpose of Christian Education

Through Christian education we invite people and communities of faith to be transformed as they are inspired and challenged to

- **Know and experience God through Jesus Christ,**
- **Claim and live God's promises, and**
- **Grow and serve as Christian disciples.**

***Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of
Christian Education in Your Congregation***

For the past several years the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church has been focusing on congregational vitality as instrumental in fulfilling the church's mission: "To make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (§120, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2012). In the "2012 UMC Vital Congregations Planning Guide," sixteen key ministry strategies are identified. The first strategy reads "Vital churches have more small groups for all ages" (p. 4).

This comes as no surprise to those of us who have been involved in

intentional faith development. Small groups meeting for prayer, study, service, support, accountability, and fellowship have been a part of Methodism since its inception. Before there was a United Methodist denomination, there was a system of small groups designed to help people live their faith as they deepened their relationship with God.

Christian Education Week is the perfect time to emphasize the importance of small groups in your congregation's plan for discipleship and to recognize the crucial role that small group leaders play. The theme for this year's CE Week is *Partners*

in Faith Formation and Discipleship: Small Group Leaders Form Vital Disciples. This annual celebration can be scheduled on a date of your choice. Check with your annual conference for any regional plans and to determine if the conference receives an offering for Christian education.

In this leaflet you will find a variety of resources to help you plan your Christian Education Week celebration. Use these resources to recognize and support small group leaders and confirm your congregation's commitment to intentional faith development and discipleship.

Partners in Faith Formation and Discipleship

SMALL GROUP LEADERS FORM VITAL DISCIPLES

Christian formation is a process of growth and maturation. This process initiates people into a new way of behavior shaped by the teachings of Jesus Christ. John Wesley and the early Methodists paid particular attention to teachings contained in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) and the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:29-31; Luke 10:25-28).

Wesley understood that the process of Christian formation is ongoing. He described it in terms of “going on to perfection.” For Wesley, as Christians mature (perfected in love), they become more like Jesus. This is possible because of God’s grace, which Wesley described as:

- prevenient (awakening us to our need for God),
- justifying (reconciling us to God and neighbor), and
- sanctifying (freeing us from the power of sin and enabling us to live as Jesus lived).

Wesley also understood that Christians needed encouragement and support to grow in God’s grace. He designed a system of small groups that immersed people in this lifelong process of Christian perfection and helped them to “watch over one another in love.”

The diagram on the following page represents the shape of Christian life. At the center of the cross is Love, which is the nature and name of God. The vertical beam of the cross represents the divine—human relationship. The works of piety (prayer, worship, the Lord’s Supper, Scripture, listening to the Word & fasting) are means of grace God gives to grow and mature in loving God. The horizontal beam represents the relationship between self and neighbor (those whom God loves). The works of mercy (feeding the hungry, welcoming strangers, caring for the sick, visiting prisoners, witnessing for Christ, etc.) are means of grace God gives to love our neighbor as ourselves and, in the process, live out our love for God in the world.

In the four corners of the page are guiding Scriptures that summarize the way of Jesus. Discipleship may be described as “faith working by love,” and the outcome is holiness of heart and life. These marks of holiness are what Paul called “fruit of the Spirit” and John Wesley called “holy tempers.” When Christians strive to live the way of Jesus, grace sets them free to become fully the persons God created them to be. Their character becomes a reflection of the character of Jesus Christ.

As you plan for Christian Education Week and the coming year, consider how your small groups help people mature in faith. Reflect on how you help people understand the Wesleyan concept of grace and invite them into the lifelong process of sanctification. Identify biblical stories and passages that exemplify mature faith for people in your congregation. Make note of ways you teach people to practice “works of piety” and “works of mercy.” What are the strengths of your small group ministry? What do you need to improve?

Use your reflections to communicate the importance of participating in a small group to people in your congregation. Identify ways to support small group leaders in leading groups that lead to maturing in faith. Celebrating Christian Education Sunday can be the start of a yearlong emphasis on starting new groups and involving new people in practicing means of grace, learning together, and growing in faith.

This article is adapted from “A Wesleyan Model of Small Group Ministry” by Steven W. Manskar. You can read an extended version at <http://bit.ly/1mFdIYF>.

