

Dialoguing With Dignity

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Floris United Methodist Church, 2018

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Introduction

Purpose Statement

To equip small groups in local congregation to understand the factors affecting the United Methodist Church (UMC) conversation on LGBT inclusion and lead Christ-centered conversations within their individual churches.

Foundational Principles

The curriculum aims to empower congregations through education, experience and tools for effective dialogue. Four core values guide this program:

- **Christ-centered conversation:** The program aims to keep Christ and Christian ethics at the center of conversation by incorporating Scripture, encouraging spiritual mindfulness and establishing biblical approaches to conflict management.
- **Action-based leadership:** The program strives not only to teach conflict management, but to give facilitators opportunities to model Christ-centered conflict through examples of mindful communication.
- **Contextual content:** The program recognizes that managing difficult conversations is not “one size fits all” and seeks to strike a balance between structured and customizable content.
- **Equipping education:** The program seeks to equip participants with practice skill sets to navigate both conversations of LGBT inclusion and other conflicts within emotionally charged contexts.

Facilitator Requirements

Each program should have two or three main facilitators, and larger programs may also enroll assistant facilitators as needed. Requirements for facilitators include:

- **Conflict management skills:** Facilitators should hold strong active listening skills and conflict management skills in order to best moderate difficult conversations. While formal training is not required, facilitators should be church community members with skillsets or experience in peacemaking.
- **Time commitment:** Facilitators should commit to attending and preparing for all sessions and complete reading *The Anatomy of Peace* (The Alban Institute, 2012) before the group begins meeting.
- **Transparency:** Facilitators will share part of their own journey regarding beliefs on LGBT inclusion with program participants in order to model effective communication. While facilitators may share while maintaining their own boundaries, they must be comfortable sharing personal experiences.
- **Diversity of belief and experience:** Facilitators should come to the group aware of their own differences in beliefs and background in order to model Christ-centered communication among people with different theological and/or political perspectives. This commitment encourages participants from different backgrounds to actively engage with decreased fear

of social repercussions. Churches are highly advised to recruit facilitators who hold different beliefs on LGBT inclusion.

Participants and Group Size

This program is designed for a Christian community interested in the conversation surrounding LGBT inclusion within the UMC. The program builds on principles learned each week, so participants should make every effort to attend all six sessions. Participants are not required to hold a particular set of beliefs regarding LGBT inclusion, but are asked to commit to a standard of respectful communication. Due to the nature of the program, the suggested age range is high school students and older. The ideal group size is 10-20 participants, although the sessions can be modified for large and small group discussion if the number is greatly higher or lower than the ideal. Each session should last 90 minutes.

Required Space and Materials

- Movable chairs that can be placed in circles or small groups
- Room large enough for participants to hold both large group discussions/presentations and small group discussions
- Whiteboard or oversized notepad
- Projector with connection to a device with internet access
- Folders for individual participants
- Writing utensils
- Tables or hard surfaces on which participants can write
- Access to printer for group handouts

For the final session, a larger space and amplifying equipment may be needed.

Session One: Christ-Centered Conversations

Session Objectives

- Introduction of program and participants
- Overview of the current status of LGBT inclusion in the United Methodist Church
- Exploration and discussion of scripture related to biblical conflict
- Group covenant to Christ-centered conversations

Resources

- [A Way Forward](#) Video
- Session One Scripture Handout
- Conversational Covenant Handout

Curriculum Instructions

Introduction

1. Facilitators should briefly introduce themselves and welcome participants.
2. Give a brief explanation of both the purpose of the six-week series and a brief overview of the session's agenda.
3. Lead an icebreaker with participants to allow them to introduce themselves further as time allows.

Part One:

Facilitators should project the video, [A Way Forward](#), available online at <https://vimeo.com/217081225>

Customizable Content: This session provides opportunities for facilitators to model transparency and bring clarity to their participants. To the extent the facilitators and church staff feel comfortable, briefly explain how the participants' individual church body has engaged with this topic. Potential topics include:

- Staff involvement in discussions, training or conversations.
- Opportunities for involvement currently available for LGBT people within the individual church.
- Major changes in policy or procedure regarding LGBT people that have occurred over the past several years.
- Programs or discussions for people interested in the topic of LGBT inclusion.

