

## “Conversations Regarding the Church and Same-Gender Issues”

**Welcome/Gathering (10 minutes) – We won’t go away from this with an answer today. This is an opportunity to learn how to see more clearly our own perspective but the perspective of others and perhaps in that see a clearer vision of God’s possibilities.**

**Opening Prayer for Illumination and for our time together –** Leader offers a prayer for illumination and Christ candle is lit as a reminder of Christ’s presence with us, within us and among us as we gather together

**Why we are here – to be presented by one of the leaders (10 minutes)**

- a. So we can be faithful disciples to Christ and remember that our highest calling is to surrender to Christ daily.
- b. We have a unique opportunity to witness to our faith in this midst of this difficult conversation. Can we find a way to give the gift of surrender to God to ourselves and to one another, even in the face of disagreement? Can we witness true Christian community by learning to live and love through controversy by faithfully finding God’s as we seek God’s direction?
- c. Showing a better model of conversation – showing a way forward that is not polarizing or led by one side or another.
- d. Opportunity to speak and listen with people who don’t agree with us.

### ***Facilitation Notes: About the Day***

*We are seated today in table conversations as a way to encourage full participation in these important conversations about same gender matters and our ministry together. At each table is a facilitator who is there to help steward the conversation and guide the table through each component of today’s conversation*

*TALKING OBJECT - In order to assist us with respectful listening and speaking, we are going to be using a talking piece. The talking piece or object is a very practical way to pattern our conversation in a way that invites full participation. It is a simple guide for us - the one with the talking piece has the privilege of speaking and we invite all others at the table to listen with compassion and curiosity. The talking object typically will be passed clockwise (to the person on one’s left) and you may pass. This is a voluntary conversation. When the talking piece has been*

*passed around the circle/table for one question or conversation, we do invite you to ask those that have passed if they wish to speak before moving on to the next conversation.*

*Be gentle with yourself and with one another. When we seek to speak about things that matter deeply to us, we often feel that deep within our being. We are all here as Christ's own and we invite you to take responsibility for your own sharing as is appropriate with your clergy colleagues. We also invite all of us to listen with compassion and curiosity. When we find ourselves wanting to interrupt another's sentence or cannot wait to share our thoughts and deep convictions, we invite you to turn to wonder...*

*...I wonder what journey in her/his life and faith have led her/him to that place?*

*...I wonder what is stirring deep within him/her?*

*When addressing a brother or sister in Christ, engage with wonder, compassion and curiosity...*

*...I am curious about what you said a little earlier in the circle about....I wonder if you would be willing to share more about that with us?*

*...When you mentioned this part of your story, it led me to think about my own...*

*Be gentle with yourself and with one another.*

*The co-leaders will guide the tables through the time frames for each component.*

*Note: Invite persons to care for their own small breaks as needed; there are no scheduled breaks.*

### **Creating Covenant (2 minutes)**

**Facilitation Notes:** *As a total gathering – We invite you to affirm at table together the core covenant for our time together by reading aloud the RESPECT guidelines.*

Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others  
Empathetic listening  
Sensitive to different communication styles  
Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak  
Examine your own assumptions and perceptions  
Confidentiality when requested or appropriate  
Tolerate ambiguity

May God bless our day, our covenant and our conversation.

### **Around the Table (8 minutes)**

**Facilitation Notes:** *We (I) remind you of the Christ Candle, the presence of Christ in and among us and invite you to begin by introducing yourselves to one another.*

*I (We) invite you to take a deep breath – inhale...exhale...*

*As a way to introduce ourselves, the invitation is to say your name, where you serve and IN ONE BREATH (remember that exhale) state a favorite part of your ministry. As a reminder, no sermons please – just a breath phrase of what is a favorite or meaningful part of your ministry.”*

*(The facilitator begins and passes the talking object to the person on the left and it continues around the table until all are introduced.)*

Invitation: **Introduce yourselves – Name / Something about you/Why are you here?**

**Facilitation Notes:** *Table facilitators, please invite someone at your table to read aloud the scripture Luke 14:7-11.*

*Scripture: “When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ‘When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” Luke 14: 7-11*

**Facilitation Notes:** *For Table Facilitators – I invite you to reflect on the following question. Whoever is led to speak first, simply let me know and I will hand you the talking object to begin. After you have shared, please pass the talking piece to the person on your left. I remind you that you can pass if you do not wish to speak at the time the object is passed to you. We will return to any that have passed before we move on. Please be mindful of our covenant and the time.*

