

# WHO ARE WE?

A JOURNEY FROM  
HEAD TO HEART

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BY BISHOP LATRELLE MILLER EASTERLING &  
THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE

## WHY THIS STUDY NOW?

Our beloved denomination is in the midst of another pivotal moment in history. Globally, in our churches, we are considering the future of the denomination, what it means to be the Church, what it means to be United Methodists, and what it means to be spirit-filled Christ-followers making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in this present age. Some may question, “Will we remain united? Will we create a new form of unity? Will we dissolve? Will the Church continue to be able to give a faithful voice and witness to the will of God in the days ahead? What is the will of God?”

There are many conversations and questions that may arise in our uncertainty. We can see the ground shift as we engage in strategic sessions, pour over new plans, and predict the year to come. These are natural and necessary steps. And in the midst of all of our uncertainty, this we know for sure – God is. God is with us and God’s Spirit has the power to birth in us a common understanding of how we might live together, disciple together, love together, and serve God together.

This Bible Study was developed so that we might enter into a process of discernment and wonder together. It isn’t meant to cater to one outcome or cajole participants into a certain line of thinking. Rather, receive this study as an invitation into communal dialogue chiefly interested in our common roots and the common interests we share as United Methodists within the universal body of Christ today.

This study was designed to center us in our core identity. And so we ask: Who are we? Who are we as the people of God? Who are we as the people called United Methodists shaped by Wesleyan theology? Who are we as the members of the Baltimore-Washington Conference? Who are we becoming as we journey on toward perfection? It is our deepest hope that you will allow responses to emerge around the room and that you will receive these responses with great care. Furthermore, it is our hope that as we study and wrestle with Scripture alongside people we know, and hopefully with people we do not know so well, that we will pay close attention to and compassionately engage one another, quiet ourselves and await God’s voice in our discernment in order to make room for emerging responses that can guide us.

## PART 3

# WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE?

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Please let us know if your church is engaging in the study and with whom so that we might pray for your time together and provide additional materials and support as needed.

## A GUIDE

As you begin this study, we invite leaders and participants to explore and reflect on the following materials, which will enrich the group's experience.

## UNDERSTANDING AND INTERACTING WITH THE SACRED TEXT

The Word of God is our Word, meant to speak to us now and inform our lives and our discipleship. The Word of God is a breathing expression between Creator and creation, alive and at work with us. What would it mean for us, as United Methodists, if we presuppose that others love God as much as we do; that others have dedicated themselves to follow Christ as passionately and faithfully as we have; that others open themselves to the movement and truth of the Holy Spirit as we do? Might we presuppose that others hold Scripture as sacred and precious as we do? In these presuppositions, we free ourselves (as much as humanly possible) from the bondage of judgment, ridicule, superiority, dismissal and disdain. We open ourselves, not to the possibility of losing our faith, but to the possibility of seeing through a different lens and thereby understanding from another perspective. At the conclusion of this study, we hope that you can have a deeper appreciation of how others view God and a deeper understanding of your own views. In our view finder, we just might make out more fully who God is calling us to be as United Methodists and as the Baltimore-Washington Conference at this particular moment.

## WHAT TO EXPECT

You won't find an exhaustive and definitive study here. You will find a wholehearted attempt to capture frames of current critical conversations that we need to have as a people of faith. You are invited to bring your experience to this content as you share with others in your community. Do so knowing that there are fellow United Methodists throughout the Baltimore-Washington Conference engaging the same material, sharing their own experiences with one another, and listening attentively to what the Spirit would yet teach us. May God's grace be sufficient for the journey ahead. To God be the Glory! Expect to learn something new in your brave space as you journey through the study using the Who Are We Affirmation. Intentionally set aside time to meditate on the Scriptures, pray, be in conversation with one another and grow in fellowship with one another. You will also have an opportunity to interact with 8-12 minutes of video content from several conversation partners across our connection.

## GROUP STUDY SUGGESTIONS

As you approach this study, please keep in mind that there is no one "right way" to engage together. As your group develops a shared culture, remember that you are taking up a collective lens. Each person's contribution brings new opportunities for shared creativity and wisdom. We have included some tools for creating safe and bold spaces. As a first activity, begin your study with the Who Are We Affirmation and make modifications as necessary. We have also included guidelines for RESPECTful Communication and Mutual Invitation (Appendix A) to help maintain a space where each voice is honored. Appendices B, C, and D provide useful tips for incorporating the study and making it come to life in your group. Stay curious. Even if your fellow group members are deeply known to you, prepare to be surprised by how God's grace will show up in and through each participant. Celebrate that groups across our Conference are affirming the Spirit's presence with us in this season through shared study. Your holy conversations as a group are a part of a larger sacred dialogue. Each time you gather, you contribute to the widening perspective of our faith and the wideness of God's mercy alive among us.



## WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

In the gift of this moment, **we affirm** that we are divinely loved and lovable.

We are the **children of God**.

**Together**, we will **learn** from the actions and words of one another.

**Christ's** lessons on love are **centered** in how we treat others and in how we treat ourselves.

We will exercise **courage** in this study as we share stories of **struggle** and **strength**.

We will **stay at the table** and receive those stories with **grace**.

We will not be afraid to **launch into the deep**.

We will **commit** to the vulnerability necessary **to allow God** to break us open.

We will set and **respect** boundaries and **honor** confidentiality together.

When uncertainty arises, we will remember the **Spirit of "peace** that passes our own understanding" and can intercede for us.

We will **remember** that even when we don't feel "United," the **uniting love of Christ** can reveal a pathway to greater **wisdom** and mutual respect.

No matter what, **there is a place for each one** of us in this study together.

Let us **hold each other up** in prayer, hold each other **accountable** in love, and **trust** that our God is making **all things new**.

Thank you for the gift of **being present** to one another in this holy time.



## PART 3

# WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE?

[VIDEO: What is special about the BWC to you?](#)

Part 3 of this three-part study, Who Are We: A Journey from Head to Heart, explores our identity as people called United Methodists within the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Our ancestors, who lived out their faith in Maryland, Washington, D.C., and the panhandle of West Virginia, created this vibrant expression of church and made disciples of Jesus Christ close at home and throughout the world. As one of 54 annual conferences in the United States, we have the honor of being the cradle of Methodism in America and pointing, in connection, to a future of hope.

Just as in any family, there are members and stories that make us proud and those that make us question ourselves. In Parts 1 and 2 of the study, we were reacquainted with our identity as the people of God and as the people shaped by the Wesleyan Spirit. We bring these understandings to this final part of the study. You will be learning directly from a descendant of one of the earliest Methodist movement-makers, from those whose family roots go deep in their local churches, from people who have laid their lives on the line for justice and faith, and from those who are just discovering the possibilities and joy of being a part of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

Together, let us learn from our past as we carry forth the best of our heritage. Let us also work together to transform that which doesn't reflect God's reign. The vision of the Baltimore-Washington Conference is "Transformed Lives Transform Lives." May it be so.

In the pdf version of this guide all links are embedded (if you can click on them, you will be taken to the resource). For those using a printed copy, a list of tiny URLs is available in the index.