Part Two:

Facilitators should lead discussion on identifying key traits of biblical conflict. Have group members volunteer to read the verses listed on the Session One Scripture handout. Under time restrictions, read only Acts 15 and encourage participants to read the other verses outside of class or break out into small groups and assign each group a passage to read. After reading the

verses, facilitators should lead discussion on how the Bible models navigating difficult conversations.

On the left half of the whiteboard/oversized notepad, facilitators should write down suggestions brought forward from the group on how to handle conflict or difficult situations biblically. On the right of the board, facilitators should ask participants to list traits of conflict they normally experience in their lives. Example below:

Biblical Conflict	Experienced Conflict

Facilitator Discussion Questions

1. What biblical principles can we pull about conflict and difficult situations from these verses?
2. What factors keep us from following biblical principles during conflict?
3. How is the culture we are a part of shape our understanding of conflict? Do we bring that culture into the church?

Example Responses

Biblical Conflict	Experienced Conflict
Loving others first Listening to the perspectives of others Extended respect, even when the other person(s) are undeserving Avoiding public shaming, but speaking in love Focus on community	Disrespect Seeking to hurt the feelings or reputation of someone "us vs. them" mentality

Using the discussion facilitated by the previous activity, transition into reading John 17:14-18:

John 17:14-18 (CEB)
I gave your word to them and the world hated them, because they don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. I'm not asking that you take them out of this world but that you keep them safe from the evil one. They don't belong to this world, just as I don't belong to this world. Make them holy in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

Discussion

How do we separate the world's way of conflicting with God's way of conflicting?

Part Three:

Pass out the Conversational Covenant handout. Explain to participants that Christ-centered conversations require a model and a standard to which the group can hold themselves

accountable. Read over the statement together, and pause for applicable comments, questions and brief discussions. After reading and reviewing the statement, encourage participants to spend a few minutes reflecting on the content. If they feel comfortable, ask them if they would be willing to sign the commitment as a symbolic gesture of stepping into difficult conversations with grace. Afterwards, instruct participants to store their commitment in their provided folder. You may collect the folders for future sessions or allow participants to hold onto them and bring them to future sessions.

Conclusion:

Facilitators should end the session with prayer. While facilitators are welcome to include additional content, including group prayer requests, the prayer should include the future of the UMC and spiritual guidance as the group continues moving forward.

Session One Scripture

Matthew 5:21-26 (CEB)

"You have heard that it was said to those who lived long ago, *Don't commit murder*, and all who commit murder will be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister will be in danger of judgment. If they say to their brother or sister, 'You idiot,' they will be in danger of being condemned by the governing council. And if they say, 'You fool,' they will be in danger of fiery hell. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift at the altar and go. First make things right with your brother or sister and then come back and offer your gift. Be sure to make friends quickly with your opponents while you are with them on the way to court. Otherwise, they will haul you before the judge, the judge will turn you over to the officer of the court, and you will be thrown into prison. I say to you in all seriousness that you won't get out of there until you've paid the very last penny.

Matthew 18:15-17 (CEB)

"If your brother or sister sins against you, go and correct them when you are alone together. If they listen to you, then you've won over your brother or sister. But if they won't listen, take with you one or two others so that every word may be established by the mouth of two or three witnesses. But if they still won't pay attention, report it to the church. If they won't pay attention even to the church, treat them as you would a Gentile and tax collector.

Acts 15:1-21 (CEB)

Some people came down from Judea teaching the family of believers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom we've received from Moses, you can't be saved." Paul and Barnabas took sides against these Judeans and argued strongly against their position.