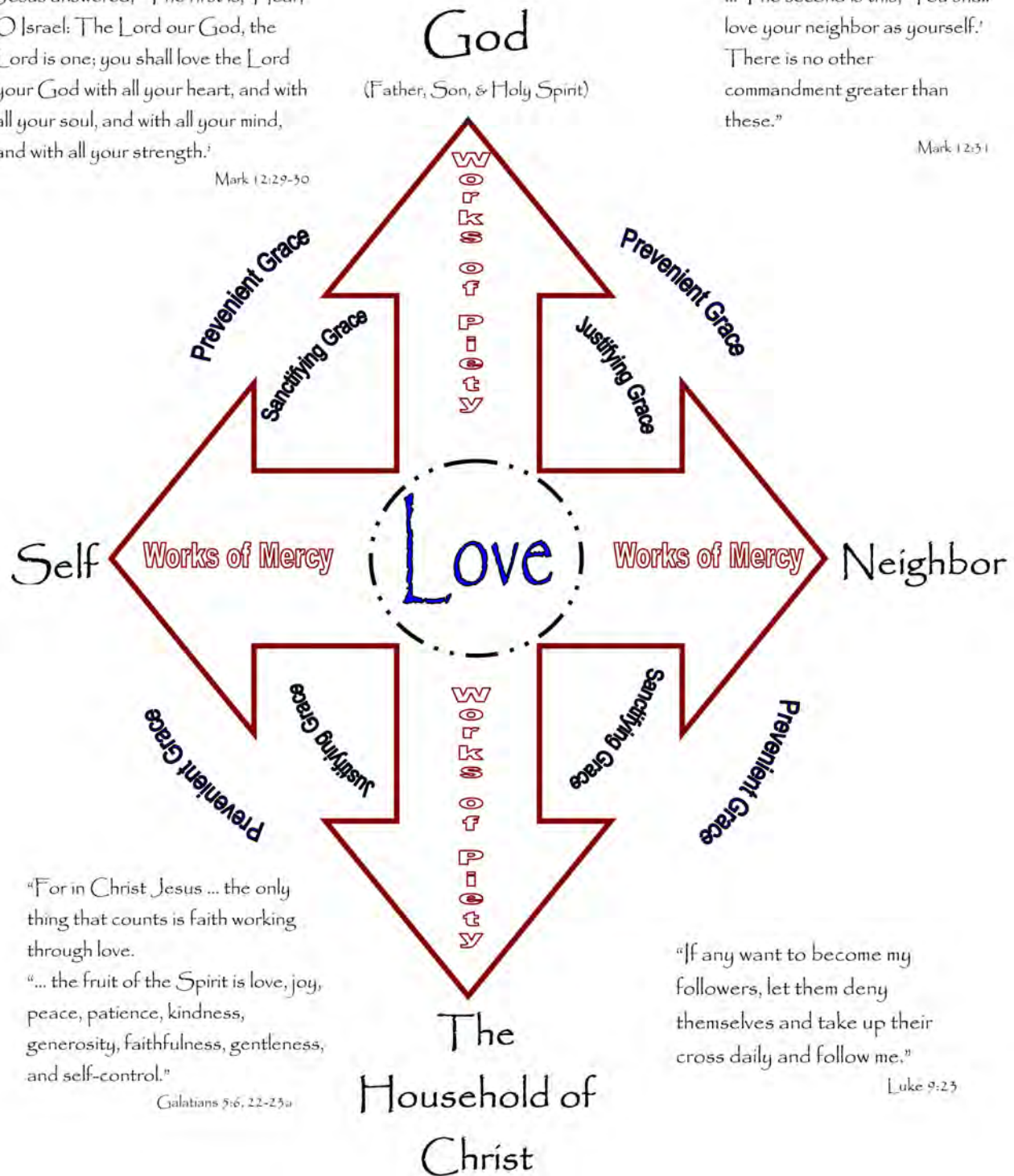
The Shape of Discipleship

Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

Mark 12:29-30

... The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Mark 12:31



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WORSHIP RESOURCES

Call to Worship

One: Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

All: For God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: Worship the LORD with gladness;
Come into his presence with singing.

All: For God's steadfast love endures forever!

One: Know that the LORD is God.
It is God who made us, and we are his;
we are God's people, and the sheep of God's pasture.