## A NOTE TO FACILITATORS

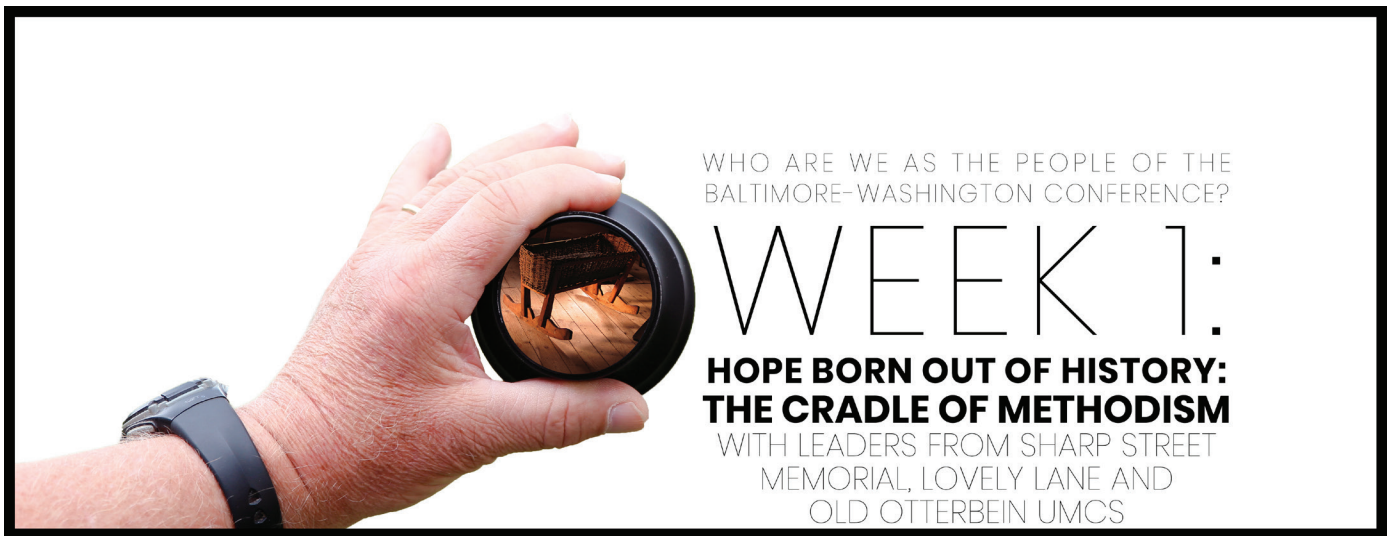
Thank you for your good work in helping people explore these topics deeply. We appreciate the time you spend preparing yourself to lead this well and are happy to hear from you about how we can improve the facilitator guide to better support your leadership. If too much of the journey is changed, we are not taking the journey together. [Ephesians 4:1-6]

We have taken much care about the content for this curriculum – from pre-reading to clips used to Additional Resources. We ask that if you decide to add exercises, clips, questions or comments that you do so in a way that doesn't take away from: a) creating safe and bold spaces that respectfully holds a diversity of opinion and; b) spending at least 30 minutes of discussion on the given questions. Additionally, should you decide to add your own touch to this, please let participants know that your additions aren't a part of the formal curriculum.

You may choose to project the web page, Participant Guide and/or curriculum's PowerPoint slides to guide your group. Specific facilitator notes may be found in blue boxes each week in this guide. We expect facilitators to do the pre-session assignments, which are especially important in this part of the curriculum.

Each week follows a similar flow and time allocation:

- I. **Greeting and Welcome** (1-2 minutes) This may take more time if you have new people join your group.
- II. **Opening Prayer** (2 minutes) These prayers are written in participant materials in support of the theme each week.
- III. **Who Are We Affirmation** (2-3 minutes) This is consistent throughout the study. You may choose to print.
- IV. **Scripture(s)** (Common English Bible-CEB) (5 minutes--depends on the week)
- V. **Engagement and Transition** (no more than 10 minutes)
  - A. Orientation to the topic through adding to the altar/board/string (see Appendix D for art);
  - B. Watch given clip or read given poem/sing a song;
  - C. Ask a warm-up question; and
  - D. Turn attention to teaching video.
- VI. **Video** (8-12 minutes) Actual timing is given each week.
- VII. **Head and Heart Discussion** (at least 30 minutes)
- VIII. **Reminders** (1 minute) Encourage journaling, exploration of additional resources and pre-reading for next time.
- IX. **Closing Prayer** (2-3 minutes) See Appendix C for ideas to make this extemporaneous prayer purposeful.



WHO ARE WE AS THE PEOPLE OF THE  
BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON CONFERENCE?

# WEEK 1:

## HOPE BORN OUT OF HISTORY: THE CRADLE OF METHODISM

WITH LEADERS FROM SHARP STREET  
MEMORIAL, LOVELY LANE AND  
OLD OTTERBEIN UMCS

In 1784, Methodists gathered in Baltimore at the Christmas Conference to create what would grow into one of the most diverse expressions of faith in modern Christendom. Its early circuit riders created a movement of scriptural and social holiness that transformed a continent. How do our spiritual roots shape us today? What should we embrace and what should be relegated to history? How does the phrase “what’s past is prologue” apply to the Church today?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [“The Christmas Conference: 10 Days That Started a Church,”](#) an article from United Methodist Insight looks at the formation of a new denomination that would change history.

**Scripture:** [Luke 3:15-17](#)

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

God of our ancestors, God with us now: we pause to acknowledge Your abiding presence.

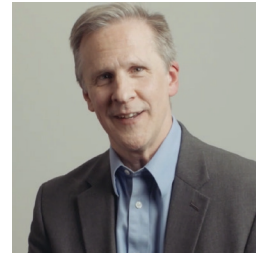
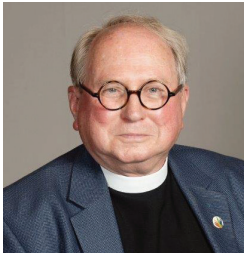
From generation to generation, You are God and You have included us in Your story of redemption, unconditional love, justice, reconciliation and peace. Thank You.

You have given us the gift of Your divine breath. May we use it for Your glory.

By the power of Your Holy Spirit, embolden us in this time of study, prayer, and reflection to be doers of Your Word and not hearers only. Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In the Name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

## WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

### SCRIPTURE [Luke 3:15-17](#)



### VIDEO (11 Minutes)

with Rev. Dr. Emora Brannan, Pamela Coleman, Daniel Fisher, Rev. Dr. C. Anthony Hunt, and John Strawbridge.

The Rev. Dr. Emora Brannan is a retired Elder who serves as the Baltimore-Washington Conference historian. Pamela Coleman is a member of Sharp Street Memorial UMC in Baltimore. Daniel Fisher is a member of Old Otterbein UMC in Baltimore, and The Rev. Dr. C. Anthony Hunt is pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore. John Strawbridge is a member of Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore, and a direct descendant of Robert Strawbridge.

### HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. You've heard John Strawbridge in his opening say that when people visit Lovely Lane, he says, "welcome home." How is the Baltimore-Washington Conference home to you?

2. As we seek to live "earnestly" as Methodists today, what similarities might we hold with our early forbearers, like those at Lovely Lane, Old Otterbein, and Sharp Street churches, and what is distinct about our twenty-first century earnestness and practices?

3. As you heard the story of our origins as the BWC, it included places to celebrate and places to lament. Where are those places for you today?

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**I think sometimes we forget that the word 'United' in 'United Methodist' comes from The United Brethren in Christ denomination. Old Otterbein UMC is the mother church of that denomination."**

### CLOSING PRAYER

*Daniel Fisher*



## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

Often, when we become reflexively resistant to what we've experienced through study, it is pointing towards an area worthy of more reflection and prayer. In this part of study, we invite you to examine your areas of resistance or struggle. Allow God to reveal how transformation can occur in those areas.

Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your journey from head to heart:

What surprised you or caught your attention?

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How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment, which applies what you learned, and then go forth and live it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Philip William Otterbein & Martin Boehm



Original drawing of Lovely Lane Chapel



German Bible at Old Otterbein UMC in Baltimore



Sharp Street Church in 1802

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

(including Wesley's sermons and other writings, articles, books, etc.)

