



Holiness *in* Community

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR
Building Local Partnerships with Other Christ-Followers



GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH

Ecumenical Relationships Commission

Holiness in Community: A Step-by-Step Guide for Building Local Partnerships with Other Christ-Followers is a resource developed by the Ecumenical Relationships Commission of the Global Methodist Church, 2024-2026, Bishop Carolyn Moore, Chair.

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Building Local Partnerships with Other Christ-Followers

VERSION 1.0



GLOBAL
METHODIST CHURCH

Ecumenical Relationships
Commission

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A Quick Note About Christian Ministries Outside the Congregation

Even though the word *church* appears a lot in the discussion questions and activities in this resource, it's also true that ecumenical activity might take place with parachurch ministries and not just among congregations. Praise be to God!

For that reason, feel free to substitute *ministry* for *church* in the discussion questions and activities whenever you find it helpful.

Note for Leaders

This resource is primarily written for Christ-followers who are already part of Global Methodist Church congregations, but that doesn't have to be the only audience. If your congregation is part of a local network or association of like-minded churches or ministries, it might be helpful to suggest that the association members engage this material together. Not only will you and your colleagues be building on ecumenism that is already present (rather than starting from scratch), but this study will also give a common foundation for further development in ecumenism. It can provide refreshed strength and fervor for your service in the one body of Christ.

A quick note on the terms we're using: In this guide, using terms like ecumenical and ecumenism does not mean that we compromise on our doctrine or water down our theological and biblical commitments. Ecumenical, which comes from a Greek word meaning house, simply means cooperating with other Christ-followers in the work of the gospel, partnering with others in the one "house" or family of Jesus. Ecumenism, as we're using the term throughout this resource, doesn't mean doctrinal compromise. It means joining together in the shared truth of the Triune God's saving, transforming, sanctifying love for the world.

In short: We are asking you to foster relationships with other churches or ministries in your area for the sake of Jesus' mission.



SESSION 1

What Kind of Church?

Introduction

You are not alone.

Across the world and down the street, Christian believers are crying out for a fuller experience of the resurrection power of Christ Jesus in their lives—and it's not just us Global Methodists. The widespread experience of spiritually powerless church has coincided with the alienation of many who might otherwise claim the saving name of Jesus. Perhaps you've seen it happen in your own congregation or town. Maybe you've seen populations and generations unreached. Maybe you've noticed Christians who are in love with Jesus but hunger for deeper, more meaningful closeness with Him. Maybe you've seen leaders who have been unsure of how to rekindle the evangelical fervor that once defined the Methodist movement. We sense that more is possible, we pray for God's power of love to emerge into our fellowships, and yet we don't know what actions to take.

What does God see when He looks at your church? What does He think of what's possible for its future? What does He envision happening in the community where your congregation is situated? Does God imagine things remaining the same, or does He imagine a passionate fire of the Spirit's holiness exploding forth in love from the strangely warmed hearts of His people? Does He desire that those around them would come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord and lead flourishing lives?

If any of that connects with you, we say it again: *You are not alone*. The GMC is built on the conviction that Jesus desires vastly more *for* us and *from* us in love and service to the world so that others may experience His saving and restoring love like we have. If you're hungry for more of what the Lord has in store for His people, you're in good company.

But it's important to remember that *we Global Methodists don't have all the answers*. Yes, we are passionately aligned with holiness theology and yes, we are deeply committed to following Jesus wholeheartedly. We also humbly recognize that God speaks through the community of His people across denominational lines, drawing together others who also claim the saving name of Jesus. What's more, He calls all of us who follow Jesus to live into Jesus' prayer for oneness. His was not a prayer for diluting the gospel. It was a prayer for a movement of love, worship, and service where we live. But sometimes we don't know how to establish and nurture relationships

that feed this vision. Where do we start?

We start right here, in a posture that confesses that we need other believers in other orthodox Christian traditions. We need an attitude that stands open and thirsty for the Holy Spirit's power to show us where He will forge new partnerships of love, salvation, and service that didn't exist before. And we begin by acknowledging our need for God's intervention.

Who is this resource for?

In short, it's for Global Methodists in local congregations (and for other siblings in Christ) who want *more* from their church's walk with Jesus:

- A local church *more* drenched in the resurrecting holiness of Jesus
- A local church that is *more* worthwhile for its members
- A local church with *more and deeper* experience of the presence, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit through relationships with other faithful churches and believers, even across denominational lines
- A local church with *more* skill and experience at blessing its community and world with the love of Jesus

If that describes you or your church, this resource is for you.

If we've done our job right, this resource will provide a spark for local congregations that want *more* and want it *now*:

- Are you impatient with church-as-usual?
- Even if your church changed its name or denomination in recent years, is there a feeling of disillusionment that the congregation's fervor and vitality in Christ has remained the same as before?
- Are members of your local church experiencing a stirring restlessness, yearning for an outbreak of the Holy Spirit's revival, vitality, and impact on the community?
- Do you and others in your congregation want reason to testify to God's love and power not only *as it was long ago* but *as it is right now*?
- Is your local church prayerfully leaning forward, asking God for revival, but not quite sure how to press ahead or whom to look to as partners in the community?

If any of that describes your local church, it's more evidence that this resource is for you.

This resource is designed to add kindling for a congregation's fire. It offers its leaders and members a chance to explore how Christ Jesus might be inviting the church to deeper closeness with Him, a fuller experience of His holiness, and greater missional effectiveness in the world right around them—*more, now, and right here*—through expanding vital relationships with faithful believers from other backgrounds.

It will help you to see that you are not alone and never have been.

How to Use This Resource

There is lots of room for tailoring this resource for *your* context. Each section starts with some written material that can be read on one's own, or in a group setting out loud, or as devotional material. At the end of each section is a **Group Discussion and Activity Guide**. Designed to be used across six gatherings, each session can probably be completed in as little as 60–90 minutes each, but there is no need to be constrained by that amount of time if it's not appropriate for *you*. (Many white American Christians, for example, are accustomed to worship or small-group study taking about 60 minutes from start to finish, but in many parts of the world, at the 90-minute mark there's still lots to say, pray, and do.) The length of time isn't important: Do what makes

sense in *your* context.

The sessions include biblical and theological material for background information and group discussion, along with a brief introductory video and resource recommendations for context and testimony. Each session has a Group Discussion and Activity Guide designed to help you develop relationships with other faithful congregations, missions, and Christian agencies in the local community. Our hope is that minds will be engaged, hearts will be warmed, new relationships will be cultivated, the larger community will see and hear the gospel in word and action, and the Lord will be glorified.

The material is applicable for use by small groups, Sunday classes, one-off study groups (during Lent or after Pentecost, for example), leadership gatherings, committees, ministry teams, or whole congregations. These six sessions can provide the foundation for a refreshed vision for the future of your congregation, including its global reach and its mission to your community. Presiding Elders and Conference Superintendents may consider adapting the resource for district- or conference-wide clergy training events or may recommend it for use in local churches under their supervision. The point is this: It's here. It's adaptable. And it's for you to use prayerfully in a way that seems best for your context.

The materials, discussion prompts, and exercises are intended to open pathways for developing local missional partnerships between Christian congregations, including GMC local churches. The Ecumenical Relationships Commission (ERC) of the GMC is built on the idea that when believers in Jesus come together to learn from and love one another in the messy work of mutual relationships across church lines, the Holy Spirit uses those moments to create new avenues, which might not have existed before, of introducing the saving love of Jesus Christ in the community. Communities can experience the saving love of Christ and receive the gift of eternal life. Families in need can feed their children. The lonely can experience togetherness and the aimless can experience eternal life in *this* life, each finding new purpose in God's loving designs for their lives. Widows can find comfort, friendship, and care. Orphans can find homes. Sins and guilt that have weighed a person down for decades can dissolve in the justifying, sanctifying love of Jesus. Injustices can be eliminated. The sky really is the limit—and it can all be furthered and accentuated by Christians' acts of unity, of pursuing the Spirit's purposes *together*.

Some of the suggested assignments may take time to arrange and experience (like visiting another church or spending time with people who attend it), so take care to provide adequate time between sessions so that group members are able to experience the possibilities for collaborative friendships with others as those relationships are cultivated. Group leaders might want to go through the material with a pen or highlighter (or highlight the .pdf file with software) before each session to pick which prompts to use, since there may be more material here than you need in a single session.

A Word on Contextualization

This is the first attempt at a new endeavor for us as a church, and as with any new thing, it won't be perfect. We think that's okay.

While the ERC writing team has been deliberate to seek and incorporate the feedback of GMC reviewers from around the world, the fact is that this first edition was compiled by GMC believers living in the United States. As a result, some of this material may not be as applicable to where *you* are, despite the best intentions of the writing team. We hope you'll feel invited in love to replace any of the activities (or metaphors or figures of speech) that don't work as well for you in your context. The point is this: If some of the activities or images in this resource don't work in your context, then (as long as you're staying true to our doctrines and discipline) throw

them out and replace them creatively. Have some fun coming up with something new! Just keep the *ideas*. See what you can do to transpose them to work well where you are. (And please let us know how you did it. We'd love to hear in case we craft future revisions.

We would also ask for grace. Since this is the first iteration of this material, the writing team assumes that it may need further development. That's also okay with us. We know that as with any new form of ministry, the prototype may not be the final word, and there may be changes if the resource matures over time. We hope you'll feel free to let us know how to improve this material for any subsequent editions that the Ecumenical Relations Commission might craft in the future. We want the church's ecumenical mission to become ever more faithful to the diversity of how God moves among us in culture and context. Help us, lovingly, to see our blind spots along the way. Doing so will be a gift to the whole church.

Session Themes

What's ahead for you and your group as you work through this resource? Here's a road map.

- **Session 1** will set the stage for ecumenism. The discussion and activities will walk your group through an initial survey of its local community.
- **Session 2** will revel in the oneness of the church, celebrating what God has done across the globe and throughout the centuries in the single body of Christ.
- **Session 3** will focus on the pursuit of holiness, a core component of our Wesleyan heritage, along with the local church's ministry of growing disciples of Jesus.
- **Session 4** will introduce what John Wesley called *catholic spirit*, which God can use to enable Christians of varying backgrounds to share in worship, witness, and mission.
- **Session 5** will show how local churches, Global Methodist and otherwise, stand in continuity with the apostolic "the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3) and are held accountable by it.
- **Session 6** invites your group to dream, envision, and plan for missional partnerships that will benefit the larger community and help your congregation stay ready, thirsty, and expectant to receive a fresh work of the Holy Spirit.

