BELOVED COMMUNITY

FEAR LESS CONVERSATIONS

West Ohio Conference
The United Methodist Church
OPENING PRAYER

Disturb us, O Lord
when we are too well-pleased with ourselves
when our dreams have come true because we dreamed too little,
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, O Lord
when with the abundance of things we possess,
we have lost our thirst for the water of life
when, having fallen in love with time,
we have ceased to dream of eternity
and in our efforts to build a new earth,
we have allowed our vision of Heaven to grow dim.

Stir us, O Lord
to dare more boldly, to venture into wider seas
where storms show Thy mastery,
where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars.
In the name of Him who pushed back the horizons of our hopes
and invited the brave to follow. Amen

(Adapted from Sir Francis Drake’s Prayer)

INDIVIDUAL WARM-UP

How have you experienced the following themes and what do you believe about each of them?:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fear</th>
<th>Redemption</th>
<th>Love</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hope</td>
<td>Brokenness</td>
<td>Community</td>
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GROUP WARM-UP

Together review the RESPECTful Guidelines and Mutual Invitation process and recommit to your small group covenant.

Discuss the following questions or prompts:

1. How do you experience each of the above AND how do you share those with others?
2. What would be the greatest risk you could take in building relationships with people who are different from you? What could be the greatest reward?
**Beloved Community**

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So, we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as e is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

— 1 John 4:7-21 (NRSV)

**Discuss as a Group**

What stands out to you in this scripture? Why?

**What Does The United Methodist Church Say?**

“Taking an active stance in society is nothing new for followers of John Wesley. He set the example for us to combine personal and social piety. Ever since, predecessor churches to United Methodism flourished in the United States, we have been known as a denomination involved with people’s lives, with political and social struggles, having local to international mission implications. Such involvement is an expression of the personal change we experience in our baptism and conversion.

The United Methodist Church believes God’s love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. So, we care enough about people’s lives to risk interpreting God’s love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex. The church helps us think and act out a faith perspective, not just responding to all the other ‘mind-makers-up’ that exist in our society.”

— Excerpt from 2016 Book of Resolutions, p. 23-24

**Discuss as a Group**

What stands out to you from our United Methodist doctrine?
WHAT IS BELOVED COMMUNITY?

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired and called many to believe in and live out beloved community. King believed God desired for us to live in beloved community where...

**LOVE AND JUSTICE RULE**

It is a community where equality of opportunity, of privilege and property is widely distributed.

**EVERYONE’S WORTH IS AFFIRMED**

It is a community where everyone respects the dignity and worth of all human persons and living beings.

**DIVERSITY ENRICHES ALL LIVES THROUGH COMMON MEMORIES AND A SHARED FUTURE**

It is a community where one is judged by the content of one’s character rather than color of one’s skin.

**STORIES INSPIRE HOPE**

It is a community of interpretation where our stories, context, and future hope have meaning.

**ALL ARE LOVED UNCONDITIONALLY**

It is a community where our gifts and resources are held not for ourselves alone but as instruments of service for the rest of humanity.

— Adapted from Charles Marsh, “The Beloved Community”

Developing beloved community takes intentionality, commitment, and a willingness to peacefully confront when the vision and goals of the community are not being upheld.

**DISCUSS AS A GROUP**

How would you define “beloved community”?

When, if ever, have your experienced beloved community?

If your congregation and community could become a perfect beloved community overnight, what would it look, sound, and feel like? How would you change because of it?

What is one thing you can change, learn, or become that could help your congregation and community look, sound, and feel more like a beloved community now…this week?
PRAY TOGETHER...

“Lord, you call us out of captivity into the freedom of your beloved community. As we pass through the wilderness spaces of our lives, grant us ears to hear you, eyes to see you, and hearts to ache for you, that we might not turn away from the brothers and sisters who help us remember who we are. Amen.

— Adapted from Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals

BECOMING BELOVED COMMUNITY

This session’s video will feature the theological grounding and reflection of Dee Stickley-Miner.

IN THIS SESSION YOU WILL HEAR HOW...

Join God out in the world where people often wonder if they matter… if their life really has value. God does see value in each and every person and yearns for us to see that too.

Scarcity is a myth. There is no limited supply of love, grace, forgiveness, and redemption… and there is room for everyone. We have to choose to be generous with our welcome and hospitality so that anyone can experiences the miracle of faith.

If we just stop at being inspired and don’t move into action then we have squandered the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is time for us to do something.

All of God’s people are called.

Love with reckless abandon.

Learn her name. Hear his story.

God’s Spirit is calling us to cross the many invisible borders that separate us from people who are not like us.

People are waiting and it’s up to us to decide if we truly do believe that with God all things are possible.

Take the risk. You’ll make mistakes… and that’s okay. Risk anyway.
Beloved Community: Watch Video

After watching the video, discuss the following questions:

1. What’s holding you back from risking the messiness of building relationships and loving others like Jesus has loved you?
2. What do you have “enough of” personally? In your congregation? In your community?
3. What are the dreams of your beloved community? How can you ask family, friends, and strangers what they would dream for your community and how is God calling you to create and sustain beloved community where you are right now?

Share Your Story

Have you or your small group been transformed or inspired toward action through this curriculum?

We’d love to share your story with others throughout the Conference! Please submit a 1/2 page to 1-page story (and a photo if relevant) to Mariellyn Grace at mgrace@wocumc.org