Question: **As you approach a time of discussion around tables today, how does this scripture speak to your time together?**

### **Sharing our fears (15 minutes)**

**Facilitation Notes:** *This component will be facilitated as a total gathering – Leaders will guide the process. Table facilitators: Please assist by locating the index cards on your table and helping with the process to name and gather fears.*

All will be invited to read aloud the Psalm for the day:

**“In tight circumstances, I cried out to the Lord, the Lord answered me with wide-open spaces.” Psalm 118:5**

**Facilitation Notes:** *On the index cards provided, we invite you to write down a fear that you hold concerning the same-gender debate. Table facilitators: Please assist with collecting the index cards.*

The cards will be collected and responses will be listed on a white board or by projection. Part of the goal is to unearth the deeply textured experiences of the group and to reveal what many in the room may hold in common. The facilitated process for the entire group will include these or similar questions:

What observations can you make as you look at this list of fears?

#### **Table discussion – servants in ministry and in conversation (20 minutes)**

**Facilitation Notes:** *For Table Facilitators – I invite you to consider the two questions now listed on the screen. I invite you to prayerfully reflect on the first questions. We will begin the talking piece with the person led to speak first. Simply let me know if you are ready to start the conversation and I will hand you the talking object to begin. After you have shared, please pass the talking piece to the person on your left. I remind you that you can pass if you do not wish to speak at the time the object is passed to you. We will return to any that have passed before we move on. Please be mindful of our covenant and the time. When all have had opportunity to converse we will move to the second question.*

*Second Question – Again, whoever is led to speak first will begin the conversation and pass the talking piece to the person on your left. I remind you that if you feel the urge to interrupt or contradict what someone is saying to turn to wonder...I wonder...*

*One of the co-leaders will indicate when it is time to move on to the next table conversation. You may invite persons to pass the talking piece a second or third time. You may also hold the talking piece and invite all around the table to share as they are led in conversation.*

Questions:

1. Have you engaged in conversation with those of opposing viewpoints around same gender matters? What was your reaction/response? Was it helpful to you? To others? What did you learn from those conversations?

2. How has this topic affected you personally, particularly in the context of your congregation and the United Methodist Church as a whole? Have you felt excluded from this conversation because of circumstances or even because of your personal viewpoint? How did that make you feel?

### **How can we truly be in discernment? (20 minutes)**

**Facilitation Notes:** *Each table group will be invited to engage around one of the following four questions and then be prepared to have one member of the table group offer a brief summary reflection of the conversation to the entire gathering.*

*For Table Facilitators –As guided by the leaders, each table group will spend time on only one of the following four questions. The questions will be assigned to tables in advance. Please invite persons to speak to the question by passing the talking object around the circle beginning on your left. You may pass it more than once and remind persons that they may pass. Return to anyone that has passed to invite their participation when all around the table circle have spoken. Invite one person to share verbally a summary reflection of the table group when called upon by the leaders.*

*One of the co-leaders will indicate when it is time to share reflections with the total group. Be mindful of the covenant for respectful conversations and to turn to wonder when one feels the urge to interrupt.*

### **Questions:**

1. What is your prayer that is foremost in your heart today to offer to God concerning this issue?
2. Have you discovered something in yourself that has been a barrier to true discernment over this issue? What do you need to surrender to God to move forward?
3. What steps can we take as brothers and sisters in Christ together that point toward true listening to God and discernment as we move forward together?
4. Do you have any discernment today regarding further steps that we, as a church, we need to take to model surrender to God and true discernment?

**Facilitation Notes:** *As time allows, the leaders will invite reflections from the total group.*

### Guided Prayer around tables (10 minutes)

**Facilitator Notes:** *Please lift a topic of focus for the prayer then out loud around the table folks will be invited to share a prayer for their group.*

- For our United Methodist Denomination that above all things we may show a love for Christ and for one another even as we deal with this issue
- For those who feel excluded from the table of conversation on this topic.
- For those who suffer from the pain that this issue has caused on all sides.
- For leadership, both lay and clergy, in our church as they seek to minister to people on both sides of this issue.
- For the body of Christ as we seek healing and wholeness together.