All: For God's steadfast love endures forever!

Scripture

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (God creates a new covenant within the hearts of all people.)

Psalms 95:1-7 (We are called to praise God for his great love and grace.)

Mark 12:28-31 (Jesus responds to a question about the greatest commandment.)

Colossians 1:9b-10; 2:6-7 (Paul encourages believers to lead lives worthy of God's calling and to bear fruit in all that they do.)

Offertory

O God, you give your love and grace to us in so many ways that we cannot begin to count them all! Today we pause to thank you for the many teachers and small group leaders who have shared your love with us over the years and for those who do so now. In response to your many blessings we offer you our resources, our gratitude, and our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hymns

What Gift Can We Bring	UMH #87
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty	UMH #139
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling	UMH #384
Bless His Holy Name	TFWS #2015
The Summons	TFWS #2130

Sending Forth

We have gathered in this place to worship God. We are renewed in spirit by the power of God's love and grace. Now we are returning to our homes, our schools, our workplaces. May we go joyfully, representing the love of God in the world. Go in peace.

UMH: *The United Methodist Hymnal*
TFWS: *The Faith We Sing*

LITANY OF DEDICATION FOR SMALL GROUPS AND THEIR LEADERS

Leader: Throughout Scripture we read of God's desire to be in relationship with all humanity and for all people to be in relationship with God and one another.

Congregation: **We hear God's call today to be in relationship with God and one another.**

Leader: Throughout our history as United Methodists we have learned that small groups provide amazing opportunities to experience God's love and grace and to learn to live as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Congregation: **We give thanks for the opportunities we have to learn, grow, and mature in faith. We thank you for the small group leaders who will guide us on the way. We pray that we may learn together to be Christ's representatives in the world.**

Small Group Leaders: *We give thanks for the small groups we will lead. We ask for God's wisdom and grace as we gather to learn and grow in faith.*

All: **God, we dedicate ourselves to a life of discipleship, to becoming more and more like Jesus. Help us turn our words and intentions into reality. Amen.**

WORKSHOP: SMALL GROUP LEADERS AS FACILITATORS

Time: About 90 minutes

Purpose

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

1. Describe how small group leaders serve as facilitators in their groups
2. Formulate questions based on the information they want to elicit from group participants
3. Lead theological reflection in their small groups

Preparation

- Publicize the workshop and its purpose.
- Pray for those who will attend.
- Gather materials:
 - Name tags
 - Markers
 - Refreshments (optional)
 - Newsprint
 - Several copies of curriculum resources
 - Several books used in study groups
 - Paper
 - Pens or pencils
- Write “Teacher” at the top of a sheet of newsprint. Write “Facilitator” at the top of a second sheet of newsprint. Post the newsprint in different areas of the meeting room. Place several markers near each of the newsprint sheets.
- Arrange chairs in a circle or around round tables for the total group interactions. Have an easel with newsprint or a whiteboard and markers ready to use with the total group.
- Set up two tables with chairs at each for small group activities. (If you have a large number of participants, determine how many tables you will need for each of the learning activities.)
- Make copies of all handouts, as well as instructions for each of the small group activities. (Handouts are available on pages 8-11.)
- Place the needed instructions, handouts, and supplies for the small group activities on the tables. (See the details of the workshop listed below.)

CONDUCTING THE WORKSHOP

Getting Started (About 15 minutes)

As leaders arrive, invite them to make a nametag. If you have provided refreshments, point them out to the arrivals. Ask them to go to each sheet of newsprint (Teacher & Facilitator) and write what comes to mind when they read each of the words. After completing this activity, they should find a seat in the circle of chairs.

Welcome everyone and ask them to briefly introduce themselves by telling their name and what small group they lead. If the group is very large, you may need to break into smaller groups in order to complete the introductions in a timely manner.

Read Mark 12: 28-31. Remind the group that this “Great Commandment” is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Your small groups are designed to help people love God and neighbor. This workshop is designed to help them as leaders develop skills in facilitating small group interaction and reflection. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their leadership, for the small groups they lead, and for your time together.