- **Timeline:** "[United Methodist Church Timeline](#)," a side-by-side chronology of United Methodist and American history
- **Book:** *Those Incredible Methodists: A History of the Baltimore Conference of the United Methodist Church*, editor, Gordon Pratt Baker; the Baltimore-Washington Conference's 1972 definitive history by the Commission on Archives and History.
- **Interactive Experience:** Visit [Lovely Lane UMC](#) and [museum, Old Otterbein](#), and/or [Sharp Street Memorial](#) UMCs, all in Baltimore. Lovely Lane UMC is at 2200 St Paul St, Baltimore, MD 21218; Old Otterbein is at 112 W Conway St, Baltimore, MD 21201; and Sharp Street Memorial UMC is at 1206 Etting St, Baltimore, MD 21217. Please call the phone numbers in the above links before visiting.



Robert Strawbridge was a man who practiced the power of the Spirit in action. Bishop Francis Asbury was a person who gave all for his faith. Their conflict over the rules of the Book of Discipline and how we live out our doctrine define us still. What do our denomination's historic conflicts over law and grace have to teach us today?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [“Francis Asbury and Robert Strawbridge Reexamining their influence on, and relationship to, one another,”](#) Rev. Dr. Emora Brannan explores the complex relationship between this “impetuous, free-wheeling Irishman,” and the “staid, rule-abiding Englishman.”

**Scripture:** [Galatians 2:6-10](#)

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Hope of the World and Divine Creator: we gather in Your Name.

Thank You for all that You are and all that You've called us to be.

In our hearts, we answer Your call to be... [moment of silence].

Regardless of all that unites and/or divides us, You've called us together for such a time as this.

Heal us. Unite us. Speak to us. Guide us as we endeavor to be more like You.

Root us in Your power and let Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In the Name of Jesus, we ask it all. Amen.



# WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

SCRIPTURE [Galatians 2:6-10](#)

**VIDEO** (11 Minutes) with John Strawbridge

John Strawbridge, a direct descendant of Robert Strawbridge, is a member of Lovely Lane UMC in Baltimore, and chair of the Conference Board of Trustees.



## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. John Strawbridge said, “We need to leave our comfort and go where the conflict is. We need to show a divided world that we are not as different as we fear, because we all have the same spark of the Holy Breath in us.” Share with us a time when your congregation modeled this idea.
2. What can our denomination’s historic conflicts over law and grace teach us today?
3. We tend to romanticize the past, and yet, as we are being reminded, our past has not always been perfect. How does our image of a “perfect church” prevent us from doing what is necessary today? As we think of the “perfect church,” perfect for whom?

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**“ We remember these founders not because they were first, but because they were so successful. They taught us that we need to stop complaining about our situation and see the current state of the church as a great opportunity for growth.”**

*John Strawbridge*

## CLOSING PRAYER

## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

In your journal this week, we invite you to answer the traditional questions below. We also invite you to dig more deeply into discipleship.

What surprised you or caught your attention?

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How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment, which applies what you learned, and then go forth and live it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Colony of Maryland map, circa 1685



Statue of Francis Asbury located in Washington, D.C.



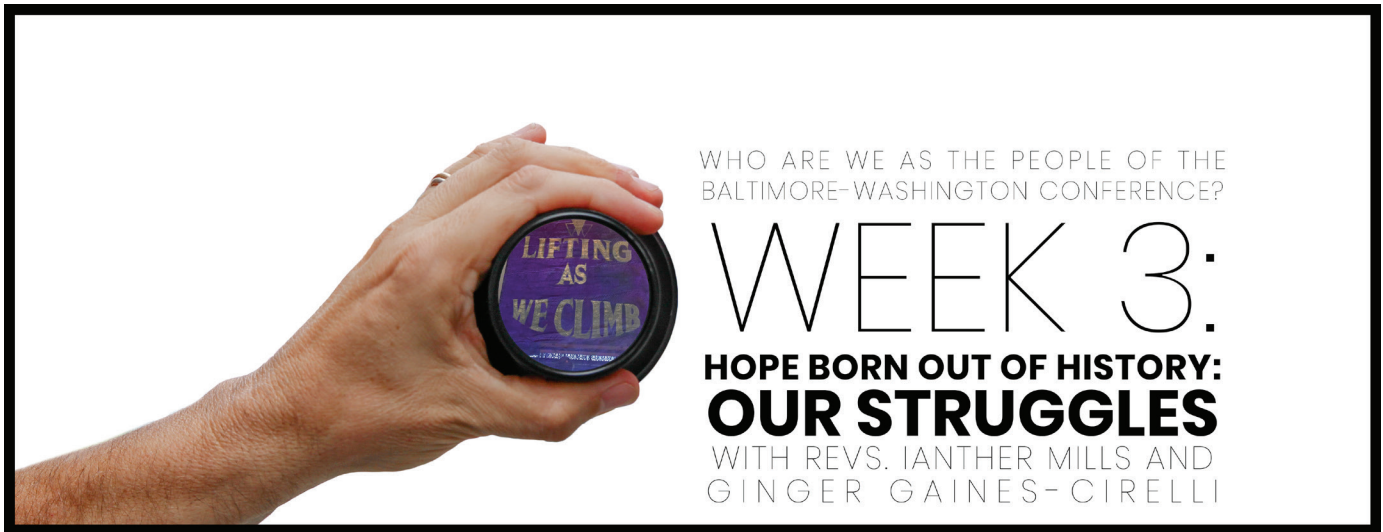
Drawing of the 1784 Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore, featuring the ordination of Francis Asbury



Meeting House at Strawbridge Shrine

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **Timeline:** "[Robert Strawbridge and Francis Asbury](#)," explores some of the ministry highlights of these two Methodist icons.
- **Book:** [The Strawbridge Shrine: Its Role in Methodist History and a Tour of the Site](#) by M. Elizabeth Sansbury, a guidebook to the ministry and legacy of Robert Strawbridge.
- **Interactive Experiences:**
  - Visit the [Strawbridge Shrine](#). The Strawbridge Shrine is located at 2650 Strawbridge Lane in New Windsor, Maryland, 21776. To arrange a tour, call ahead to 410-635-2600, or email [Tours@StrawbridgeShrine.org](mailto:Tours@StrawbridgeShrine.org).
  - "[The Faith Journey of Robert & Elizabeth Strawbridge: A Study Guide](#)," a discussion resource for small groups.
  - "[Reclaiming Evangelism](#)," Six webinars, each exploring a different facet of evangelism from Discipleship Ministries.



Diversity is one of the distinguishing features of the Baltimore-Washington Conference. Geographic, ethnic, cultural, theological, and economic diversity shape its identity in countless ways. United Methodists are “all-in” when it comes to matters of their faith, but they are also known as a people of the big tent, inviting differences of opinion while being united in Christ. Using the example of the role of women in the church, explore the distance between who we say we are and how we behave.

Some of the groups that later became part of The United Methodist Church started ordaining women in the late 19th century, but the largest group, the Methodist Church, did not grant women full clergy rights until 1956. Yet even today, some churches don’t want a female pastor or don’t treat women clergy with the same respect or rights as their male counterparts. How do we stay connected and how do we work in shared mission when we hold conflicting views on important issues? How do we both name the work to be done while championing justice and taking responsibility for the work of forgiveness and reconciliation?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [Women in Ministry](#), an eye-opening video in which male pastors read real comments made to female pastors in the North Carolina Annual Conference.