The church at Antioch appointed Paul, Barnabas, and several others from Antioch to go up to Jerusalem to set this question before the apostles and the elders. The church sent this delegation on their way. They traveled through Phoenicia and Samaria, telling stories about the conversion of the Gentiles to everyone. Their reports thrilled the brothers and sisters. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the

church, the apostles, and the elders all welcomed them. They gave a full report of what God had accomplished through their activity. Some believers from among the Pharisees stood up and claimed, "The Gentiles must be circumcised. They must be required to keep the Law from Moses."

The apostles and the elders gathered to consider this matter. After much debate, Peter stood and addressed them, "Fellow believers, you know that, early on, God chose me from among you as the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and come to believe. God, who knows people's deepest thoughts and desires, confirmed this by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, but purified their deepest thoughts and desires through faith. Why then are you now challenging God by placing a burden on the shoulders of these disciples that neither we nor our ancestors could bear? On the contrary, we believe that we and they are saved in the same way, by the grace of the Lord Jesus."

The entire assembly fell quiet as they listened to Barnabas and Paul describe all the signs and wonders God did among the Gentiles through their activity. When Barnabas and Paul also fell silent, James responded, "Fellow believers, listen to me. Simon reported how, in his kindness, God came to the Gentiles in the first place, to raise up from them a people of God. The prophets' words agree with this; as it is written,

After this I will return,
and I will rebuild David's fallen tent;
I will rebuild what has been torn down.
I will restore it
so that the rest of humanity will seek the Lord,
even all the Gentiles who belong to me.
The Lord says this, the one who does these things
known from earliest times.

"Therefore, I conclude that we shouldn't create problems for Gentiles who turn to God. Instead, we should write a letter, telling them to avoid the pollution associated with idols, sexual immorality, eating meat from strangled animals, and consuming blood. After all, Moses has been proclaimed in every city for a long time, and is read aloud every Sabbath in every synagogue.

Conversational Covenant

1. **Conscientious engagement (Micah 6:8):** I acknowledge the difficulty of conflict and commit to conscientious engagement with a spirit of listening, humility and love.
2. **Language of peace (Psalms 19:14):** I commit to language that honors the dignity and worth of others in both public and private contexts.
3. **Intentional inclusion (Ephesians 2:14):** I recognize the diversity of beliefs in the body of Christ, and commit to a spirit of listening and respect regardless of differing beliefs.
4. **Unwarranted grace (Ephesians 4:31-32):** I commit to extending grace and forgiveness to those whose words or actions are hurtful to me, regardless of the deservedness or repentance of the individual or group.
5. **Steadfast honesty (Ephesians 4:25):** I commit to speaking with honesty, clarity and respect.
6. **Restorative relationships (John 1:9):** I commit to openness of conviction when I have wronged others, and the willingness to seek forgiveness from those whom I have wronged.

I commit to pursue these principles in my behaviors and thoughts as we enter into difficult conversations together.

Signature_____

Session Two: Building Boundaries

Session Objectives

- Explore scriptural passages related to building emotional boundaries
- Enable participants to understand their personal experiences and perspectives they bring to the table
- Model trust and transparency through facilitator’s sharing of stories
- Equip participants with strategies of boundary building and emotional regulation

Resources

- Our Stories Handout
- Building Boundaries Handout

Curriculum Instructions

Introduction:

Facilitators should briefly re-introduce themselves, welcome participants, review the purpose of the six-week series and introduce the current session topic. In addition, facilitators should review the bolded principles of the Conversational Covenant from Session One.

Part One:

Begin conversation by asking participants to think back on Session One discussion about barriers to Christ-centered conflict. Remind participants of their answers. When the topic of becoming overwhelmed by emotions comes up (guide discussion to this if it does not) focus in discussion on this factor. Encourage participants to have this factor in mind as you explore Matthew 14:22-27 together:

Matthew 14:22-27 (CEB)
Right then, Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead to the other side of the lake while he dismissed the crowds. When he sent them away, he went up onto a mountain by himself to pray. Evening came and he was alone. Meanwhile, the boat, fighting a strong headwind, was being battered by the waves and was already far away from land. Very early in the morning he came to his disciples, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified and said, "It's a ghost!" They were so frightened they screamed. Just then Jesus spoke to them, "Be encouraged! It's me. Don't be afraid."