What is Facilitation? (About 10 minutes)

Ask a volunteer to read the list of ideas written on the newsprint titled “Teacher.” Then have someone read the ideas from the newsprint titled “Facilitator.” Ask the group what similarities they notice between the two lists. Makes

notes of their comments on a sheet of newsprint or a whiteboard. Then ask what differences they notice between the two lists. Again, make notes of their responses.

Depending on the ideas that have been generated, you might want to add the following to the conversation:

- Facilitators are leaders of group processes, rather than experts in content delivery.
- Facilitators create and maintain an environment that allows learning to take place.
- Small group members are partners in determining learning goals, resources, and learning activities. They take responsibility for their own learning.

Describe the two learning centers available for exploration:

1) Asking Good Questions and 2) Leading Theological Reflection. Tell the group that they have 45 minutes to explore the activities. (They can visit both learning centers or spend all their time in one. Their choice should reflect their own needs to grow as a small group leader.) Participants can take a break and enjoy refreshments as needed.

Learning Centers (About 45 minutes)

Asking Good Questions

Instructions: Read through the handouts “Purposes for Questions” and “Types of Questions.” Choose one of the curriculum resources, and select a session or book chapter. Practice writing several questions for a group that might be using that book or curriculum resource. What type of question will you ask? What is the purpose of the question?

Think about your current small group. What kind of questions do you use on a regular basis? What kind of questions can move your discussion to a deeper level? What kind of question do you want to incorporate into your role as group facilitator?

Leading Theological Reflection

Instructions: Review the handout “What is Theological Reflection?” Make notes of anything you would like to explore in more depth. Think about how you facilitate theological reflection in your small group.

Look at the handout “Critical Incident Report.” Spend time identifying a significant issue for you and using the form to prompt your thinking about the issue. Find a friend to talk with about the issue. Consider how you might use this exercise in a small group to facilitate theological reflection.

Mutual Invitation (About 10 minutes)

Ask the small groups to reassemble in the total group space. Explain that Mutual Invitation is a small group process that gives everyone an opportunity to speak, but does not force anyone to speak. A designated leader begins the discussion, and then after responding invites someone else from the group to respond. This can be anyone in the group, not necessarily the person sitting next to the leader. The invited person can either respond, or say “I pass,” or “I pass for now.” After responding or passing, the person then invites another member of the group to speak. The process continues until everyone has been individually invited to respond. If a person decides to “pass for now,” then they will be invited again later in the conversation.

Using the Mutual Invitation process, invite people to share what they learned, any insights they had, or questions that were raised by the small group activities.

Note: More about Mutual Invitation can be found in *The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, by Eric H.F. Law. Chalice Press, 1993.

Closing (About 10 minutes)

Read Mark 12:28-31. Invite participants to a time of prayer. Prompt spoken or silent prayers with the following phrases:

For those in need of healing or comfort . . .

For those who are celebrating . . .

For the participants in our small groups . . .

For our congregation . . .

For the Church universal . . .

For our world . . .

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Knowledge

- Recall information
- Describe

Comprehension

- Explain
- Summarize
- Give an example

Application

- Identify how information informs action
- Consider implications

Analysis

- Explore relationships within information
- Organize information

Evaluation

- Identify the pros and cons of information, action, etc.
- Reflect on information, action, etc. in terms of Scripture and Christian tradition

Creation

- Generate new ideas and perspectives
- Test new behaviors

PURPOSES FOR QUESTIONS

Fact-finding

- Verifiable data such as who, what, when, where, and how much
- Use: gather information about current topic, Scripture passage, etc.; build basic knowledge of the topic

Feeling-finding

- Subjective information reflecting group members' opinions, feelings, values, and beliefs
- Use: understand perspectives and recognize emotions related to topic of conversation

Preference

- Subjective information related to preference of participants; allows multiple “right” answers
- Use: gather information for decision-making within group

Clarification

- Checking accuracy in understanding what participants say
- Use: avoid incorrect conclusions and misunderstanding

Elaboration

- Probing what participants say
- Use: encourage more information/details; check for comprehension of information and application to current context

Reasoned Judgment

- Surfacing assumptions, values, and mental models that lead to opinions, beliefs, or actions
- Use: identify and evaluate criteria, values, concepts, and data

WHAT IS THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION?