**Scripture:** [Galatians 3:23-29](#)

**It has been difficult at times to navigate the waters of racism and sexism. There’s always the question of which you are dealing with and it is often difficult to distinguish. Early in my ministry, some racism and sexism were cloaked in my being ‘too young to pastor a church.’”**

*Ianther Mills*

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Gracious and Merciful God who moves among us: Thank You for the gift of Your presence.

Thank You for allowing Your Spirit to rest in, speak through, and transform human vessels.

Thank You for the gifts of Baptism in Christ and for reminding us that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus. Nothing we can do can preclude the work of Your Spirit. Thank You. Lead us in this time of holy conferencing and allow us to wholly experience the fullness of Your liberating love.

In the Name of Jesus, we ask it all. Amen.

### WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

SCRIPTURE [Galatians 3:23-29](#)

**VIDEO** (11 Minutes)

with Revs. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli  
and Ianther Mills



The Rev. Ginger Gaines-Cirelli is senior pastor of Foundry UMC in Washington, D.C., and the Rev. Ianther Mills is senior pastor of Asbury UMC, also in Washington.

### HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. What word or concept emerged for you as we read Galatians 3:23-29? How is the Spirit nudging you to better live into this?

2. How do we stay connected and work in shared mission when we hold conflicting views on who can hold the power in leadership?

3. If you are really honest with yourself, who would you not accept as a pastor or other leader? Are these people present in your context?

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### CLOSING PRAYER



## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

Often, when we become reflexively resistant to what we've experienced through study, it is pointing towards an area worthy of more reflection and prayer. In this part of study, we invite you to examine your areas of resistance or struggle. Allow God to reveal how transformation can occur in those areas.

Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your introspection:

What surprised you or caught your attention?

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How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment, which applies what you learned, and then go forth and live it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Susanna Wesley, mother of Methodism's founder, John Wesley



Clergy Women's Choir, 2014 Women's Assembly



Kathryn B. Moore, left, with Kay Barger, the first two women ordained in the Baltimore-Washington Conference



Annie Sweitzer, a slave and member of Methodism's first class meeting at John Evans' house



Hi Rho Park of the General Commission on Higher Education and Ministry

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Timeline:** "[Timeline of Women in Methodism](#)," learn about interesting women who helped shape the history of the church.
- **Books:**
  - [Women Bishops of The United Methodist Church: Extraordinary Gifts of the Spirit](#), by Bishop Sharon Zimmerman Rader and Margaret Cain (2019), interviews that highlight the stories of trail-blazing bishops in the first denomination to ordain women.
  - [Courageous Spirit: Voices from Women in Ministry](#), by Pamela C. Hawkins, Susan W. N. Ruach, and Marion Jackson (2006), celebrating the 50th anniversary of full clergy rights for women, this book explores clergywomen as breakers of the glass ceiling.
- **Interactive Experience:**
  - [Implicit Bias: What We Don't Think We Think](#), an online course from the General Commission on Religion and Race that helps you understand what you might not know about race.
  - [General Commission on the Status and Role of Women Curriculum](#), a series of trainings on a variety of issues facing women in the denomination.
  - [#HerTruth](#) includes a video and discussion guide produced by North Alabama Conference COSROW.
  - [The Church and People with Disabilities](#) Mission u Curriculum: The intent of these mission studies is to promote awareness, inclusion, accessibility and advocacy for people with disabilities – including youth and children.
  - [Board of Church and Society](#) Resources focused on civil and human rights, women and children, economic justice, environmental justice, health and wholeness, and peace with justice.





Too often we allow ourselves to be lulled into thinking that we are living in a post-racial world, where racism doesn't shape our culture and our lives. Too often, we ignore the evils of racism, preferring instead to dwell in partial truths and spiritual platitudes. This tendency causes us to tame the calls to action from prophets like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. How is the church today being called to deep transformation? How do we combat the remnants of the sin of segregation? In the BWC, we can learn from many examples.

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** [“What Have We Wrought: The Legacy of the Washington Conference”](#) by Rev. Dr. C. Anthony Hunt, is an exploration of how the effects of the church's segregation in the past persist in United Methodism today.

**Scripture:** [Psalm 133:1-3](#)

## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Triune God: You are with us.

Creator of community and the unity of creation, You have claimed us as Your very own.

You've made us One people. We are One Nation, indivisible under the power of Your existence.

You have created humanity in Your image. Nothing in our limited vision can distort that truth.

You are the Way the Truth and the Life.

You are the Truth that perfects our limited knowledge.

You are the Life that gives us purpose and animation.

You are the Reason that we live, move and have our being.

Thank You for all that You are and for all that You call us to be this day.

As we dwell together in unity, speak Lord, and bestow Your blessings upon us.

In the Name of Jesus, we ask it all. Amen.

# WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

SCRIPTURE [Psalm 133:1-3](#)

**VIDEO** (10 Minutes)  
with Dr. C. Anthony Hunt

The Rev. Dr. C. Anthony Hunt is pastor of Epworth Chapel UMC in Baltimore.



**A part of our biblical and theological imperative has been and continues to be to ask the important question, 'Should the church be divided by race, age, gender and socio-economic status?' Most people would clearly say 'no.'**

*C. Anthony Hunt*

## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. How do we acknowledge and affirm the full humanity of all people?

2. In what ways, as individuals and churches, might we commit to telling and embracing our stories?

3. What does God expect of us when it comes to overcoming racism and other forms of segregation? What are we prepared to do to work toward it?

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## CLOSING PRAYER

## BEYOND THE SESSION

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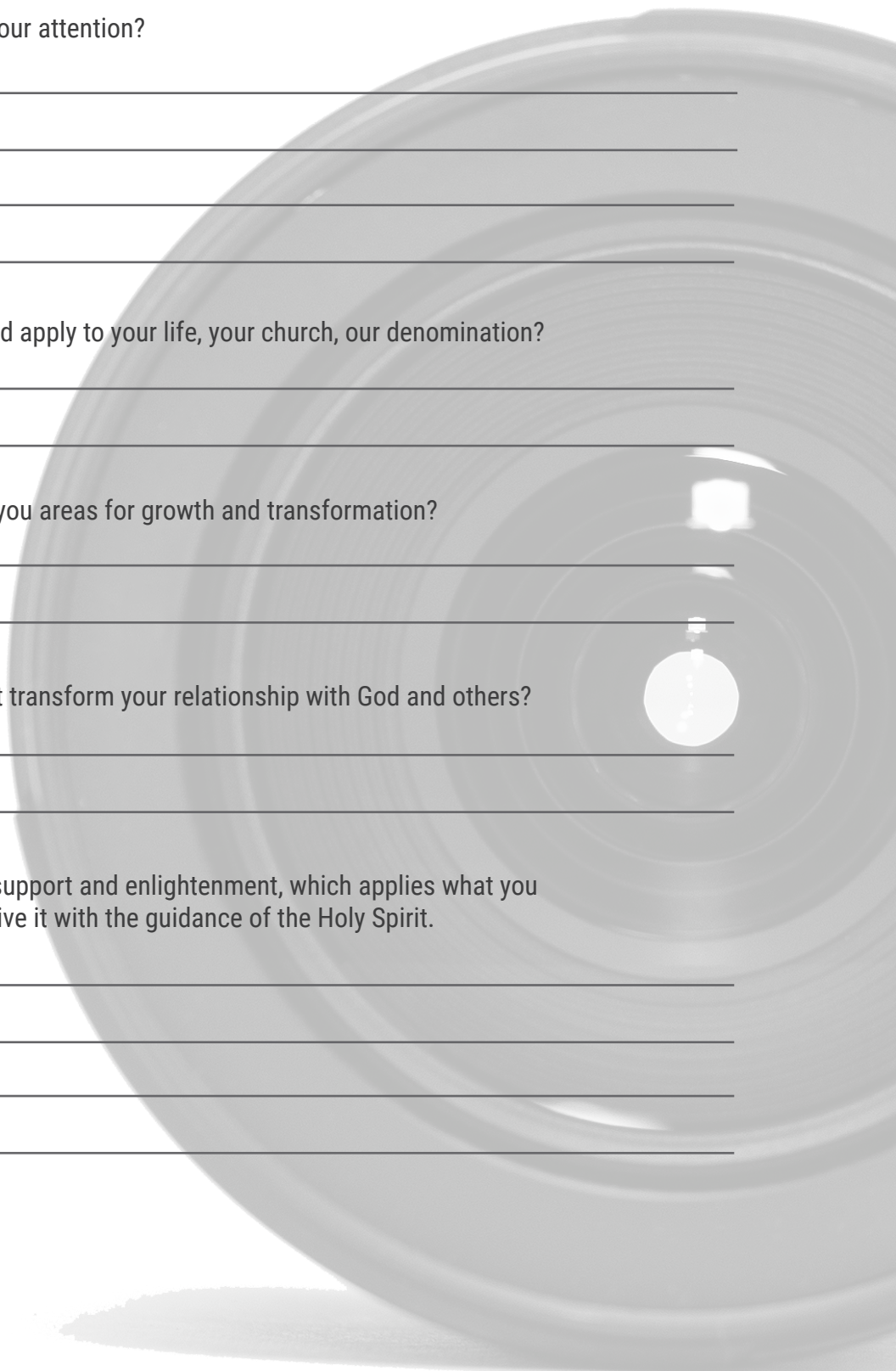
Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment, which applies what you learned, and then go forth and live it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Revs. Richard Allen & Absalom Jones