Why Ecumenical?

The word *ecumenical* often brings to mind agreements or study documents between denominational officials. Sometimes it might bring up images of a community food pantry operated by several churches in town, a parachurch ministry to university students, or a joint worship service during Holy Week led by a priest, a Messianic rabbi, and a Pentecostal minister.

While we have nothing against covenants between denominations, those institutional arrangements aren't the focus of this material. The Ecumenical Relationships Commission takes the view that the Global Methodist Church has been raised up as part of a spiritual awakening throughout the world (see Colossians 1:6). The primary ministry unit of the Global Methodist Church is the local congregation (charge conference), which says something about how we have understood ourselves from the beginning: Our best work is done organically, at the grassroots level of neighborhoods and families of faith. That's why the ERC places a priority on organically

developed, mission-driven partnerships between *congregations*. Does that mean that we *don't* pursue denomination-wide links between us and other branches of the Christian tree? Of course not. We only mean to say that in the resource you're reading, the focus will be as much on the local church as we can make it.

When local church partnerships develop, it's an implicit witness to the essential oneness of the Jesus movement, a signal in our own time of what Jesus prayed over His disciples in Gethsemane: "that they may be one as we [He and the Father] are one" (John 17:11). It also deepens the well of God's nourishing gifts and graces that He has given various individual congregations for the world around them, amplifying their potential impact for holiness and healing beyond what they might have done before having been joined together. This resource will help focus your prayer, discernment, planning, and listening, and how you do ministry in your community. It will help you to harness the gifts that God has placed in your congregation and nearby ones so that the Christ-followers in your area may witness to the gospel with greater strength, creativity, and resilience. We hope that this in turn will allow people and places around you to know God's forgiving and healing love more fully.

The final goal, of course, is transformation, or what Wesleyans call *sanctifying grace*, whereby people and communities more and more reflect the Father's holy character in the power of the Holy Spirit until they're perfected in love. The gift of oneness in Christ, however we experience it in our relationships, is given by the Holy Spirit. It's the presence and action of the Holy Spirit that enables Christian congregations to be faithful and fruitful in the first place, and it's the Holy Spirit who brings the fruit of partnerships between members of the body of Christ too. The resource you're reading presumes a prayerful reliance upon the Holy Spirit. Actually, it *depends upon* the Spirit, or else these will just be empty words on a page or a screen. As you consider your congregation, the needs of your larger community, and the possibilities for local partnerships in ministry in this study, seek to experience the kind of discernment described by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15: "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). Throughout this journey, "since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). We wouldn't want it any other way.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 1

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Making an ecumenical “treasure map” for our area, asking God to show us opportunities for partnership, so that we can go deeper into His desires for our church

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For revival in the Holy Spirit

Open the session by asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide.

For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture.

If you’d like a prayer to use, feel free to use this one:

Come, Holy Spirit, like a refiner’s fire. We have so many bright ideas and ready proposals for our way forward. But they are worthless without you, powerless without your authorization and enabling. Quiet our minds and hearts to desire nothing but you. Guide our conversations and thoughts; inspire our dreams and visions; empower us to act. See that we desire to carry the fire of your love faithfully to the world around us. Help us stay in step with your guidance and direction, together in this congregation and with other believers around us. In the matchless name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Supplies Suggested

- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- Either (a) A map of your community, city, or region, or (b) A large piece of paper (or easel, chalkboard, or whiteboard that won’t be erased between sessions)
- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video

2 Video | Our Story

Visit the [Session One resource webpage](#) and view one of the short videos that have been uploaded. These videos provide examples of what GMC congregations in various parts of the world are doing locally to partner with other Christ-followers to amplify the gospel.

3 Getting Our Bearings

a. Gifts

Say something like this:

To begin, let's think about the gifts that God has given our congregation. What are some of those things? How would you describe some of the gifts our congregation brings to the larger ministry of Christ in our area? Let's list them together.

Examples (but be specific):

- People, such as . . .
- Skills, such as . . .
- Particular passions or interests, such as . . .
- Close familiarity with a particular cultural or ethnic group, such as . . .
- Resources, such as . . .
- Talents, such as . . .
- Location, such as . . .
- History, such as . . .
- Leadership, such as . . .
- Etc.

Make sure to write them down.

Pause and have a member of the group pray a word of thanks to God for each of the things your group has listed. (You'll want to save this list for use again in session 2.)

b. Challenges

Say something like this:

Congregations sometimes come to the topic of ecumenism having experienced tears or hurt in its past.

- Is that true of our congregation? Has it experienced frustration, disillusionment, or pain in recent years?
- If so, list some examples of when it happened.

Make sure to write them down.

- Let's pause and ask God for healing for each of the things we have listed.
- Let's also ask for the power to forgive anyone who has trespassed against us or our congregation.

Pause and pray; ask a volunteer to lead if possible.

c. Visions

Say something like this:

The fact that you are here for this gathering shows that you are still connected to the congregation. It suggests that *something* has made staying together worth any tears and wounds that might have come along the way for us as a church.

- What would you say has made it worthwhile to persevere with the church through any hard times that you or our church have experienced?

Write down any answers that the group gives.

- Let's pause and ask the Holy Spirit to complete the good work that the Spirit began in our congregation (Phil. 1:6).

Pause and pray; ask a volunteer to lead if possible.

4 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is important to community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn't already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue during or after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

5 What's Next?

Talk over these questions as a group.

- Look at the lists of Gifts, Challenges, and Visions that we've written down. Thinking about our church's history and gifts, what do you think it would look like for the Holy Spirit to enable *more* for our congregation? What would being *more* like Jesus look like for our church?
(Hint: When we say *more*, we're not just talking about worship attendance.)
- What would you like God to do for our congregation *now*? How about for the community around it?
- Is anything holding our congregation back from flourishing to the maximum of its potential for witness and mission in the community? If so, what?
- On a scale of "0" for *apathetic* to "10" for *restless*, where would you rate our congregation's eagerness for the Holy Spirit to do a fresh work in the community? How about for you yourself? What might be standing in the way of either one?
- What would it take for the Holy Spirit to remove whatever is standing in the way of our congregation's flourishing as Jesus' disciples on mission?
- In majority-immigrant congregations – What are some of the treasures that our congregation can bring in the name of Jesus to the community around us from our unique culture?

Pause and pray once more, asking the Holy Spirit to show the way to overcoming whatever obstacles are blocking the pathway to becoming more like Jesus, both as a congregation and as individuals. If you can, ask a volunteer.

6 Treasure Map – Looking Out

Say something like this:

Many churches have a sense of being so busy keeping the “God shop” up and running—worship, visitations, meetings, budgeting, solving everyday concerns—that there’s no time, resourcing, or attention left for connecting with others in the Jesus Mission. *Maybe someday*, they think—*just not now*.

We can begin to engage our community by use of an intentional exercise.

Take out either the map of your community, city, or region, or a large piece of paper (or easel, chalkboard, or whiteboard that won’t be erased between sessions).

a. Draw a Treasure Map

1. *Find (or draw) a map of your city or region.*
2. *Ask the group to join you in placing on the map the other congregations, ministries, and mission groups that you are aware of in your area that are committed to historic, orthodox Christianity.*

(If you find that there aren’t any nearby, expand the boundaries of the map outward until you can place the names of at least two or three other churches or ministries.)

It doesn’t have to be an exhaustive list; just mark down the ones that come to mind.

(As an alternative: If you’d prefer, you can simply list the churches and ministries instead of plotting them geographically.)

3. *Along one margin, feel free to add any ministries that you could connect with by long-distance means (Internet, e-mail, video conferencing, etc.). But try to focus primarily on in-person options in the area where you live.*
4. *Across the top, write this: “TREASURE MAP – The Church That God Has Planted in Our Area.”*
5. *Across the bottom, write this: “Many Ministries, One Lord Jesus Christ.”*

b. Label It

Ask group members to add a descriptive word or phrase for each ministry or church that you plotted on the map (or listed). What is that church, organization, or ministry known for? If you discover that there are some whose reputation you don’t know, highlight them on the Treasure Map (or list) as an “unknown” or a “point of curiosity.”

c. Say Hello

Now it's time to get acquainted.

Divide into pairs or groups of three. (It's fine to do this as individuals too, but you might find the conversation richer with the perspective of two or more people at once. Those who don't normally enjoy talking to strangers might like having someone else along who is more comfortable.)

- *Beginning with the ministries whose reputations you don't know, have each group select one church, ministry, or organization from the Treasure Map (or list) for establishing contact and making introductions.*
- *Say something like this (or summarize it):*
 - » Before we leave this session, let's take one step toward setting up a conversation with a leader from the organization you picked.
 - » If you have Internet access and can identify a leader, take a moment right now to make contact by email, phone, SMS, or text. Pick a friend to go with you and ask to meet and offer whatever form of hospitality is true to your culture and context. (This could be lunch, coffee, tea, a walk, a simple phone conversation—whatever is appropriate to your culture.)
- Identify yourself as part of your congregation. Explain that you're part of a movement at your church to meet friends in the faith in your area and that you would like to come and learn more about what the other church or ministry is like.
- Try to set up the meeting to take place before the next meeting of this study group.
- When you meet, introduce yourself and ask your contact to talk about the ministry that he or she represents.
 - » How was the ministry formed?
 - » When was it established?
 - » What do its members desire to see God do in the community?
 - » What are some strengths and challenges that this ministry has experienced along the way?
 - » What does the person with whom you're speaking see on the horizon for the ministry and the community?
- Make sure to include this question in the conversation:
 - » What do you think our church can learn from your church?

Remember as you ask this question that ecumenism begins not with bright ideas or strategies for accomplishing a predetermined outcome, but with the wounded hands of our own experiences. It takes a stance of humility, first learning from others what gifts God has already provided in the community where God has placed you.
- After the visit, take some time to write down and discuss the positive gifts you experienced in the conversation. Bring your notes with you to the next gathering of our group study.

7 Alternate Activity: Just Stop By and Worship the Lord

If a personal meeting with a ministry leader isn't attainable or you'd prefer a different approach, try this one instead: Worship with a church different from your own.

Go in pairs or threes if you can. As you do, avoid the temptation to critique the incidentals like the music, the preacher, the people, the venue, and so forth.