Discussion questions:

1. How does Jesus model self-care in this passage?
2. What can we learn about difficult conversations from this passage?

Using what we learned from the passage, guide conversation by emphasizing these three points:

1. When we experience emotionally draining tasks, we need time set aside for spiritual and emotional renewal.
2. There are times to step back, but also times to engage.
3. Before engaging with stressful situations, it is helpful to refocus our purpose and self-understanding.

These points set up the next topic of understanding how we create and follow emotional and spiritual boundaries.

Part Two:

Facilitators should explain to participants that the first step in understanding our own boundaries is understanding the stories and emotional baggage we bring to this conversation. After passing out the "Our Stories" handout, instruct participants to spend 10-15 minutes completing the worksheet. Inform them that the information included on the worksheet will be kept in their personal folders and only viewed by the participant themselves or anyone with whom they may wish to share it. If desired, give participants room to spread out or find solitude to complete the handout.

When participants have completed the handout, invite them back to the larger group. Explain that in a few weeks the program will invite participants to share their own stories and beliefs in a small group setting. Use the script below or one with the same foundational principles:

"As leaders, we recognize that we are asking you to engage in difficult conversations, share personal experiences and enter into a space that might push you out of your comfort zone. We want to honor that vulnerability, and walk alongside you in these difficult conversations. In the spirit of that, we would like to share a little bit about our own backgrounds, beliefs and how we choose to engage in these conversations."

As a catalyst for leading participants in exploring their stories, facilitators should model grace-filled communication of personal experience and opinions. Facilitators should share for about five minutes on their personal perspectives and history with LGBT inclusion topics. Potential prompts for facilitators are included below:

1. What is your background of beliefs on the ethics of LGBT sexuality?
2. How does it affect your personal life?
3. What factors shape your beliefs?
4. Why is peacemaking and unity important to you? How do you live that out in this conversation?
5. How do you include Christ in difficult conversations?
6. How do your personal boundaries inform these conversations?

As the first examples of sharing personal experience, facilitators play an important role for modeling effective communication while engaging with vulnerable and controversial topics. To effectively model this practice, facilitators should include the following factors:

1. Facilitators should represent a diversity of beliefs, backgrounds and hopes for the future. This space is an opportunity to model a space that allows people to express honesty without fear of social condemnation.
2. Facilitators should focus on I-statements, avoid derogatory language and avoid generalization about groups or individuals with differing opinions.
3. Facilitators should focus on individual experience and the factors that influence their current beliefs.

If participants have questions or comments, allow a brief period of time (do not exceed 10 minutes) following your sharing. If questions or comments include antagonistic language or challenges to personal beliefs, redirect participants by informing them that there will be space later in the program for those conversations. Transition into the next topic of addressing strategies for building boundaries for sharing our stories.

Part Three:

Invite participants to think on incidents where they have become frustrated or emotionally overwhelmed. On the whiteboard/notepad, divide the space into four different sections using the model shown below:

Situation/Trigger	Emotional reaction	Action/response	Result

Using the board, fill out between 3-4 answers within the topic of situation/trigger. See examples of situations/triggers below:

1. A person references your belief as "close-minded."
2. The word "sick" is used to describe sexual minorities.
3. A person rolls their eyes when you ask them to use preferred pronouns.
4. You feel like you cannot express yourself in a setting without being attacked for holding a minority opinion.

Follow the chart, filling out corresponding reactions and responses for each situation. Attempt to establish and emphasize a pattern of negative consequences when emotions are escalated. See example on following page:

Situation/Trigger	Emotional reaction	Action/response	Result
Someone uses the phrase "so-called Christians"	Anger, hurt, feelings of invalidation of Christianity or morality	Attacking or questioning the individual's morality/spirituality	Conversation becomes off topic, shifts to attacks on individuals instead of discussion of topic, relationships between parties are damaged

Walk participants through 2-3 examples of situations that highlight how recognizing our emotional response and changing our reaction can change the situation. Use and consider the following questions and responses for each category:

Situation/Trigger

Why would the person speaking say this? Do you think that they sincerely meant what they said?