Harry Hosier, a preacher and traveling companion of Bishop Francis Asbury, circled above, attended the Christmas Conference



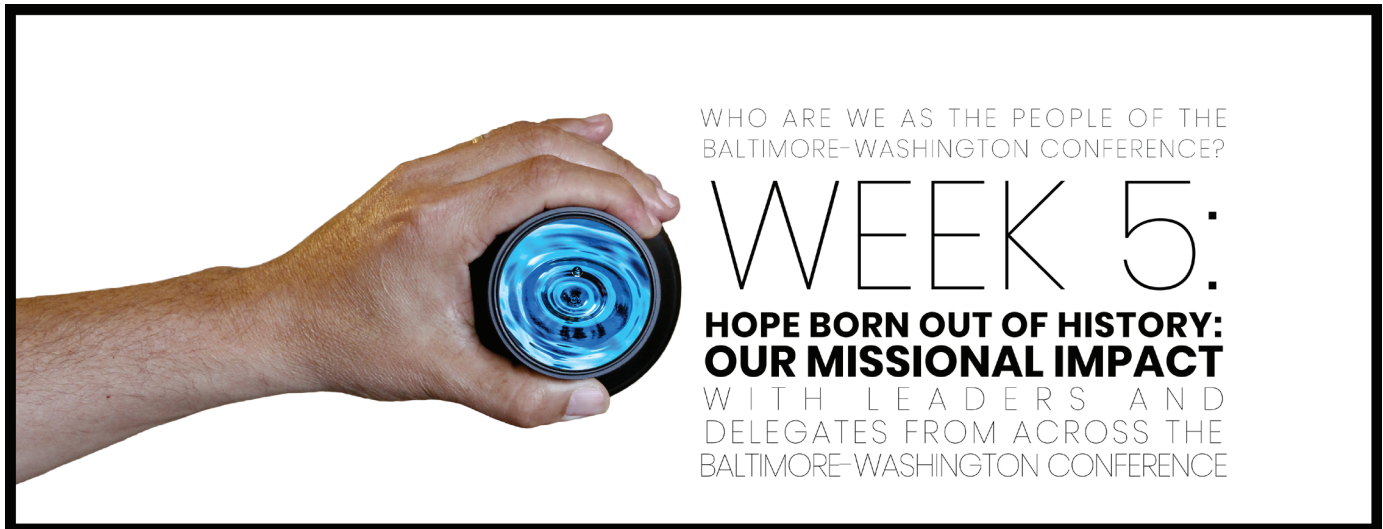
At the 1939 Conference, the racially segregated Central Conferences were created



John Street Church in New York, one of the first black congregations

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Timeline:** "Lessons of the Black Church in History: A listing of key dates," by Bishop Forrest Stith; a listing of highlights of African-American history and accomplishments within The Methodist Church.
- **Book:** [This Far by Faith: Stories from the African American Religious Experience](#), by Juan Williams, the companion piece to the PBS series, which examines how faith inspired the Civil Rights movement.
- **Interactive:**
  - The Northeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church issued a "Call to Action for Racial Justice" in 2016. [Find curriculum and resources here.](#)
  - Have a viewing party and conversation about one of the two documentaries listed below. [Finding Fellowship: The Quince Orchard Project](#). This hour-long documentary is a story of one community's story of overcoming division with intentionality and includes some of the story of three churches (one black and two white) that became Fairhaven UMC. Or, [We've Come This Far by Faith](#), a 30-minute history of the Delaware and Washington Conferences and Black Methodism in this region.



Even in its darker moments, United Methodists shine as a light to the nations. We are missional. We embrace the vision that “Transformed Lives Transform Lives,” and live out our call to make disciples for the transformation of the world with ministries like Volunteers In Mission (VIM), the United Methodist Women (UMW) and United Methodist Men (UMM), the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), Imagine No Malaria, and others. Over the decades, the people of the BWC have built hospitals, universities, retirement communities, orphanages, camps and so much more. How does our mission define us? How do we honor God in our actions as a Church?

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

**Article:** ["2018 BWC Annual Report"](#), discover some of the missional priorities and Spirit-driven work of the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.

**Scripture:** [Matthew 28:19-20](#)

**All these institutions,  
which became pillars in  
their communities, were  
constructed to illustrate how God  
is at work in the world and were  
labors of love."**

*Ken Ow*



## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

Omnipotent God: Unlimited is Your power and magnificent is Your name.

In the person of Jesus, You've shown us how to love and respect. Grant us the humility to love one another with dignity and equity as extensions of ourselves.

Omniscient God: You know everything and have infinite awareness, knowledge, and insight into all that concerns us.

Teach how to love as You love.

Omnipresent God: You are in all places and there is no place devoid of Your healing presence.

Teach us how to show up in the world in ways that reflect Your glory and work for liberty and justice for all.

Redeemer God: You've defeated the power of sin and death and You've called us to be One.

Unite us and bless us, now and forever.

Merciful God: You are better to us than we deserve and love us deeper than the human mind can imagine.

May we forgive one another as You have forgiven us.

Enliven us to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sustainer, and teaching them to follow everything Jesus commanded.

You are with us not for a moment but for a lifetime. Therefore, we go to make and be Your disciples.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

### WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

### SCRIPTURE [Matthew 28:19-20](#)

### [VIDEO](#) (13 Minutes) with Leaders from Across the Conference

Several BWC leaders lent their voice to this video. They include: Sharon Milton\* of Emory Fellowship in Washington, D.C. and Greater Washington district youth coordinator; Megan Blizzard\* of Westminster UMC in Westminster and chair of the Young Adult Ministry Team; Ken Ow\* of North Bethesda UMC in Bethesda and a member of the General Commission on Finance and Administration; Rev. Sung Hwan (Steven) Cho of Ward's Chapel in Randallstown and the Grow Asian Ministries Team; Nathaniel Wright of Christ Church of the Deaf in Baltimore; Lutebula "Danny" Pembamoto\* of Hiss UMC in Baltimore; Nathan Jones\* of Epworth UMC in Cockeysville and a Youth Member at Large; and Rev. Yolando Pupo-Ortiz, a retired Elder who serves as pastor emeritus at Epworth UMC in Gaithersburg.