Simply enter with this question: "Now that we're here as guests, what is God doing to transform our church as co-laborers with this other church in the work of the gospel?" Ask God to give you a humble heart and wounded hands, enabling you first to observe and learn.

After the visit, take some time to write down and discuss together the positive gifts you experienced in that time of worship. Bring your notes with you to the next gathering of the group study.

8 Conclusion and Prayer

- *Confirm together the date, time, and place of the next gathering of this group.*
- *Commit to praying in the interim about whether others in the congregation might be ripe for inviting to this journey together in the study group. Determine who has the responsibility to invite them to join.*
- *Pray together to close. Use this prayer if you desire, or use your own.*

Lord Jesus, whose Spirit enables your followers to love one another with the very love of the Father: Lead us in this new season of ministry as we seek to bless and be blessed by your people in our community. Teach us your love, make us humble, guide us toward curiosity, and give us a glimpse of what you desire to do to enliven the world around us as one people in the body of Christ. Through you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever: Amen.



SESSION 2

Ancient, Future, Worldwide

You Are Here

Sometimes it's easy to feel alone.

Many people who are members of Global Methodist congregations today walked through years or decades of conflict as members of the denomination (The United Methodist Church) that had been their home before. Their experience involved discovering deep-seated differences with other members and church leaders over theological commitments, institutional governance, and accountability to scriptural authority over the church's life. Many who remember those days can testify that their core desire was fidelity to Jesus, faithfulness to what Jude calls "the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3). It's true that there were brothers and sisters in the denomination who shared their convictions and passions, even in great numbers. But the nature of the disagreements often made for a lonely, exhausting road for many who eventually became part of the newly born GMC.

Other Christians across many branches of the Christian tree have had similar experiences with contending for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people, whether within their churches, in their denominations, or among family and friends. The pages of church history are filled with stories of those who sought renewal for the church that Jesus established on earth, sometimes having to stop and confront themselves along the way as they worked for renewal where God had planted them. Members of the GMC are no different: The faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people must constantly be re-embraced, re-learned, and kept resolutely at the center of our life together so that we don't go astray.

For these reasons, the Global Methodist Church from its very beginnings has been committed to the faith of the church as it has been handed down to us through the ages. Do we agree with all faithful Jesus-followers in every tiny particular of doctrine or practice? Of course not. But we still abide by the good gift of the boundary markers of faith that God has given the church throughout its history despite its fragmentation.

The Nicene Creed stands out as one of those good gifts. As an ancient and global summary of Christian faith affirmed across Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant traditions, it is included among the Normative Documents for Our Doctrinal Standards of the Global Methodist Church.¹ The Nicene Creed is a foundational profession of Christian faith, originating from councils in

¹ *Book of Doctrines and Discipline for the Global Methodist Church*, 2024, rev. January 15, 2025, ¶105.

Nicaea (A.D. 325) and Constantinople (A.D. 381). It affirms core beliefs about God as a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

That creed has a specific phrase that is foundational to our ecumenical ministry as Global Methodists:

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.”

Our attention in session 2 and the sessions that follow will be on understanding, affirming, and enjoying the richness of that inspiring description of the church of Jesus Christ across the world. We will take up each of the four adjectives (*one, holy, catholic, and apostolic*) in our sessions together in turn and imagine how our congregations can live our identity as part of what God has been doing all over the world throughout history.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 2

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Confessing our church to be part of the “one” church of Jesus Christ; imagining how to establish meaningful relationships between our church and other followers of Jesus

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For unity in the church—across living generations (adults, teens, children), across cultures, across geography

Open the session by asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide.

For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture.

If you’d like a prayer to use, feel free to use this one:

Lord Jesus, thank you for calling us into the ministry of oneness in the body of Christ. Send your Holy Spirit to anoint us during this time as we seek to follow you into the world faithfully in the company of our brothers and sisters. Thank you that we are not alone. In your own name we pray, amen.

2 Video | Our Story

Visit the [Session 2 Resource Page](#) and view one of the short videos that have been uploaded. These videos provide examples of what GMC congregations in various parts of the world are doing locally to partner with other Christ-followers to amplify the gospel

Supplies Suggested

- Bible
- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video
- A copy of the Nicene Creed²
- The Treasure Map (or list) of other churches in your area that you made during session 1
- The list of gifts that you made during session 1

² The Nicene Creed appears in the *Book of Doctrines and Disciplines 2024* (rev. 1.15.25) at ¶105. As of this writing in 2026, a copy of the BDD can be accessed online for free in several languages at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline>.

3 Discussion

Invite those in attendance to offer their thoughts on the following questions:

- *What is one thing that connected with you from the video? Why?*
- *What is one way that you find yourself challenged by the story? Why?*

4 Walking Before We Run - Our Visits with Others in the Community

Say something like this:

Last time we gathered, we set out on a mission to learn all we could from brothers and sisters of other churches and ministries. Let's talk a bit about that experience.

Ask volunteers to tell about their experiences visiting other churches and ministries. Here are some sample questions to get started.

1. Which church did you visit, and who was your host or contact?
2. What did you learn about that other church?
3. What did you learn about *our* church through the conversation?
4. What did you find that the church you visited has *in common* with ours?
5. How was the church that you visited *different* from ours?
6. What is one way that you could imagine this other church and our church partnering to serve Jesus in our area?
7. What other things would you like to tell the group about what you experienced?

Say Hello, Round 2

Once everyone has had a chance to talk about what they experienced and learned, take a look at the Treasure Map (or list) of other ministries in your community.

Challenge yourself and the members of your group to reach out to a second ministry to visit between now and the next time you meet.

If you have Internet or mobile phone access, invite each member of your group to take a five-minute break to try to establish contact with a potential host or ministry leader to invite them to meet. If you don't have Internet or mobile phone access, make a commitment to contact a ministry leader by another means within the next few days.

5 Searching the Scriptures

Invite members of the group to open their Bibles and turn to John 17:20–21. Ask a volunteer to read the words aloud.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

One or Many?

Say something like this before asking the group to respond to the following discussion questions:

If Jesus made a point of praying that His followers might all be one, it must be very important.

- There are lots of denominations, nondenominational churches, mission agencies, and parachurch organizations all over the world. Do you find that fact to be in conflict with Jesus’ prayer that His people be “one”? Why or why not?
- What do you think Jesus meant when He prayed for us to be “one”? Why?
- What obstacles might keep our church from serving as partners with other churches? List a few.
- How might we address and overcome these obstacles? (Try to imagine at least one solution for every obstacle that you identified.)
- What obstacles might our church present to *other* churches that might desire to become partners? What’s a way we might start to address one of those obstacles in love?

6 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is a crucial aspect of community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn’t already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

7 One Church, Many Expressions

Say something like this:

We believe in *one* church with *many* expressions. Let’s search the Scriptures together to learn a bit about what church as “one” might look like.

If possible, split the group into smaller groups of two or three persons each and hand a piece of paper and writing implement (or other medium) to each smaller group.

Assign each group one of the following passages to read aloud together.

Invite them to write down the following:

- One or two things we might learn from each of these passages about how the church can be

one, and

- One or two things we might learn from each about how to be many.
 - » 1 Corinthians 12:12–31a
 - » Romans 12
 - » Ephesians 4:1–16
 - » 1 Corinthians 12:31b–13:13

Allow enough time for the groups to complete their work. Then ask them to describe what they learned from their passages. Display each smaller group's written answers in a place where the whole group can see and compare.

Then say something like this:

The passages of Scripture that we just examined are included within letters originally written to particular congregations in the first century. Among other things, these passages direct individual believers to recognize the diversity of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has provided to individuals within these congregations. We should recognize, however, that the Scriptures, including the New Testament letters, are intended for *communities* of believers, not only for individuals.

Think back to the Gifts list that we developed during session 1.

Show the group the list once more to prompt its memory if needed.

1. What other assets, talents, or gifts might we add to this list that we overlooked last time?

Add them to the list.

2. Think of the “body of Christ” image from 1 Corinthians 12. Many Christians (particularly in the West) are likely to read the passage to take account of their contributions to the body of Christ as *individuals*. What might the contribution of our *congregation as a whole* be to the global body of Christ? What are some gifts and assets that God has given to us *as a congregation* (ministry) that are unique, to be found nowhere else?

Write those down on the Gifts list. If it helps, you can add this heading: “Things that God has made true about our congregation and none other.”

8 Every Tribe

Say something like this:

In Revelation 5:9–10, the Scripture offers a breathtaking description of the expansive diversity of those who believe in the Lord Jesus throughout the world and across the centuries:

“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”

Talk about these questions together:

1. Describe how our community (city, town, region) is made up. What economic classes are present? What ethnic or racial groups live or work here? What languages are spoken?
2. On a scale of 1 to 10, with “1” being *not at all* and “10” being *excellently*, how would you rate our congregation (ministry) at reflecting the demographics of the community around us? Why?
3. Does our congregation have specific demographics in abundance (racial, class, ethnic, linguistic, age, etc.)? If so, which ones might be missing?
4. How well would you say our congregation has done building relationships with people from demographic groups in our area that are not well-represented in the congregation itself?
5. If such relationships don’t already exist, how might our congregation begin to build friendships with believers in our community who are from a background different from that of most of the people in our church? What’s one tangible, attainable step the congregation could take in the next several months? What’s one step *you* could take as a member of your congregation?

9 The Church We Might Not See

Say something like this:

According to Open Doors, one in seven Christians around the world faces serious persecution and discrimination. This can include violence, church burnings, destruction of private property, restrictions on employment and public gatherings, and other pressures that threaten Christians in their family, social, and church life.

To find more information on the present situation with the persecuted church and how you might be connected in supportive prayer, as well as the World Watch List of Christian persecution, go to opendoors.org.

10 Conclusion and Prayer

- *Confirm together the date, time, and place of the next gathering of this study group.*
- *Ask the group to commit to praying in the interim for God to show how your congregation can reach out across barriers (like language, race, class, and other characteristics) to build relationships with Christians from backgrounds that aren’t already represented in your church.*
- *Pray together to close. Use this prayer if you desire, or use your own.*

Heavenly Father, who calls people “from every tribe and language and people and nation” to be saved and made holy in the love of your Son Jesus: Remind us of the heritage you have given us in those who have gone before us. Help us to see how we stand arm-in-arm with those around the world who call on your Son’s name even now. And show us how to share in the fellowship of your love with your faithful people who are different from us. Through

| the Lord Jesus Christ, who reigns together with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever, amen.