Theological reflection is a process of thinking about God and matters of faith. It includes making connections between the Bible, Christian tradition, and our lives. Through theological reflection we determine the significance of information, experience, and situations that arise. We consider appropriate responses to the information, experience, or situation in light of our faith.

It is common for people to alter their beliefs about God and other aspects of faith as they have new experiences and learn new information. Theological reflection supports people in considering the adequacy of their previously held beliefs and the validity of new ideas.

Some Sources for Theological Reflection

- Bible
- Christian tradition
- Reason
- Experience
- Hymns and songs
- Conversation with friends
- Other religious traditions

Process of Theological Reflection

- Slow down thinking
- Make assumptions explicit
- Ask questions about validity
- Separate relevant from irrelevant information
- Distinguish between observable data and inferences
- Establish credibility of source(s)
- Identify inconsistencies
- Identify other points of view
- Test new ideas or responses
- Integrate new ideas into one's theology as appropriate

CRITICAL INCIDENT REPORT

Describe a critical issue in your life in the past two to four weeks. There are no predetermined criteria for what is critical. A “critical incident” is significant to you in some way: it was a high point for you (gratifying); it provided a valuable insight for you; it surprised you in some way; or it was a low point for you (disturbing).

Use the following ideas to reflect on this “critical incident.” It may be helpful to write your reflections. You do not have to follow this order or include everything.

1. Describe:

- The event or the issue triggered by the event. Include verbatim accounts of conversations and/or meetings, if helpful.
- The vested interests, emotions, and theological perspectives that form your view.
- The vested interests, emotions, theological perspectives of others.

2. What is the broader and deeper context of this incident? What are the values/priorities of the persons involved, the history, the political relationships, as well as other factors that may color this issue?

3. How do you understand this situation or issue? Theological or Biblical image or perspective, social scientific perspectives, and so forth? What hidden theological world-views may be at work?

4. Is it a high point or a low point?

- If it is a “low point,” state the problem as you see it and name some other ways you might have responded. What would you have done differently?
- If it is a “high point,” list new insights or growth you experienced.
- If it is a situation producing questions, list as many as you can.

5. What help do you want from your friends as you discuss this issue?

6. Begin to list alternative next steps for your action or leadership in this situation.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The resources listed here can be downloaded at www.gbod.org unless noted otherwise. Many of them are in the section for Christian education and formation at www.gbod.org/education. To quickly locate these resources, go to your favorite search engine and enter the title of the resource followed by GBOD.

Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education In Your Congregation

Grounded in “Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task” as stated in *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, this is a statement of the biblical and theological foundations of Christian education.

Intentional Faith Development: Establishing Standards for Christian Formation and Discipleship

To be used in conjunction with *Foundations*, this resource helps congregations as they develop standards as part of a comprehensive plan for faith formation.

Teacher Development: A Comprehensive Plan for United Methodist Congregations

Assists congregations in identifying what teachers need to know, do, and be. Provides help in developing a congregational plan for development.

iTeach

A free monthly e-mail newsletter for teachers and leaders that provides support for the developmental areas identified in *Teacher Development*.

What Every Teacher Needs to Know

Originally published as a series of booklets, these resources are now available as downloadable leaflets. Each leaflet provides basic knowledge to help teachers reach the “do no harm” level in the areas identified in *Teacher Development*. Leaflet titles include:

Teachers as Spiritual Leaders and Theologians

Understanding and Using the Bible

Teachers Know Their Place in the Faith Story

Classroom Environment

A Short Glossary of Faith and Church Language

Understanding The United Methodist Church

Teachers Live the Faith

A People of God

Who Am I as a Teacher?

Keeping in Touch: Christian Formation and Teaching, Revised Edition

This book identifies five critical processes for teachers and small group leaders. It can be ordered through Cokesbury or the Upper Room Bookstore.

GBOD Webinars

These one-hour webinars focus on a variety of topics related to Christian faith formation and discipleship. Each webinar is recorded and archived at www.gbod.org/webinars. The following webinars relate to this year’s Christian Education Week theme:

- Leading Group Discussion (Adult Ministry)
- Starting Small Groups (Educational Ministry)

Christian Education Week is authorized by the General Conference of The United Methodist Church, but its observance is set by each annual conference. Check with your annual conference office to determine if your annual conference has set a specific date.

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