*The \* denotes that these people are also a part of the BWC delegation to the 2020 General or Jurisdictional Conference.*

## HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. At the beginning of the video, Sharon Milton states that “God reveals Godself as love, and this love is on a mission to transform the world. *Missio Dei*, ‘God’s mission’ or the ‘sending of God.’” Describe what *Missio Dei* looks like in your context.

2. If your church closed tomorrow, would your community notice? If not, how can you reclaim your missional impact?

3. What does it say of our witness when we withhold our time, talent or treasure? And, how does that withholding influence our lives together?

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## CLOSING PRAYER

“The Methodist commitment to live out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission is a part of our inheritance. Specifically, in the region known as the Baltimore–Washington Conference, Methodists were known as builders of faith and disrupters of the status quo.”

*Megan Blizzard*

## BEYOND THE SESSION

### PRAYER AND PATHWAY TO JOURNALING

Often, when we become reflexively resistant to what we've experienced through study, it is pointing towards an area worthy of more reflection and prayer. In this part of study, we invite you to examine your areas of resistance or struggle. Allow God to reveal how transformation can occur in those areas.

Use these open-ended questions to facilitate your introspection:

What surprised you or caught your attention?

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How does the discussion we had apply to your life, your church, our denomination?

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Where is the Spirit revealing to you areas for growth and transformation?

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How does what we talked about transform your relationship with God and others?

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Write a prayer to ask for God's support and enlightenment, which applies what you learned, and then go forth and live it with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

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Children cement the union of the Methodist Episcopal and Evangelical United Brethren churches in 1968



Methodists created Sunday Schools to help children learn about faith, basic reading, writing, and arithmetic



Henry Appenzeller, funded by the BWC's Rev. John Goucher, takes Methodism to Korea



Methodist missionaries took the Gospel to Africa

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- **Timeline:** The people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference were, and are today, builders of the faith. [View a timeline](#) of some ways we impacted our communities and the world.
- **Book:** *Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation* by David Martin Whitworth; this text examines how, through the means of grace, disciples can love and transform the world.
- **Interactive:** Visit the [United Methodist Building](#), located at 100 Maryland Ave., NE, in Washington, D.C. This building serves as home to the denomination's [General Board of Church and Society](#) and [General Commission on Religion and Race](#).





Who Are We? Over the course of this study, we have explored this question through a variety of lenses, seeking biblical wisdom, delving into lessons from our shared history, and envisioning the people God calls us to be. As the study draws to a close, we invite you to commit to an on-going journey from head to heart as you reflect back and look forward. As individuals and churches, as we live as children of God, called to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, and certain in the belief that transformed lives, transform lives.

## PRE-SESSION ASSIGNMENTS

Read through your *Who Are We* Journaling Responses

Scripture: [Psalm 139:1-14, 23-24](#)

**Who Are We? We are the faith of our ancestors. We are biblical wisdom. We are the lessons of history and the hope of our hymns. We are dreamers, we build ladders to heaven and craft God's kingdom in our communities. We are connected soul-to-soul, church-to-church, one-to-another. We are the stories we tell ourselves and the world. We are the people of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church. We are one and we are transformed by the lives we transform."**

*Bishop Easterling*



## SMALL GROUP SESSION AGENDA

### OPENING PRAYER

*(See Appendix C for ideas.)*

God, you are here. Unlimited in presence and power, you exist and do exceedingly and abundantly above all we can ask or imagine. Thank You. Great Storyteller, who knows who we are and fills us with Your breath, we are shaped by Your words. Skillfully, meticulously, and lovingly, You've formed us as your Image bearers. From generation to generation, you are God and Your mercies are new every morning. Remind us of those intersections where your story transforms our story.

You've delivered us from ....[provide a time of silence for people to pause and whisper their personal responses]

You've delivered us for your purpose and not our own.

You've delivered us to something that only time can tell.

Lead us in this session and enable us to be present with and for one another,

For your glory to be made known, and

For your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

### WHO ARE WE AFFIRMATION

SCRIPTURE [Psalm 139:1-14, 23-24](#)

**VIDEO** (15 Minutes) with Bishop LaTrelle Easterling

Episcopal leader of the Baltimore-Washington Conference.



### HEAD & HEART DISCUSSION (30 minutes)

1. What connections do you draw between the study, your own life and your ministry?

2. What concepts do you find most challenging? Where are you experiencing cognitive dissonance?

3. What key concepts or ideas from the study do you think are important to our work within the Baltimore-Washington Conference?

4. What changes in attitudes, thinking or action will you take as a result of this study?

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## CLOSING ASSIGNMENT

As Bishop Easterling said in the video we saw today, let us not stop allowing these lessons to transform us. Instead of journaling, we invite you to complete this <https://forms.gle/6ci9YLhcFhsP284P9>. May you take what we've gained in this study and continue to apply it as we study scripture, build relationships with one another and those on the margins and do our skilled servant work as the Body of Christ.

## CLOSING PRAYER

As your image bearers, we go into the world to be salt and light.  
We go to love like you, to live like you, and to be merciful like you.

We go as

Your covenant community

Your witnesses

Your people

Your children who are called to go to comfortable and uncomfortable places in seeking to follow

Your will.

To likely and unlikely places led by Scripture and informed by reason, tradition, and experience.

We go to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of your world.

In Jesus' Name, we go together as one, Amen.



**We are the stories we tell  
ourselves and the world."**

*Bishop Easterling*



# INDEX OF PART 3 RESOURCES

[BWCUMC.ORG/WHOAREWELINKS](http://BWCUMC.ORG/WHOAREWELINKS)

## WEEK 1:

Video: <http://tiny.cc/Part3Week1>

"The Christmas Conference: 10 Days That Started a Church": <http://tiny.cc/xmasconference>

United Methodist Church Timeline: <http://tiny.cc/timelineUMC>

Lovely Lane UMC: <http://www.lovelylane.net/>

Old Otterbein UMC: <http://www.oldotterbeinumc.org/home>

Sharp Street UMC: <http://tiny.cc/SharpStreetUMC>

## WEEK 2:

Video: <http://tiny.cc/Part3Week2>

"Francis Asbury and Robert Strawbridge": <https://bit.ly/372tK5R>

Farmers that helped sow the seeds of Methodism: <http://tiny.cc/farmers>

The Strawbridge Shrine: Its Role in Methodist History and a Tour of the Site: <http://tiny.cc/Shrinebook>

Strawbridge Shrine: [www.strawbridgeshrine.org](http://www.strawbridgeshrine.org)

The Faith Journey of Robert and Elizabeth Strawbridge: <https://bit.ly/3730lqv>

Reclaiming Evangelism: <http://tiny.cc/reclaimevangelism>

## WEEK 3:

Video: <http://tiny.cc/Part3Week3>

Women in Ministry: <http://tiny.cc/Womeninministry>

Corporate video: <http://tiny.cc/diversityoracle>

Timeline of Women in Ministry: <http://tiny.cc/womentimeline>

Women Bishops of The United Methodist Church: <http://tiny.cc/womenbishopbook>

Courageous Spirit: Voices from Women in Ministry: <http://tiny.cc/courageousvoices>

Implicit Bias: <https://bit.ly/2GWCJLg>

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women Curriculum: <https://bit.ly/2vYzLE1>