Response Highlights:

- Recognizing that sometimes people say things that don't reflect what they really mean, but can sometimes be projections of feels of hurt or not being heard.
- An opportunity to live out Christian faith by extending grace to those who have hurt us.

Emotional Reaction

What factors do you bring to this emotional reaction? Do you carry any baggage from past hurts or conflicts that impacts your interpretation of the situation/trigger?

Response Highlights:

- By understanding when we are reacting to not only the current situation but also past hurt, we can focus on our emotional reactions within the current conversation.
- Strong emotions help us to recognize when a situation is out of balance and motivate us to change.
- We have an opportunity for spiritual growth
 - If someone were to criticize the merit of our church involvement, it is an opportunity for us to meditate on how our identity lies in Christ.
 - We have an opportunity to trust in God as a God of justice when we feel like we have personally been wronged.
- Emotions can become a tool to help us empathize with and understand those who are different than us.
 - I feel angry and upset when I am portrayed as a "false Christian," I imagine people with other views than I also feel a similarly negative emotion when accused of being a false Christian.

Action/Response

How do I keep my actions productive? How do I show Christ through my actions?

Response Highlights:

- Redirect attention back to shared mutual purpose
- Break the cycle of violence by not responding to hurtful statements with other hurtful statements
- Know when to step out
- Encourage participants to recognize when emotions become overwhelming and then need time to process, reorient and heal
- Focus on responses that recognize the full personhood of the person or group being addressed
- Avoid language that reduces them to a group or system of beliefs

Result

Contrast with participants impulsive responses to our emotions with thoughtfully evaluating our emotions before responding. How do the end results differ? How can we grow in our spiritual walk through taking charge of our emotions in difficult situations?

Pass out the Building Boundaries handout. Invite participants to fill out the form and keep it in their folder for future sessions. Give participants 5-10 minutes to complete. When finished, invite people back for a concluding prayer.

Conclusion:

Facilitators should end the session with prayer. While facilitators are welcome to include additional content, the prayer should include the future of the UMC and spiritual guidance moving forward.

Our Stories

1. What experiences shaped your understanding of LGBT people throughout your upbringing and background?
2. Do you have people in your life who identify as sexual or gender minorities? How do your interactions with them affect you?
3. How do your personal experiences shape your interaction with this topic?
4. Have your thoughts/opinions changed on this topic? How so?
5. What words/actions/behaviors related to LGBT inclusion frustrate you in the church?

Building Boundaries

1. How do I re-charge after difficult conversations?
2. In whom can I confide when I need to process my reactions or emotions?
3. When are my emotions keeping me from having Christ-centered conversations?
4. What topics or conversations are difficult for me to engage?

I will set aside time for myself to _____
_____ in order to recharge after difficult conversations.

I will process with _____, who is a person that I trust.

I will step back from conversations when _____

I will protect my mental well-being by _____
_____ during conversations that are difficult for me.

Session Three: The ABCs of LGBTs

Session Objectives

- Explore and discuss scripture relevant to this topic
- Educate on LGBT American demographics, terminology and risk factors
- Equip participants with suggested terminology for discussions on LGBT inclusion
- Create a greater understanding of the experiences of LGBT Christians in faith communities

Resources

- Session Three PowerPoint (Available at VAUMC.org)
- YouTube Documentary [Through Our Eyes](#)

Curriculum Instructions

Introduction:

Facilitators should briefly re-introduce themselves, welcome participants, review the purpose of the six-week series and introduce the current session topic. In addition, facilitators should review the bolded principles of the Conversational Covenant from Session One.