Additional Resources for [Session Two](#)

- Ed Murphy’s Summary of Jesus’ Prayer “that all of them may be one” (John 17:21 NIV).
[Session 2 Online Resource Page](#)
- Our friends at the Lausanne Movement have produced a brief video that explains what “ecumenical” means. Visit lausanne.org/video/ecumenical.
- Bishop Leah Hidde-Gregory, “Tea with an Orthodox Priest: Oneness is Different from Unity”
[Session 2 Online Resource Page](#)
- *Christian Faith and Doctrine: An Annotated Catechism for the Global Methodist Church*, edited by Dr. David A. deSilva (Seedbed, 2024), esp. pp. 73–84



SESSION 3

A Living Witness

You Are Here

In the previous session we asked what it means to be the ancient, future, worldwide church in our community here and now. We looked through the lens of the Nicene Creed as a way of interpreting who and what we are:

“We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church.”

We talked about the word *one* and described how Jesus prayed for unity among His disciples, including us (John 17). We asked what it might mean for our congregation to be part of “every tribe and language and people and nation” (see Revelation 5:9–10) that Jesus is redeeming.

Today we will delve into the Nicene Creed’s second description of the church: the word *holy*.

Searching the Scriptures

The Bride of Christ

What does it mean to be a *holy* church?

The Scriptures sometimes use the image of the Bride of Christ to describe what holiness looks like. Marriage is part of how the Holy Spirit describes the relationship between Christ and His church through the text. The deep, intimate, committed, pure, exclusive relationship of husband

³ A word of explanation: It’s true that many Christians today, particularly in the West, find the gendered image of a *bride* unsettling. It is the same with biblical descriptions of God as *Father* or disciples as *sons* of God: They can be difficult to accept because of the masculine imagery that they carry. It may be helpful to remember that the Scripture was written within a particular context in a time and place where those images weren’t as difficult to receive as they are to many twenty-first-century readers. Biblical metaphors, like the parables of Jesus, are often the Holy Spirit’s way of comparing the things of the Triune God with things that humans know from everyday experience. That’s why the Scriptures use images of family relationships, farming, searching for lost coins or hidden pearls, and so on. If the gendered language of brides and grooms gets in your way, try to focus instead on what the image is *pointing to*: Jesus’ *sacrificial love for us* and our exclusive commitment to Jesus. That may help to prevent getting lost in the particulars of the language that the writers of Scripture were using.

and wife is one biblical image of what it means to be in a holy relationship with God.³

The Scripture comes back over and over again to the image of marriage to describe the relationship of God with His people. Take a look at these passages that include the image of marriage between God and the people of God:

- **Isaiah 54:5**

“For your Maker is your husband—
the LORD Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
he is called the God of all the earth.”

- **Isaiah 62:5**

“As a young man marries a young woman,
so will your Builder marry you;
as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so will your God rejoice over you.”

- **Hosea 2:14–23**

“Therefore I am now going to allure her [the house of Israel];
I will lead her into the wilderness
and speak tenderly to her. . . .” (2:14)

- **Matthew 22:1–14**

“Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. . . .’” (22:1–2)

- **Matthew 25:1–13**

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. . . .” (25:1)

- **John 3:29**

“The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom’s voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.”

- **2 Corinthians 11:2**

“I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.”

- **Ephesians 5:21–33**

“‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and

the church” (5:31–32; see Genesis 2:24)

- **Revelation 19:6–9**

“Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready” (19:7)

- **Revelation 21:1–8**

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (21:2).

- **Revelation 21:9–10**

“One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.’ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.”

- **The entire Song of Solomon**

“I belong to my beloved,
and his desire is for me” (7:10).

How does the “Bride of Christ” metaphor appeal to you? What do you think these passages teach us about the nature of Jesus and His love? In the discussion questions and activities suggested for session 3, your group will ask some of these questions as we try to catch a glimpse of what being a *holy* church can mean for us.

The Wedding Garment

The Scriptures also speak of a *wedding banquet* for our future with Christ, such as in the passages from Revelation 19 and Matthew 22 above. In a sermon called “On the Wedding Garment,” John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said that following Jesus Christ as Lord is like accepting the invitation to the wedding banquet of the great king. Yet to be appropriately attired for the wedding banquet, Wesley taught, we must have holiness—“‘the mind that was in Christ,’ and the ‘walking as Christ walked.’”⁴

⁴ See John Wesley, “On the Wedding Garment,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 559–65. An online version of the sermon is housed at the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, USA, at the following link: <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-120-on-the-wedding-garment/>. See also Phil. 2:5 and 1 John 2:6.

Wesley used the term *scriptural holiness*. It's an idea central to the Global Methodist Church. Anytime we ask "Why do we exist as a movement?" or "What difference do we intend this movement to make?" we refer back to the idea of scriptural holiness as a core part of who we are.

For example, at the founding General Conference of the Global Methodist Church in Costa Rica in 2024, the church attempted to answer the question of why we are here by adopting these words as our mission statement:

*The Global Methodist Church exists
to make disciples of Jesus Christ
and spread scriptural holiness across the globe.*

At the same General Conference, the church also adopted a vision statement, which seeks to answer the question of what effect we intend for the movement to have over time by God's grace:

*Through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the Global Methodist
Church envisions multiplying disciples of Jesus Christ throughout the
Earth who flourish in scriptural holiness as we worship passionately, love
extravagantly, and witness boldly.*

Note that the term *scriptural holiness* is so important to who we are that it appears both in the church's mission and in its vision—and all from the very first General Conference session. We believe that scriptural holiness is such an important component of God's work in restoring the broken world that we've made sure to put it front-and-center of who we are and what we do.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 3

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Confessing our church to be part of the “holy” church of Jesus Christ; imagining how to live as set-apart people marked by Jesus’ love in our community

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For holiness of life

Open the session by asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide.

For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture.

If you’d like a prayer to use, feel free to use this one:

Holy Spirit, you have shown us the love of the Father and the Son. Make us to be living images of your love to one another, to our congregation, and to the world around us. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

2 Video | Our Story

Visit the [Session 3 Online Resources webpage](#) and view one of the short videos that have been uploaded. These videos provide examples of what GMC congregations in various parts of the world are doing locally to partner with other Christ-followers to amplify the gospel.

Supplies Suggested

- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video
- Bibles
- A copy of the Nicene Creed⁵
- The Treasure Map (or list) of other churches in your area that you began during session 1

⁵ The Nicene Creed appears in the *Book of Doctrines and Disciplines* 2024 (rev. 1.15.25) at ¶105. As of this writing in 2026, a copy of the *BDD* can be accessed online for free in several languages at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline>.

3 Discussion

Invite those in attendance to offer their thoughts on the following questions:

- What is one thing that resonated with you from the video? Why?
- What is one way that you find yourself challenged by the video? Why?

4 Walking Before We Run - Our Visits

Say something like this:

When we gathered together previously, we set out on a second mission to learn all we could from brothers and sisters of other churches and ministries. Let's talk a bit about that experience.

Have volunteers share about their experiences visiting other churches and ministries. Here are the sample questions once more to get started, but use your own if you desire.

1. Which church did you visit, and who was your host or contact?
2. What did you learn about that other church?
3. What did you learn about *our* church through the conversation?
4. What did you find that the church you visited has *in common* with ours?
5. How was the church that you visited *different* from ours?
6. What is one way that you could imagine this other church and our church partnering to serve Jesus in our area?
7. What other things would you like to tell the group about what you experienced?

Keeping the Momentum Going

Now take the assignment one small step further.

1. *On a large piece of paper, make a list of each church that has been contacted by a member of this group.*
2. *Next to the name of each church, write the name of the person who is the main point-of-contact.*
3. *Also write the name of the member of this group who connected with that person.*
4. *Ask each group member to identify one way that he or she can keep the conversation with that other person going between now and the next time we meet, even in some small way.*

Examples could include these:

- a. *Sending a handwritten thank-you note or word of encouragement*
- b. *Offering to meet for tea, coffee, an in-office conversation, a meal, or a walk with that person and a colleague for continued conversation in the next few weeks*
- c. *Sending an e-mail to ask a question generated in curiosity from your conversation. For example: "When you told me _____ about your church, it made me curious to know more about _____. What else can you tell me about this? I'm eager*

to learn.”

- d. *Surprising the person by dropping by in a group of two or three simply to pray a blessing over him or her in person*

5. *Write down who will be responsible for which actions between now and when we meet again.*

5 Treasure Map Update

Take out the Treasure Map (or list) of other area churches that you started making in session 1. Say something like this:

Now let's look at the map (or list) we've been creating during these sessions.

We're making a way to remind ourselves that the church in our area is more than just our local congregation. We are part of a network of sisters and brothers in Christ and we always have something to learn from each other.

Ask the group to add to the Treasure Map (or list) any new information you can add based on what you've learned since session 1. Try to add at least 3–5 notes in total.

Here are some ideas for the kinds of things you can add:

- *Additional churches or ministries*
- *Labeling existing churches with strengths or talents you've come to recognize within them as you've visited*
- *Questions that have emerged for you about particular churches along the way*

6 Prayer for the Body

Ask a volunteer to offer up a prayer of thanks and blessing over the churches and ministries that are represented on the map or list.

7 Searching the Scriptures

Say something like this:

Today we're going to look together at what being a *holy* church means. Over and over again, the Scriptures talk about God's love for His people by using the image of marriage: the intimate and exclusive love between husband and wife. We talk about this image as what we call the "Bride of Christ."

Divide the group into smaller groups of two or three persons each. Ask each group to choose one of the passages below, to read it together out loud, and to respond to the following questions to each other. (After a few moments, ask each small group to tell the larger group something about what they learned; you can use the same questions if you like.)

Scripture Passages

- a. Isaiah 54:5
- b. Isaiah 62:5
- c. Hosea 2:14–23
- d. Matthew 22:1–14
- e. Matthew 25:1–13
- f. John 3:29
- g. 2 Corinthians 11:2
- h. Ephesians 5:21–33
- i. Revelation 19:6–9
- j. Revelation 21:1–8
- k. Revelation 21:9–10
- l. Song of Songs 1:1–4

Questions

1. What do you think your passage teaches about the nature of Jesus and His love? What is one thing you learn about Jesus from your passage?
2. What do you think your passage teaches about the nature of the *church*? What is one thing you learn about *us as disciples* from this passage?
3. What questions are you left with after reading your passage?