#HerTruth: <https://www.umcna.org/hertruth>

The Church and People with Disabilities: <http://tiny.cc/UMWdisabilities>

Board of Church and Society: <https://www.umcjustice.org/resources>

## WEEK 4:

Video: <http://tiny.cc/Part3Week4>

'Facing the Truth': <http://tiny.cc/TutuTruth>

Black People in the Methodist Church: Whither Thou Goest?: <http://tiny.cc/blackmethodistbook>

Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction: <http://tiny.cc/umccentraljurisdiction>

This Far by Faith: Stories from the African American Religious Experience: <http://tiny.cc/thisfarbyfaithbook>

NEJ Call to Action resources: <http://tiny.cc/nejcalltoaction>

[Finding Fellowship: The Quince Orchard Project.](#)

[We've Come This Far by Faith,](#)

## WEEK 5:

Video: <http://tiny.cc/Part3Week5>

2018 BWC Annual Report, <http://tiny.cc/BWCministries>

Timeline <http://tiny.cc/BWCmissiontimeline>

Missio Dei and the Means of Grace: A Theology of Participation: <http://tiny.cc/missiodeibook>

Ants video/commercial: <http://tiny.cc/antsvideo>

Visit the United Methodist Building: <http://tiny.cc/umbuilding>

General Board of Church and Society General Commission on Religion and Race: <http://www.gcorr.org/>

# APPENDIX

## APPENDIX A: ADDITIONAL GROUND RULES

### ***Respectful Communication Guidelines by Eric Law***

As a way to create a brave and safe space for faithful dialogue, please consider using the *RESPECTful Communication Guidelines* by Eric Law and the process of Mutual Invitation. These guidelines are written in a way for you to share with your group. If your group is larger than seven people, consider breaking people into smaller groups and provide time for sharing.

R = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E = use EMPATHETIC listening.

S = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles.

P = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak.

E = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions.

C = keep CONFIDENTIALITY.

T = TRUST ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

### **Mutual Invitation**

Taken from *The Wolf Shall Dance With the Lamb* by Eric Law

In order to ensure that everyone who wants to share has the opportunity to speak, we will proceed in the following way: The leader or a designated person will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share.

Whom you invite does not need to be the person next to you. (As a matter of fact it is best if it is NOT the person next to you.) After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you are not ready to share yet, say “I pass for now” and you will be invited to share later on. If you don’t want to say anything at all, simply say “pass” and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

We invite you to listen and not to respond to someone’s sharing immediately (also known as crosstalk). There will be time to respond and to ask clarification questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

### ***Grounding Virtues by Krista Tippett from On Being Project***

Taken from Krista Tippett’s *Grounding Virtues: What we Practice We Become* at

<http://tiny.cc/betterconversations>

### **WORDS THAT MATTER**

We are starved for fresh language to approach each other. We need what Elizabeth Alexander calls “words that shimmer” — words with power that convey real truth, which cannot be captured in mere fact. Words have the force of action and become virtues in and of themselves. The words we use shape how we understand ourselves, how we interpret the world, how we treat others. Words are one of our primary ways to reach across the mystery of each other. As technology reframes the meaning of basic human acts like making and leading and belonging, the world needs the most vivid and transformative universe of words we can muster.

### **HOSPITALITY**

Hospitality is a bridge to all the great virtues, but it is immediately accessible. You don’t have to love or forgive or feel compassion to extend hospitality. But it’s more than an invitation. It is the creation of an inviting,



trustworthy space — an atmosphere as much as a place. It shapes the experience to follow. It creates the intention, the spirit, and the boundaries for what is possible. As creatures, it seems, we imagine a homogeneity in other groups that we know not to be there in our own. But new social realities are brought into being over time by a quality of relationship between unlikely combinations of people. When in doubt, practice hospitality.

#### HUMILITY

Humility is a companion to curiosity, surprise, and delight. Spiritual humility is not about getting small. It is about encouraging others to be big. It is not about debasing oneself but about approaching everything and everyone with a readiness to be surprised and delighted. This is the humility of the child. It is the humility in the spirituality of the scientist and the mystic — to be planted in what you know, while living expectantly for discoveries yet to come. The wisest people we've interviewed carry a humility that manifests as tenderness in a creative interplay with power.

#### PATIENCE

Like humility, patience is not to be mistaken for meekness and ineffectuality. It can be the fruit of a full-on reckoning with reality — a commitment to move through the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. A spiritual view of time is a long view of time — seasonal and cyclical, resistant to the illusion of time as a bully, time as a matter of deadlines. Human transformation takes time — longer than we want it to — but it is what is necessary for social transformation. A long, patient view of time will replenish our sense of our capacities and our hope for the world.

#### GENEROUS LISTENING

Listening is an everyday art and virtue, but it's an art we have lost and must learn anew. Listening is more than being quiet while others have their say. It is about presence as much as receiving; it is about connection more than observing. Real listening is powered by curiosity. It involves vulnerability — a willingness to be surprised, to let go of assumptions and take in ambiguity. It is never in "gotcha" mode. The generous listener wants to understand the humanity behind the words of the other and patiently summons one's own best self and one's own most generous words and questions.

#### ADVENTUROUS CIVILITY

The adventure of civility for our time can't be a mere matter of politeness or niceness. Adventurous civility honors the difficulty of what we face and the complexity of what it means to be human. It doesn't celebrate diversity by putting it up on a pedestal and ignoring its messiness and its depths. The intimate and civilizational questions that perplex and divide us will not be resolved quickly. Civility, in our world of change, is about creating new possibilities for living forward while being different and even continuing to hold profound disagreement.

## APPENDIX B: IDEAS FOR INCORPORATING THIS STUDY INTO YOUR CHURCH

There are many ways that a faith community can engage with this study. Using multiple approaches within your congregation can help broaden the appeal and increase the likelihood that persons will encounter the ideas.

- As an intergenerational Sunday School class.
  - Think of combining your adult, youth and young adult Sunday School classes. You could meet in one larger room and do the conversation at individual round tables or you could make several intergenerational classes.
- With your leadership team.
  - Pair up leaders and ask them to invite people who have differing perspectives to the study. Ask leaders to report back what their groups are discovering (via social media, email or another platform that is easily shareable). At monthly leadership meetings, use the content as the devotional time and reflect on what it means for your church and work as a council, board or team.
  - If your leadership team meets monthly, add a virtual meeting in the intervening weeks so that the leadership team is digesting the study together. Consider adding dinner to the monthly meeting and inviting all persons engaging in the study to join the leadership team for reflection.
- As a series of church-wide, six-week studies with or without parallel sermonic themes.
  - If your church has a culture of short-term small group studies, use this material as your content for those. Introduce it as is your custom after the current study is complete.
  - If your church doesn't have this as a habit or practice, this is a great time to introduce this spiritual discipline to your church.
- With another United Methodist church or churches. This will create a wider understanding of the diversity of viewpoints within our connection and can be an opportunity to build stronger relationships across lines of difference.
  - If your church is located near one or two other churches, consider creating a joint study group.
  - If your church is participating in a cluster with other United Methodist churches, consider doing a cluster Bible Study.

Use the local church marketing materials at [www.bwcumc.org/whoarewe](http://www.bwcumc.org/whoarewe) to help promote this study in your congregation and beyond.