Part One:

Read James 2:1-13 as a group. After reading, prompt participants to consider how they understand this story within the current conversation on LGBT inclusion. Highlight that like the community being discussed, our modern-day communities sometimes have trouble finding a place for people whose differences we don't understand or make us uncomfortable. Use this topic to transition into the Session Three PowerPoint. Part of finding a place for people in community requires learning about the demographic and their needs:

James 2:1-13 (CEB)

My brothers and sisters, when you show favoritism you deny the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been resurrected in glory. Imagine two people coming into your meeting. One has a gold ring and fine clothes, while the other is poor, dressed in filthy rags. Then suppose that you were to take special notice of the one wearing fine clothes, saying, "Here's an excellent place. Sit here." But to the poor person you say, "Stand over there"; or, "Here, sit at my feet." Wouldn't you have shown favoritism among yourselves and become evil-minded judges? My dear brothers and sisters, listen! Hasn't God chosen those who are poor by worldly standards to be rich in terms of faith? Hasn't God chosen the poor as heirs of the kingdom he has promised to those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Don't the wealthy make life difficult for you? Aren't they the ones who drag you into court? Aren't they the ones who insult the good name spoken over you at your baptism? You do well when you really fulfill the royal law found in scripture, Love your neighbor as yourself. But when you show favoritism, you are committing a sin, and by that same law you are exposed as a lawbreaker. Anyone who tries to keep all of the Law but fails at one point is guilty of failing to keep all of it. The one who said, "Don't commit adultery," also said, "Don't commit murder." So if you

don't commit adultery but do commit murder, you are a lawbreaker. In every way, then, speak and act as people who will be judged by the law of freedom. There will be no mercy in judgment for anyone who hasn't shown mercy. Mercy overrules judgment.

Facilitators will follow the Session Three PowerPoint. Encourage participants to take notes. The PowerPoint will cover basic terminology, who is included within the LGBT community, population statistics and recommended language for addressing LGBT topics. Following the PowerPoint, offer participants an opportunity to ask questions or discuss PowerPoint content.

Part Two:

Activity: Give each participant a sheet of paper and writing utensils. Instruct them to write down past or future "highlights" of their life, included 5-7 moments. After approximately five minutes to complete the activity, instruct them to now imagine those moments as a member of the LGBT community. Include the following questions in discussion:

1. How would these moments change if you were LGBT?
2. Would your community change in these moments?
3. What emotions do you feel after this exercise?

From the discussion, notice reactions of stress, sadness, anxiety or feeling conflicted. Explain to participants that the purpose of this exercise is not to change views on ethics, but to gain a greater understanding of the experience of being LGBT. End with these central points:

1. LGBT inclusion has larger impacts than a conversation about same-sex sexual expression.
2. Being LGBT can create stress and anxiety.
3. There are not always resources and community available for LGBT people in churches.

The documentary [Through Our Eyes](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QImNx1JA3BI) should be viewed following the activity. The video is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QImNx1JA3BI>. The documentary follows the stories of several LGBT Christians as they share their experiences understanding their sexuality and finding their place in Christian community. The documentary takes no theological stance on LGBT sexual ethics.

Following the documentary, facilitators should give each participant a blank sheet of paper and writing utensil. Write on the board "How do I support LGBT people within my beliefs?" Tell participants they will be given 10 minutes to answer to write down their thoughts and responses to the question. Tell them that the content of the paper will be private unless they wish to share it. After 10 minutes, call the group back together to conclude the session.

Conclusion:

Facilitators should end the session with prayer. While facilitators are welcome to include additional content, the prayer should include the future of the UMC and spiritual guidance moving forward.

Session Four: Language of Love

Session Objectives

- Exploring Scripture on entering into difficult conversations
- Challenging participants to enter into a new perspective on conflict
- Equip participants with strategies for changing the way we conflict
- Structured practice of constructive conflict

Resources

- TED Talk: [Conflict is a Place of Possibility](#)
- Misunderstandings Script
- TED Talk: [Anger, Compassion, and What It Means To Be Strong](#)
- LGBT Language and Theological Views Handout
- Practice Scenarios Handout

Curriculum Instructions

Introduction:

Facilitators should briefly re-introduce themselves, welcome participants, review the purpose of the six-week series and introduce the current session topic. In addition, facilitators should review the bolded principles of the Conversational Covenant from Session One. Facilitators should encourage participants to draw on their experience with the previous sessions to shape the way they participate in conversations during this session.