8 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is a crucial aspect of community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn't already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

9 Video – Voices from the Church

Say something like this:

Bishop Carolyn Moore tells a story of her personal experience of the local church as the Bride of Christ.

Let's take a few moments to listen to her story.

Show the video (or have volunteers read the transcript). The video is available at the Ecumenical Relations Commission's website in the [Session 3 Online Resources page](https://www.globalmethodist.org/erc-session-3) at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/erc-session-3>

Afterward, discuss two or more of the questions that follow.

1. “Through the church,” Bishop Moore said, “God loved me when I didn’t know my own worth.” When have you had a similar experience of God’s love for you through the church?
2. Bishop Moore tells of Hosea and his wife Gomer as a powerful example of God’s love for us and for all people. When have you seen the love of God seek and save someone that was broken, wounded, rebellious, or wandering away?
3. The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids (or Virgins; Matthew 25:1–13) describes a sense of expectant waiting for Jesus, the Bridegroom, to return. How does our church focus its attention on preparing for the return of Jesus? How might we take one step further?
4. When we care for the church of Jesus Christ, and not just our own *local church* but *the Church*, we demonstrate our care for the Bride of Christ. What’s one way that our church already cares for Christians in other congregations? What’s something we can do to improve?
5. Bishop Moore says that each local church, including ours, has been planted where it is as a community of welcome, love, and redemption. In what ways can your church be an outpost of God’s love?

10 Feasting at the Banquet

Talk about these questions together as a group.

1. Leviticus 11:44–45 and 1 Peter 1:16 carry God’s commandment to “be holy, because I am holy.” How does our church help its members and friends to live according to the biblical mandate to be set apart in love for Jesus?
2. What are some unexplored horizons for growing in the holiness of Jesus that we can see for our church? (Righteous living? Gospel proclamation? Working for justice for the poor and oppressed? Other things?)
3. Look again at the Treasure Map (or list) of other churches and ministries in our area. What wisdom, experience, encouragement, or know-how might one of them be able to share with our church to help us grow on one of the horizons of holiness we’ve identified? What might *our* church offer to *another* church?
4. What have the Scripture passages we’ve looked at today taught us about how to live as an alien, exile community in the world—acting differently from how the world around us does (see 1 Peter 1:13–25)?
5. For majority-immigrant congregations: What wisdom might our congregation in particular bring to other churches in our community from our experience of living amid a different culture? How might we edify our brothers and sisters who have never experienced that same “otherness” before like we might have?
6. When we practice scriptural holiness, we are also connected to the “fellowship of his sufferings” (Philippians 3:10 KJV)—our brothers and sisters around the world who endure persecution for living as Jesus’ disciples regardless of the consequences from the world around them. Set a reminder to yourself somewhere to pray for those who suffer for the name of Jesus, and try to pray for them at least daily between now and when we next meet.

11 Conclusion and Prayer

- *Confirm together the date, time, and place of the next gathering of this study group.*
- *Ask the group to commit to praying in the interim for God to reveal how to live in scriptural holiness—both in daily life and as a whole church.*
- *Remind group members to do these things before the next session:*
 - » Remember to take a moment to take your next small step in relationship (see the *Walking Before We Run* section above).
 - » Also: Before next time, look through Dr. Tim Tennent’s slideshow “Wesleyan Distinctives,” available through the ERC webpage at [link and final doc needed]. Even if the theology language or the missiology terms are new to you, give it a try anyway. We’ll talk about it together next time.
- *Pray together to close. Use this prayer if you desire, or use your own.*

Lord Jesus, whose Spirit calls us to a deeper transformation to be like you: Lead us more and more into the holy love that you have proclaimed in your word, and help us to share the overflow of your love to those around us until we meet again. Through your name we pray, amen.

Other Resources for [Session Three](#)

- “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” (Charles Wesley, 1747) — This hymn, which is no. 88 in the hymnal [Our Great Redeemer’s Praise](#) (Seedbed), is a favorite hymn of many Global Methodists and expresses our expectation of becoming a community of believers who live in God’s holiness. The second verse asks God to “take away our bent to sinning, Alpha and Omega be.” The fourth verse expresses a desire for being made completely holy (what we also call *entire sanctification*): “Finish then Thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be.”

Consider reading or singing the hymn together during one or more of the remaining sessions.

- Our Assembly of Bishops, knowing how important scriptural holiness is to the GMC’s identity, produced a teaching series on scriptural holiness in 2025 on the heels of the inaugural General Conference in Costa Rica the previous year. It’s available on the GMC website at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/bishop-teaching-series> (scroll to “Lessons in Scriptural Holiness”).

The group may find watching these videos together or as a suggested assignment before the next session helpful in understanding the call to scriptural holiness.

- Bonus activity – After having watched the videos, use newsprint or other means to make two lists as a group: “What Scriptural Holiness Is Not” and “What Scriptural Holiness Is.” Use those lists as a guide for practicing how to describe scriptural holiness to friends, family, and other Christians who might not be familiar with the idea yet.
- Richard J. Foster’s classic [Celebration of Discipline](#) is a foundational guide for living a holy life on purpose. See also his [Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups](#), edited with James Bryan Smith.
- *To Spread Scriptural Holiness: Theological, Social, and Missional Foundations for the Wesleyan Movement*, edited by Ryan N. Danker (2026) – A collection of helpful essays written by scholars from the John Wesley Institute; available through Seedbed (seedbed.com).



SESSION 4

Catholic Spirit

You Are Here

Last time, we asked what it means to be a *holy* church. The Nicene Creed continued to act as a guide for how we envision our life together as Christians in God's church:

"We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church."

During these sessions, we're exploring what it means to be part of the ancient, future, worldwide church in our communities here and now, using the Scriptures as our foundation and the Nicene Creed as a guidepost along the way. Today we will delve into the Nicene Creed's third description of the church: the word *catholic*.

We believe in and seek to be a catholic church.

What does *catholic* mean? Some of us may have a strong reaction to the word *catholic* because we usually hear it in reference to the Roman Catholic Church. But the Nicene Creed, which affirms belief in the "holy catholic" church, was written by an ecumenical council long before the age of denominations or the creation of the Church of England, which birthed the early Methodist renewal movement. In historical context, the word *catholic* in the creed primarily underscored unity and doctrinal faithfulness rather than the modern connotations that are often associated with the term today.

John Wesley promoted and practiced a "catholic spirit" among Christians—a shared understanding that as long as we follow Jesus as the Lord Himself taught, we're all on the same team and can break bread together with loving hearts, serving the world as one.⁶ Why was catholic spirit so important to Wesley?

In the decades following the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation, religious controversies plunged the European continent into persecution and war. Roman Catholics and Protestants raised armies against each other, Protestants persecuted other Protestants for not being Protestant enough, and Roman Catholics and Protestants together martyred tens of thousands of Anabaptist

⁶ See John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit," in *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 299–309. An online version of the sermon is housed at the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, Nampa, Idaho, USA, at the following link: <https://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-39-catholic-spirit/>. Quotations of "Catholic Spirit" in this session are taken from the Outler / Heitzenrater source.

Christians. In the seventeenth century, the religious conflicts of the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) claimed the lives of millions of people. For centuries, intolerance and bigotry blighted the Christian witness.⁷

Dr. Tim Tennent's slideshow "Wesleyan Distinctives" describes John Wesley as a "conjunctive theologian," meaning that he brought together various streams of theological conviction within the broader Christian church. Wesley may also be understood as a "catholic practitioner," meaning that he worked across a number of theological lines in an affirmative, cooperative way to strengthen the Christian witness, reach anyone and everyone everywhere with the gospel message, and address pressing issues of the day for the common good. Two of John Wesley's writings focus on the deep and abiding cooperative relationships among Christians of the very kind that our group is learning how to foster: *The Character of a Methodist* and his sermon "Catholic Spirit."

Rather than read through the whole of "Catholic Spirit" together, we'll note some pieces of what Wesley preached, gathering insights for how to establish relationships with other believers in our own place and time.

It's important to note that what Wesley was describing was not ecumenical relationships the way we often practice them now. He wasn't talking about cooperative arrangements, ecumenical covenants, or annual community prayer breakfasts, as valuable as those may be. Instead, he was talking about something much deeper and more basic: the love of the Father for the human race through Jesus Christ, and the love we have for one another as sisters and brothers in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Wesley on Catholic Spirit

1. "It is sure, there is a peculiar love which we owe to those that love God."

Wesley underscored a posture of *humility* to undergird our relationships with other believers. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, he wrote about the sad state of the splintered church throughout the world:

Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world were forgot, and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear His word, to imbibe His spirit, and to transcribe His life in our own!

2. The catholic spirit "is not an indifference to all opinions."

Wesley insisted that there *are* some limits to partnerships. In the next session we will explore again the foundations of the oneness of the Christian movement, but for now we recognize that there are doctrinal lines that we cannot cross.

Such doctrinal apathy, Wesley continued,

is the spawn of hell, not the offspring of heaven. This [is] unsettledness of thought, ... being "driven to and fro, and tossed about with every wind of doctrine" [Eph. 4:14] A man of a truly catholic spirit has not now his religion to seek. He is fixed as the

⁷ Adapted from Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *John Wesley on Christian Practice: The Standard Sermons in Modern English*, vol. 3 (Abingdon Press, 2003), 101.

sun in his judgment concerning the main branches of Christian doctrine. 'Tis true he is always ready to hear and weigh whatsoever can be offered against his principles. But as this does not show any wavering in his own mind, so neither does it occasion any. He does not halt between two opinions, nor vainly endeavour to blend them into one.

3. “I desire,” Wesley said, “to have a league offensive and defensive with every soldier of Christ.”

From Wesley's perspective, collaboration is not optional. It's *essential* for the Christian mission. He taught and practiced that the unity of all Christians in Christ is not a future goal to be achieved but a present fact to be recognized. In the same 1763 letter, he continued that “we have not only one faith, one hope, and one Lord, but we are directly engaged in one warfare. We are carrying the war into the devil's own quarters, who therefore summons all his hosts to war. Come, then, ye that love Him, to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty!”⁸

⁸ John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, edited by John Telford, vol. 4 (Epworth, 1960), 218.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 4

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Confessing our church to be part of the “catholic” church of Jesus Christ; imagining how to find fellowship with faithful, historically orthodox followers of Jesus in other churches in our area

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For mutual love and friendship with Christians of other cultures

Open the session by asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide.

For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture.