## APPENDIX C: UNITED METHODIST READING LIST BY DR. C. ANTHONY HUNT

- *Meet the Methodists: An Introduction to the United Methodist Church*, Charles Allen, 1986.
- *Two Centuries of Methodist Concern: Bondage, Freedom and Education of Black People*, James Brawley, 1974.
- *The United Methodist Primer*, Chester Custer, 1993.
- *Turning Corners: Reflections of African Americans in the United Methodist Church from 1961-1993*, George Daniels.
- *Wesley's Daily Prayers; Prayers for Every Day of the Year*, Donald Demaray, ed. 1998.
- *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation*, John Deschner, 1985.
- *Polity, Practice and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, Thomas Frank, 1997.
- *Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of the Living Faith*, Steve Harper, 2015.
- *Prayer and Devotional Life of United Methodists*, Steve Harper, 1999.
- *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics*, Theodore Jennings, Jr., 1990.
- *Three Simple Rules: The Wesleyan Way of Living*, Reuben Job, 2007.
- *Facts and Possibilities: An Agenda for the United Methodist Church*, Douglas Johnson and Alan Waltz, 1987.
- *United Methodist Questions, United Methodist Answers: Exploring Christian Faith*, F. Belton Joyner, Jr. 2007.
- *The People(s) called Methodist; Forms and Reforms of The Life*, William Lawrence, Dennis Campbell, and Russell Richey, eds., 1998.
- *Christ for the World: United Methodist Bishops Speak on Evangelism*, James Logan, ed., 1996.
- *How Great a Flame: Contemporary Lessons from the Wesleyan Revival*, James Logan, 2005.
- *Theology and Evangelism in the Wesleyan Heritage*, James C. Logan, ed., 1994.
- *Living the Discipline: United Methodist Theological Reflections on War, Civilization and Holiness*, D. Stephen Long, 1992.
- *Black People in the United Methodist Church; Whither Thou Goest?* William McClain, 1984.
- *Come Sunday: The Liturgy of Zion*, William McClain, 1990.
- *United Methodism in America: A Compact History*, John McEllhenney, ed., 1992.
- *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, M. Douglas Meeks, ed., 1995.
- *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, eds., 1991.
- *The Story of American Methodism*, Frederick Norwood, 1974.
- *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit*, Albert Outler. 1975.
- *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church*, Russell Richey, William Lawrence and Denis Campbell, eds., 1999.
- *Heritage and Hope: The African American Presence in United Methodism*, Grant Shockley, ed. 1991.
- *The Romance of African Methodism*, George Singleton, 1952.
- *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church*, Laurence Hull Stookey, 1992.

- *This Day; A Wesleyan Way of Prayer*, Laurence Hull Stookey, 2004.
- *The Holy Spirit in the Wesleyan Heritage*, Mack Stokes, 1985.
- *Major United Methodist Beliefs*, Mack Stokes, 1989.
- *Methodism's Racial Dilemma: The Story of the Central Jurisdiction*, James Thomas, 1992.
- *The Central Jurisdiction Recovery Project: Preserving Our Past... Building Our Future*, Barbara Ricks Thompson, ed., 2006.
- *Class Leaders; Recovering a Tradition*, David Lowes Watson, 1989.
- *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*, David Lowes Watson, 1991.
- *Leadership in the Wesleyan Spirit*, Lovett Weems, Jr., 1999.
- *And are We Yet Alive? - The Future of the United Methodist Church*, Richard Wilke, 1986.
- *Signs and Wonders: The Mighty Work of God in the Church*, Richard Wilke, 1989.
- *United Methodist Beliefs: A Brief Introduction*, William Willimon, 2007.
- *To Serve the Present Age: The Gift and Promise of United Methodism*, J. Philip Wogaman, 1995.
- *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., 1996.
- *A Longing for Holiness: Selected Writings of John Wesley*, 1997.
- *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns*, 1981.



A content outline overview for parts 1 and 2 is provided below.

## **PART 1: WHO ARE WE AS PEOPLE OF GOD?**

### **Week 1:**

Our faith and our understanding of church is often defined by how we view the nature of God. As people created in the divine image, we are called to seek an ever-growing knowledge of the nature of God and to let that knowledge shape our lives.

### **Week 2:**

We were created to be God's image-bearers. But what happens when we distort that image or, even worse, presume that we know the will of God? What lessons do we have to learn from the Garden of Eden and from Golgotha? What does it mean to be in relationship with God?

### **Week 3:**

The stories of Exodus belong to every generation. They introduce us to God's deliverance and the possibilities of new life. But that doesn't mean we can avoid the hardships of the wilderness or that we should shrink from the unexpected ways God can deliver us.?

### **Week 4:**

God is the ultimate source from which all things find their meaning and purpose. But in the Hebrew Bible, there is no word for God. Rather, God is known by many names. By what names do you know God, and how do the names you choose have the potential to transform the world?

### **Week 5:**

The biblical prophets called on the people of their time, and on us today, to "remember who you are," to remember that you are a child of God. Prophets also remind us that God's heart resides most profoundly with people in the margins of our culture. How are the voices of ancient prophets relevant to the Church today?

### **Week 6:**

Each of us is on a journey from brokenness, to healing, to wholeness that echoes the Exodus sojourn. What does Israel's story of traveling from oppression to liberation have in common with our own? What should we expect to encounter as we seek God's path of liberation?

## PART 2: WHO ARE WE AS UNITED METHODISTS?

### Week 1: Our Theology of Grace

Grace pervades everything. As United Methodists, we share the conviction that grace "is the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit. We celebrate prevenient grace, which precedes salvation; justifying grace, which illuminates God's accepting and forgiving love; and sanctifying grace, which nurtures our growth in the love of God and our neighbor.

### Week 2: Our Wesleyan Discipleship and The Means of Grace

At the heart of Methodism is the uniting of vital piety and social holiness. We accomplish this by practicing the Rule of Discipleship with acts of personal acts of compassion and devotion, and communal acts of justice and worship. With these acts, we grow in our ability to love God with all our heart, soul and mind and our neighbors as ourselves. A vital part of our spiritual journey, we practice means of grace that include Bible study, prayer, fasting, healthy living, taking Communion, visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, seeking justice, and working to end oppression, and more. In these practices, God works in and through us.

### Week 3: Our Way of Understanding Scripture (Wesleyan Quadrilateral)

Our theology is an expression of God's presence in the world. Every person, in each generation, is called to explore anew God's unfolding power and Gospel promise. To assist in this task, United Methodists call upon the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, trusting that our faith is revealed in Scripture, illuminated by tradition, manifest in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture is the primary source of our doctrine. However, many issues before the church today demand the broadening of our preconceived notions of faith and require complex and nuanced discernment. How, for example, should the Levitical codes be applied to life in a modern context? What do we miss when we try to provide tidy theological answers to exquisitely complicated issues?

### Week 4: Our Founder: John Wesley the Resister

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, stood as a counter-cultural presence, daring to stand-up and confront the culture of his day. How did Wesley deal with slavery, the working poor, women in ministry and other issues facing the church? What principles informed his thinking? What relevance does Methodism's founder have for the denomination today? Which of his lessons can impact our lives in significant ways?

### Week 5: Our Foundational Doctrine

The Book of Discipline, which has been described as a covenant or set of laws for the denomination, outlines a shared way of life for United Methodists. Within the Discipline is a set of foundational documents, or doctrinal standards, that give us direction and enables us to stand together as disciples of Jesus Christ. What does a lived-out doctrine look like in today's world? How can our differences spur conversation and draw us deeper into discipleship?

### Week 6: Our Unfinished Business, What Really Happened in 1968?

When the Evangelical United Brethren and Methodist churches united 51 years ago, the EUB leaders insisted on an integrated denomination. But many questions of race and justice remained unresolved. In what ways is racism United Methodism's "original sin"? As the church faces new separations, what lessons does our approach to race have to teach us? How is the church "forever beginning?"

## AN EXPRESSION OF GRATITUDE

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To God be the glory!  
*Bishop LaTrelle Easterling*