If you’d like a prayer to use, feel free to use this one:

Heavenly Father, who creates the many kindreds, tongues, and tribes of your Son’s church and whose Spirit inspires friendship and mutual love: Remember us as we study your word, and by your Spirit reveal to us the ways in which you work not only through us but through our brothers and sisters in other places and communities, that we may glorify your name as one, just as you are one with the Son and the Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

2 Video | Our Story

Visit the [Session 4 Online Resources webpage](#) and view one of the short videos that have been uploaded. These videos provide examples of what GMC congregations in various parts of the world are doing locally to partner with other Christ-followers to amplify the gospel.

Supplies Suggested

- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video
- Bibles
- Hymnal
- The list of churches visited and points of contact that the group generated in session 3
- The Treasure Map (or list) of other churches in your area that you started making during session 1

Discussion

Invite those in attendance to offer their thoughts on the following questions:

- What is one thing that resonated with you from the video? Why?
- What is one way that you find yourself challenged by the video? Why?

4

Walking Before We Run - Our Relationships with Other Christians

Take out the list of churches visited and points-of-contact that the group generated in session 3. Say something like this:

During the last session we came up with ways to keep our conversations going with other believers in our area, whether through notes of thanks, words of prayer or encouragement, or other small tokens of friendship. Describe how that experience has been for you since the last time we met. Talk about what you learned.

Treasure Map Update

Take out the Treasure Map (or list) that you started making in session 1. Say something like this:

Now let's look at the map we've been creating during these sessions.

We're making a way to remind ourselves that the church in our area is more than just our local congregation. We are part of a network of sisters and brothers in Christ and we always have something to learn from each other.

Ask the group to add to the Treasure Map (or list) any new information you can add based on what you've learned since session 1. Try to add at least 3–5 notes in total.

Here are some ideas for the kinds of things you can add:

- Additional churches or ministries
- Labeling existing churches with strengths or talents you've come to recognize within them as you've visited
- Questions that have emerged for you about particular churches along the way

5

Prayer for the Body

Ask a volunteer to offer up a prayer of thanks and blessing over the churches and ministries that are represented on the map or list.

Once the group is ready, continue with the study below.

5 Searching the Scriptures

Say something like this:

Today we will focus on Wesley's sermon *Catholic Spirit*, which is based on 2 Kings 10:15.

Have a volunteer read 2 Kings 10:15 aloud.

After he [Jehu] left there, he came upon Jehonadab son of Rekab, who was on his way to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, "Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?"

"I am," Jehonadab answered.

"If so," said Jehu, "give me your hand." So he did, and Jehu helped him up into the chariot.

Reflection

In each of the sections that follow, first ask a volunteer to read the Wesley quote, and then ask the group to respond to the discussion questions.

"It is sure," Wesley said, "there is a peculiar love which we owe to those that love God."

1. What are some ways we have experienced cooperative, loving, and fruitful ministry among the believers in our area in ways that go *beyond* our church?
2. What are some ways our community has been blessed by Christians coming together to serve them?
3. How have the various believers (churches or ministries) in our community experienced division and dismissive attitudes among them? What led to the divisions? How have we ourselves participated?
4. What has stood in the way of our church establishing loving and fruitful relationships with other believers in our area?
5. What are some ways the community around us has been hurt by Christians' failure to come together to serve them? What are one or two ways God might be enabling us to help correct some of those shortcomings for their good?

Wesley said that the catholic spirit "is not an indifference to all opinions."

1. What do you make of Wesley's assertion that doctrinal differences actually do matter? Do you agree with him? Disagree? Agree to a certain point?
2. As you consider believers you could join in mission and ministry from outside your church, what are some of the non-negotiables that your church would say need to be agreed upon to serve the Lord in humility and charity together? Why do you think so?
3. What are some of the differences in doctrine or practice that *aren't* deal-breakers for your church in working with other Christians? How did you determine which ones fit this category?
4. Do you think that knowing your doctrinal boundary lines makes it easier to establish

mutuality with other believers, or harder? Why?

“I desire,” Wesley said, “to have a league offensive and defensive with every soldier of Christ.”

1. What would “a league offensive and defensive with every soldier of Christ” look like in your community? Brainstorm 5 or 10 ways your congregation might partner with other churches in your area to build Christian friendships.
2. What are some of the potential benefits that could emerge by bringing together a diversity of Christians in common mission?
3. What are some potential challenges that could emerge?
4. For majority-immigrant churches: If we have experienced common ground with Christians of our culture (here or abroad) *and* with Christians in the community around us, we experience “catholicity” in two ways at the same time. What is a way that God might use the collective wisdom that we bring and make it a blessing to other Christians in the community where we live?

6 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is a crucial aspect of community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn't already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

7 Carrying It Forward - To Do Before the Next Session

Invite the group to do the following between now and the next session, starting now:

Look at the Treasure Map (or list) of ministries you've been building during these sessions. Try to identify 2–3 ministry leaders who have not yet been contacted by someone from this group.

Take a moment to invite them for prayer, food, a walk, coffee, tea, or whatever is appropriate in your context. Ask for their perspectives as to what keeps collaborative ministry partnerships from developing within your community. Take notes and be prepared to describe your findings when the group reconvenes for session 5.

8 Conclusion and Prayer

- *Confirm the date, time, and place of the next gathering of this study group.*
- *Between now and the next session, commit to praying for God to show you and your congregation other believers outside your church who can share catholicity of spirit with you. Pray that your community may be blessed as a result.*
- *Pray together to close. Use this prayer if you desire, or use your own.*

Lord Jesus, you call your church to be one as you are one with the Father. By your Spirit, anoint us with eyes to see and ears to hear how you are creating catholicity between us and our brothers and sisters. Show us how to serve with them, that our community might be blessed with your love. In your name we pray, amen.

Additional Resources for [Session Four](#)

- Hymns from [Our Great Redeemer's Praise](#) (Seedbed):
 - » *In Christ There Is No East or West*, no. 392
 - » *Jesus, United by Thy Grace*, no. 401
- Additional resources are available at the Ecumenical Relationships Commission webpage: <https://www.globalmethodist.org/ecumenical-relationships-commission>



SESSION 5

An Apostolic Church

You Are Here

In the previous session we asked what it means to be a catholic church. The Nicene Creed remained a guide for how we envision our life together as Christians in God's church:

"We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church."

Today we will look at the Nicene Creed's fourth description of the church: the word *apostolic*.

We believe in and seek to be an apostolic church.

Searching the Scriptures

In session 2 (on the word *one*) and session 4 (on the word *catholic*), we remembered that we are part of the unity of Christ's church across time and space. When we say that we are part of the apostolic church, we are affirming that we are sent out on mission to the world from that unity, and that the authority comes from Jesus Himself. (That's what *apostolic* means: that we are sent out, authorized to share in God's mission of love to the world.)

Our unity is founded on being sent together by Someone with something for some particular purpose. Christ followers are sent together, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, with the gospel of Christ, for the healing of the world in Jesus' name. Are we squarely aligned with the movement of God throughout human history? Are we living in fidelity to His word and serving Him "in spirit and in truth"? Are our "life and doctrine" sound and in good order? Are we doing all things in love? In short, are we living in faithfulness to God as we step out in faith into the world?

If the answer to such questions is yes, then we can know that we are acting apostolically.

We're moving into the world in love *and* we're aligned with the church across time and space, unified with sisters and brothers who have been faithful to Jesus, even if we never meet them or if they died hundreds of years ago. Through a great and beautiful mystery, the Holy Spirit sends us out from the community of believers—that “great multitude,” mysteriously and beautifully connected to each other through the Spirit, whether far or near, living or dead, young or old—into a world in need of Jesus' love. That's what being apostolic means: That we are coming from the unified church throughout the world and going with its blessing to where God is leading us in love and service.

Here are some Scripture passages that speak to the unity of the church and God's apostolic sending-out of His people.

- **Ephesians 4:1–6** – Paul describes the foundations of our unity across the many differing expressions of the Christian faith. Even though we're focusing on the word *apostolic* in this session, listen for how Paul uses the word *one* to describe the unity of the fellowship that sends its people outward into the world.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

The Scripture reminds us of what unites all believers everywhere for all time—the “one faith,” unified even amid our diversity and differences, that we carry with us into the world as we are sent forth.

While the word *faith* isn't a verb on its own, it can still point to action. *Having* faith, for example, is the practice of trusting in the gospel and expecting the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to save us and make us holy.

But faith is also a noun: We talk about “the faith,” the good news of God's work in the world. It was proclaimed by the first apostles and recorded in the Scriptures, and it is carried forward today in how we live. That's how Paul can write to the Ephesians about there being “one faith.”

- **Jude 3** – In his brief letter toward the end of our New Testament, the apostle Jude writes this:

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people.

Jude teaches his readers that it's important to watch and safeguard “the faith” lest it become compromised, diluted, or distorted with falsehood. The same is true for God's people today in the apostolic church around the world. It is easy to lose sight of the good news that Jesus has given us to proclaim by what we teach and how we live. The church has the responsibility and high honor of making sure that its life, witness, and practice continually align with God's revealed truth, the “one faith” God has preserved in the worldwide church throughout history.

Pride of Place – Keeping “the Faith”

In its ongoing effort to make sure that the life of the local church is connected to the ancient, future, worldwide church, the Global Methodist Church has reasserted not only the primacy of Scripture but also the foundational role of the ecumenical creeds as summary statements of the “one faith” to which we are committed. To show just how important these things are to our life as part of the apostolic church, take a look at these two passages from very early in our statement of what we believe.

- “The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments ... are the primary rule and authority for faith, morals, and service,” says our *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, “against which all other authorities must be measured.”⁹ This statement appears very early and prominently in our statement of how we order our life together, an expression of how important we hold the Scriptures to be.
- The Nicene and Apostles’ Creeds, along with the Definition of Chalcedon, are held up as “normative,” a word which “refers to the standards by which we judge true and false teaching. Normative teaching is binding and obligatory. It establishes the proper boundaries for preaching and teaching in our denomination.”¹⁰

These ideas are so crucial that the GMC has already developed a catechism (that is, a teaching guide for new members and new believers) to address the need for theologically faithful instruction within local churches. It focuses on small-group settings for making disciples of Christ, and it holds up evangelism, worship, witness, and social engagement as the responsibility first of the *local church* rather than the *denomination*.

(As a denomination we can make all the great statements of mission and doctrine that we want to, but if we’re not equipping each other to take the good news of Jesus’ restoring love into our local communities *through our local churches* where we live and worship together day by day and week by week, then we’ll be left with a half-baked blessing for the world. That’s why we try to focus so much on our local churches. It’s where most of the best work of proclaiming the good news takes place.)

The focus on intentional discipleship, faithful theological grounding, and local church accountability are essential parts of how the GMC seeks to live out its heritage as part of the apostolic church around the world. It’s how we preserve God’s good gift of “the faith,” the good news of Jesus and His coming kingdom. It’s also how we join the rest of the worldwide church in carrying that gift in love to those around us.

⁹ *Book of Doctrines and Disciplines* 2024 (rev. 1.15.25) at ¶104. As of this writing in 2026, a copy of the *BDD* can be accessed online for free in several languages at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline>.

¹⁰ ¶105.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 5

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Confessing our church to be part of the “apostolic” church of Jesus Christ; imagining how to safeguard the sound, historically orthodox teaching of Christ’s church within our own congregation.

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For the boldness to go into the world in the name of Jesus

Open the session by asking for the presence of the Holy Spirit as teacher and guide.

For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture.

If you’d like a prayer to use, feel free to use this one:

Holy Spirit, as you sent your church out at Pentecost, thank you for sending us out into the world as your people today. Give us a glimpse of how we might participate with you in taking your love to our community in confidence that you go before us always. Through Christ our Lord, amen.

2 Video | Our Story

Visit the [Session 5 Online Resources webpage](#) and view one of the short videos that have been uploaded. These videos provide examples of what GMC congregations in various parts of the world are doing locally to partner with other Christ-followers to amplify the gospel.

Supplies Suggested

- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video
- Bibles
- A copy of the GMC’s *Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, 2024 edition, if you have access¹¹
- The Treasure Map (or list) of other churches in your area that you started making during session 1

¹¹ Free online access in several languages is available at this link: <https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline>.

Discussion

Invite those in attendance to offer their thoughts on the following questions:

- What is one thing that resonated with you from the video? Why?
- What is one way that you find yourself challenged by the video? Why?

3

Walking Before We Run – Our Relationships with Others in the Community

Say something like this:

During the last session we took away the assignment of asking other believers in our area what they think might keep collaborative ministry partnerships from developing within the community.

Let's describe those conversations. What did you learn about the history of friendly partnerships between churches in the community, or about current obstacles and opportunities around forming new ones?

Treasure Map Update

Take out the Treasure Map or list (of other area churches) that you started making in session 1. Say something like this:

Now let's look at the map we've been creating during these sessions.

We're making a way to remind ourselves that the church in our area is more than just our local congregation. We are part of a network of sisters and brothers in Christ and we always have something to learn from each other.

Ask the group to add to the Treasure Map (or list) any new information you can add based on what you've learned since session 1. Try to add at least 3–5 notes in total. Here are some ideas for the kinds of things you can add:

- *Additional churches or ministries*
- *Labeling existing churches with strengths or talents you've come to recognize within them as you've visited*
- *Questions that have emerged for you about particular churches along the way*

Prayer for the Body – *Have a volunteer offer up a prayer of thanks and blessing over the churches and ministries that are represented on the map or list.*

Once the group is ready, continue with the study below.

4 Searching the Scriptures

*Ask a volunteer to turn to **Ephesians 4:1–6** and read it out loud. Then ask the group these questions:*

- Paul speaks of “one faith.” What do you think we mean when we use that phrase? What would Christians at all times and everywhere agree is contained in the “one faith”?
- What parts of the “one faith” does your congregation (ministry) naturally teach, practice, and model to those around it? What pieces of “the faith” come easier for your church than others? Here are some ideas:
 - » The saving work of Jesus?
 - » The authority of Scripture?
 - » Justice for the poor and oppressed?
 - » Obedience to God?
 - » The importance of holy day-to-day living?
- What elements of the “one faith” does your church struggle with? What are some of your blind spots as a community?
- Look again at your Treasure Map (or list) of ministries that you’ve been building together during these sessions. Who on the map might have wisdom to help your church overcome one of its weak spots in proclaiming the “one faith”? What’s one way you could ask those people for wisdom or insight *between now and the next time the group meets*?

*Ask a volunteer to turn to **Jude 3–4** and read the passage aloud.¹² Then ask the group these questions:*

1. Jude warns his readers that “certain individuals . . . have secretly slipped in among you ” with false teaching that distorts “the faith.” What are some ways that our church puts safeguards around its proclamation of the “one faith”?
2. What are some of the ways that false teaching can creep into a church (any church, not just ours)?
3. What are some ways that our church can grow in its ministry of faithful proclamation of “the faith”?

5 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is a crucial aspect of community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn’t already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

¹² Note that Jude only has a single chapter, so when we say “Jude 3–4,” it means the third and fourth verses of Jude (and not the third and fourth chapters, which don’t exist).

6 What We Believe

Ask volunteers to turn in the Book of Doctrines and Discipline, 2024 edition, to ¶¶104–105 and take turns reading them aloud for the group. The relevant passages are printed here too for ease of reference if you need them.¹³

¶104. HOLY SCRIPTURE. The canonical books of the Old and New Testaments (as specified in the *Articles of Religion*) are the primary rule and authority for faith, morals, and service, against which all other authorities must be measured.

¶105. NORMATIVE DOCUMENTS FOR OUR DOCTRINAL STANDARDS. The following summaries of the apostolic witness disclosed in Scripture have been affirmed by many Christian communities, and express orthodox Christian teaching. The word *normative* refers to the standards by which we judge true and false teaching. Normative teaching is binding and obligatory. It establishes the proper boundaries for preaching and teaching in our denomination.

Ask the group to talk about these questions aloud:

- In these early years of the GMC, how have you seen the church’s apostolic nature reflected through the life of our local church? (If you haven’t, what do you wish you could see instead?)
- What tensions, if any, have you seen develop in our church as it has sought to step out in apostolic faith? Have the tensions been productive, or counterproductive? Why?
- In your experience, what’s an example of a change that our congregation has navigated *well* that has resulted in greater faithfulness? What was that experience like for you?
- How does our local church provide for believers to become mature disciples?
- How could our church use the GMC catechism in its worship, membership classes, sermon series, youth and children’s groups, or other settings to help continually provide grounding in what we believe and how we live?
- **For majority-immigrant churches** – Families in immigrant communities can often speak from experience having gone “out” from what was known and familiar and into a new, unfamiliar place while staying true to their roots. How might our congregation serve as an example of “going forth” as apostles into the world, rooted in who God has called us to be?

7 Carrying It Forward – To Do Before Next Session

Have the Treasure Map (or list) handy that you started making during session 1, and ask the group these questions.

1. As part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church, what are some examples of how our congregation could step out in “the faith” in new ways over the next three to six months?

¹³ Free online access in several languages is available at this link: <https://www.globalmethodist.org/books-of-doctrines---discipline>.

Let's brainstorm at least three ideas.

Be sure to write them down.

2. For each of the ideas we generated, think of one way we could partner with someone from a non-GMC church to pursue it. What comes to mind?

Write these down too, perhaps beside what you wrote in item 1.

3. Looking at our Treasure Map (or list) of potential ministry partners: Who are two or three potential partners who could provide wisdom, counsel, or insight as your congregation seeks to live into “the faith” with greater fervor?
4. Between now and next time, think about this: What questions would you ask those partners if you could?

(We don't have to make contact with such partners yet. Just be ready to discuss your answers with the group when you come back next time.)

8 Conclusion and Prayer

- *Confirm together the date, time, and place of the next gathering of this study group.*
- *Between now and then, commit to praying for Christ Jesus to show you and your congregation (ministry) ways big and small to live His apostolic call faithfully.*
- *Pray together to close. Use this prayer, adapted from Ephesians 4:2–3, if you desire, or use your own.*

Lord Jesus, help us always to be humble and gentle like you. Teach us how to be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of the love your Spirit gives us for one another. By your Spirit, keep us united, bound together in peace with all who answer your call to serve as apostles of your love. We pray in your name. Amen.

Additional Resources for [Session Five](#)

- Hymn suggestion: Charles Wesley, “A Charge to Keep I Have” (no. 456 in [Our Great Redeemer's Praise](#), available from Seedbed). This classic hymn captures the spirit of the Wesley brothers to maintain the fervor of God's apostolic call to love the world faithfully. Consider singing it together or praying it aloud as a spoken prayer.
- Teaching the [GMC Catechism](#) may be one way of strengthening the connection between church members and the “one faith” we share. Digital copies are located at <https://www.globalmethodist.org/copy-of-book-of-doctrines---discipline>. *Christian Faith and Doctrine: An Annotated Catechism for the Global Methodist Church*, edited by Dr. David A. DeSilva (Seedbed, 2024), is available from Seedbed.com.



SESSION 6

Dreams and Visions, Friends and Partners

Introduction

This session will focus on determining how our churches are best situated to work together to be living witnesses of God's love in tangible ways in the community.

There are only a few words of introduction this time:

We live in the age that started at Pentecost. The Spirit's outpouring in Acts 2 birthed the church's apostolic mission into the world—"in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth," as Jesus had said at His ascension (Acts 1:8). As we have been affirming across these study sessions, GMC congregations are meant to be local expressions of the one holy catholic and apostolic church that is ancient, future, and worldwide.

That church, God's beautiful gift to the whole world, had spanned the world long before the GMC was formed and will continue until Jesus comes again—and we in the GMC get to be part of it now.



Group Discussion and Activity Guide

SESSION 6

Anticipated outcome for this session:

Laying strategic plans for how to join in Christ's labor of love to the community around us with other faithful followers of Jesus

This session's activity will take more preparation than the previous ones, so if you are a group leader or facilitator, make sure to read through the material to get an idea of the activity before you embark on these steps with your group.

1 Prayer

Suggested prayer-and-worship focus for this session:

For wisdom to see the needs in the community around us the name of Jesus

Open the session by asking for the Open the session with prayer—but a little differently this time. Have volunteers

read through the prayer and Scripture passages below, using the biblical text as part of the prayer.

(For groups that would like to have an extended time of prayer and worship, consider starting that here, inviting group members to pray as they feel led, whether in unison, silently, or all-at-once and aloud—whatever is true to your culture. Feel free to incorporate the following prayer if desired.)

Let us pray together.

Holy Spirit, who empowers us, enlivens us, and sends us out as part of the one holy catholic and apostolic church: Fill us with your presence as we gather to study your word. Show us how to live faithfully. Help us to receive the birthright you have given all of your people throughout time and space, that we might see your power and your love on full display in these days. Let us be attentive when you do as you spoke to the prophet Joel and affirmed for the apostles:

Supplies Suggested

- A way to take notes for your group, such as a large piece of paper, a chalkboard or whiteboard, or a projected computer screen
- A way to make several lists that are visible to the whole group next to each other, such as with pieces of newsprint, a chalkboard, a whiteboard, or a projected spreadsheet
- The Treasure Map (or list) of other churches in your area that you made during session 1
- A large note (on paper, a chalkboard, a projected screen, etc.) that says this, large enough that everyone can see it:

Using ASSET from our congregation and ASSET from the body of Christ in our area, we can ACTION in the community so that FULFILLED GOOD-NEWS NEED in Jesus' name.

- Writing implements (such as pens, chalk, or markers)
- Ability to show a video
- Bibles

“In the last days, God says,
 I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
 Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your young men will see visions,
 your old men will dream dreams.
 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.”

As it will be in the last days, so let it be in our day, that we might see your love break forth through our congregation and into the world around us, that they might experience the love of Christ Jesus as we have.

Through His name we pray, who with you and the Father lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever, amen.

Pause here to offer joys and concerns if desired, or continue with the study.

2 Video | Our Story

There is no Our Story video for this session. By now, this group may have its own story to tell. If desired, you can spend a few moments sharing your own stories of what you’ve learned from this work of building ecumenical relationships. If you were to make an Our Story video, what would you say to those who view it?

3 What Do We Do Now? – Apostolic Assets

Say something like this:

In this session we aim to do some Spirit-infused brainstorming and imagination work. We want to move now from exploring *who we are* as a church to the “So what?” questions of *what we can do* in relationships with other believers in our community.

Make sure you have a way of making a big list that everyone in the room can see at the same time, perhaps using a large piece of newsprint, a chalkboard, a whiteboard, or a projected spreadsheet—whatever works for you.

Also make sure you have the Treasure Map (or list) of potential ministry partners that you started during session 1.

List 1 – Assets: Our Area

On a piece of newsprint (whiteboard, projected screen, etc.), start the first list and call it “Assets: Our Area.” Say something like this:

We’re about to make four lists as a group. To start, let’s look at the Treasure Map (or list) we’ve

been making of other churches around us.

What have we learned about the *strengths* of the other congregations (ministries) in our area? Under “**Assets: Our Area,**” let’s jot down a list of as many strengths as we can think of. These can be strengths of *individual* churches or ministries, or they can be strengths of *this region of the body of Christ* as a whole. Let’s try to add as many things as we can.

Let’s say a prayer of thanks to God for the richness of the gifts He has given to Christians in our area.

Place the list where everyone in the group can see it (such as taping it to a wall). Ask a volunteer to say a prayer of thanks.

List 2 – Assets: Our Church

Say something like this:

Now we’ll make a second list and label it “**Assets: Our Church.**” What strengths does *our* congregation bring to the mission of the one holy catholic and apostolic church in our area? Let’s add as many things as we can.

Post this list in the room beside the first list you made—but leaving a gap between them for posting the third list, which will come in a moment—so that you can see the community’s assets and your church’s assets side by side.

List 3 – Good News Needs

Say something like this:

Now we’ll make a third list and call it “Good News Needs.” Thinking about our geographical area, write down as many needs that you know Jesus cares about as you can from your knowledge of His word in Scripture.

These can be

- Spiritual needs (like deliverance from sins or destructive behaviors, a sense of hope)
- Emotional / relational / intellectual needs (restoration of broken families, educational opportunities)
- Physical needs (shelter, clean water, medicine, etc.)
- Any other needs you can think of

(If we get stuck, here’s a way to jumpstart the thinking: What things in our area *don’t yet look like the Kingdom of God?*)

Post this list between and above the other two, so that there’s a triangle of lists with a large empty space in the middle.



List 4 – Apostolic Actions

Say something like this:

Now we'll make a fourth and final list in the empty space in the middle, called “**Apostolic Actions.**” Let's write down as many ideas as we can for how Christians in our area, including our church, might begin to offer their gifts and strengths in ways that show the good news of the kingdom of God.

The ideas don't need to be great or even good. They just need to be *ideas*. Write them all down, no matter how farfetched or attainable they might seem.

Post this fourth list in the empty space in the middle between the other three lists you've made

Missional Links

Say something like this:

Now we're going to take turns drawing a link between each *Apostolic Action* and at least one *Asset* on each list that seems like it could be helpful to enabling that action.

We'll also link each *Apostolic Action* to at least one *Good News Need* that the action would help to alleviate or solve.

If the result appears as a tangled web of lines, that's okay. The point is to see where the fuel is for whatever fire the Holy Spirit wants to inspire in our church and community—and to make sure it's grounded in realities that our community is actually facing.

Give group members a few minutes to take turns drawing those links, then continue:

Let's pause for a moment to look at the web of results and talk about them together.

- What do you notice?
- Do you see anything that surprises you?
- Do you notice anything missing as Assets, Actions, or Needs that hadn't been considered before? Add *them while you're thinking about them and link as many as you can.*

4 Break

Now might be a good time to take a pause and then come back. In cultures or contexts where the sharing of a meal is a crucial aspect of community life, this might be the time to do it (if it didn't already happen at the beginning); the conversation can continue after the time of fellowship. This could also be a short break for refreshments.

5 Ecumenical Possibilities

Make sure you've posted your large note (see the supplies list) as a guide where everyone can see it. Then divide the group into smaller groups of two or three persons each. Have each group

claim (for the conversation) at least one Action from the list and rewrite it this way on a sheet of paper (note that it's okay if not all the Actions are claimed in the end):

Using ASSET from our congregation
and ASSET from the body of Christ in our area,
we can ACTION in the community
so that FULFILLED GOOD-NEWS NEED in Jesus' name.

Give this example if it's helpful.

In a fictional town, most parents work long hours for low pay at a local employer and can't get home to meet their kids right away after school. This leads to kids spending aimless time in town or at home for three hours every school day, alone or tempted to get into trouble with each other. The church loves to try new things, and the community's citizens have a high average age.

Church Asset: Passion for trying new things

Area Asset: Abundance of retirees and elderly

Good-News Need: Kids know that they have access to a safe, fun place to go, and to adults outside their family to model God's love for them, while they wait for their parents to be released from the factory's second shift each afternoon.

Action: Starting an afternoon fun-and-mentorship ministry for fourth-graders for free

Sample Result – Ecumenical Possibility

Using the passion for trying new things from our congregation
and the abundance of retirees and elderly from the body of Christ in our area,
we can start an afternoon fun-and-mentorship ministry for fourth graders for free in
the community
so that kids know that they have a safe, fun place to go, and adults outside their
family to model God's love for them, while they wait for their parents to be released
from the factory's second shift each afternoon—in Jesus' name.

Have group members write each Ecumenical Possibility on a new, individual piece of paper and post it near the lists. They don't have to be perfect; sometimes they'll be wordy or they might not feel like they make sense. That's okay. Just aim to put something on paper as a starting point. (God can use a joyful noise.)

6 Reflections

Once group members have finished posting their Ecumenical Possibility statements, ask these questions.

1. Look at the collection of Ecumenical Possibilities that were prompted in your group. What do you notice about them? Are there similarities? Differences? Do you notice them moving in a similar direction, or are they different?
2. What two or three of these options seem most attainable toward ecumenical partnerships for our church? Why?
3. Select one of them. What would the first steps be to making it a reality?
4. Before we leave the session, let's take a first step toward making it a reality, deciding how to see it through as far as it will go with God's blessing.
5. Who in the group will share this Ecumenical Possibility with one of the potential partners we identified? *[If possible, do this before the session adjourns.]*
6. **For majority-immigrant churches** – What is one way that we can include some aspect of our particular culture in how we approach this potential partner? How might we use what we bring—language, food, stories, celebrations, particular forms of prayer, worship, or mission—as a gift of love to the other congregation?

Dedicate the work to the Lord in prayer together; ask Him to guide it, and then commit to pursuing the opportunity in Jesus' name unless He directs otherwise.

7 Conclusion and Prayer

- *If your group will continue meeting after this session, then confirm together the date, time, and place of its next gathering.*
- *Jesus' prayer for the church's unity in John 17 includes a glimpse at the Lord's gift of supernatural joy (John 17:13). It also hints at our need for supernatural protection from the evil one (John 17:15) as we follow Jesus as His body.*

Conclude today's session with a time of group prayer. Here are some prompts to guide your prayer together:

- » *Praying for the Holy Spirit to guide the work of fostering ecumenical relationships—the partnerships that will emerge, the challenges that will inevitably come, and the witness for Christ in our community; praying that others will be blessed by the inbreaking of Christ's kingdom in some way through this ministry*
- » *Confessing our complicity with the barriers that keep members of Jesus' body trapped in ministry silos and isolated from each other*
- » *Offering our willingness to be changed*
- » *Asking for supernatural perception, safety, and boldness to break through barriers in*

specific, practical, and loving ways

- » *Claiming a wider and more fruitful impact in our community and beyond for the glory of Christ Jesus and the blessing of people who may not even be aware of His love yet*
- » *Sharing with each other any words of knowledge or other impressions or inklings from the Holy Spirit that may emerge from the time of prayer*

Additional Resources for [Session Six](#)

- Watch the video for the song “Start Right Here” by Casting Crowns.
Video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGvfagBOHJE>

Casting Crowns is a Christian band that for decades has been exhorting the church in love to follow its vocation. (It is American in origin, so if that isn’t your context, ask how you might adapt the ideas into your own culture where you are so that it resonates more with the church in your area.) Listen to the lyrics of “Start Right Here” and talk together about which parts of the song are the most challenging and which are the most affirming for your church. What does the song’s message prompt you to do in pursuit of partnerships among Christians in your area.

- **Petros Network** – Petros Network is “a faith-based organization that partners with world-changers . . . to equip indigenous leaders to share, show, and spread the Good News of Jesus among their own people and end spiritual and physical poverty.” See more at petrosnetwork.org.
- **Ministry Architects / Ministry Incubators** – For nearly 25 years, Ministry Architects has been helping church ministries to become more sustainable through fostering healthy systems and innovative change. Its Ministry Incubators division for over 10 years has been helping early-stage Christian social entrepreneurs to get their new ministry ideas clarified, launched and sustainable. See more at ministryarchitects.com and ministryincubators.com.



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