Part One:

Read Ezra 6:19-22 as a group. After reading, discuss why this passage is included as part of a conversation on conflict. Focus on the purpose of ceremony and ritual in our lives, and challenge participants to examine how their actions or thoughts prepare them before they enter a sacred space, like the priests from the Ezra passage. Connect the story with preparing ourselves for the difficult conversations by examining our hearts and preparing ourselves.

Ezra 6:19-22 (CEB)

On the fourteenth day of the first month, the returned exiles celebrated the Passover. All of the priests and the Levites had purified themselves; all of them were clean. They slaughtered the Passover animals for all the returned exiles, their fellow priests, and themselves. The Israelites who had returned from exile, together with all those who had joined them by separating themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel, ate the Passover meal. They also joyfully celebrated the Festival of Unleavened Bread for seven days, because the Lord had made them joyful by changing the attitude of the king of Assyria toward them so that he assisted them in the work on the house of God, the God of Israel.

From this discussion, transition to show the video, [Conflict is a Place of Possibility](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfQeH3og2Sc), a TED Talk by Dana Caspersen which frames conflict in a new light. The video is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfQeH3og2Sc>.

Part Two:

After the video, direct the group to your whiteboard or oversized notepad. Explain to participants that the group will focus on three aspects of communication in this session, and will have a chance to practice these skills in roleplay scenarios. Encourage participants to take notes and ask questions. Write out the three main principles on the board or oversized notepad.

Three Principles for Discussing LGBT Inclusion

1. Shared Language
2. Person-First Perspective
3. Mutual Purpose

Shared Language

Activity: select two participants to act out a scenario. Give them each a copy of the Misunderstandings Script handout, and have the participants act out the scenario. The scenario will focus on how when we hold different meaning for the same words, it's easy to miscommunicate. Ask the group what was wrong with the scenario, and focus on the need for clearer communication. You may use the script provided at the end of this session or use it as a structure from which you or participants can build.

Discussion:

1. As silly as that scenario was, what did we learn?
2. Will someone share a story they would like to share about a time they miscommunicated about language?
3. What are some strategies for creating shared language?

List strategies suggested on the board, and use the discussion to transition into the next section. Invite a participant to write for you if possible. This section is customizable for each group, but write down and discuss each of the three points listed below. For point three, pass out the LGBT Language and Theological Views handout.

Strategies for Creating Shared Language

1. **Repeat:** Repeat back to a person speaking your understanding of their use of a word or idea. Not only does it help to clarify language, but it also helps the person with whom you are speaking feel heard.
2. **Clarify:** Don't assume the other person has the same understanding of words you do. Clarify your terminology in the beginning. A clarification formula as simple as, "I believe [idea]...which I understand to be [brief explanation]..." can help to avoid unnecessary conflict.
3. **Use Neutral Language:** Use the language or labels a person or group uses to self-identify. (Discuss LGBT Language and Theological Views handout)

Person-First Perspective

Draw a grid on the board using the following example:

What does it mean to view others from a person-first perspective?	What stops us from viewing others from a person-first perspective?

Invite participants to answer the questions listed above, addressing the question on the left first. Guide discussion to highlight the examples listed below, or include them in a generated list.

What does it mean to view others from a person first perspective?	What stops us from viewing others from a person-first perspective?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizing people as a collection of interests, beliefs, and personality traits, not simply one of these • Recognizing people as valued children of God • Choosing to show Christ-like love to people with whom we disagree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger or hurt at what the person has said or represents • Belief that respect will be interpreted as validation • Misunderstandings of what a person is communicating

When addressing the question on the right, be sure to focus on how we handle entering conversations when we're angry or upset. Transition into watching this TED Talk video by Russell Kolts titled, [Anger, Compassion, and What It Means To Be Strong](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG4Z185MBJE). The video is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QG4Z185MBJE>.

Mutual Purpose

Use the scenario below to help participants understand how to find mutual purpose in conflict. Begin by writing three strategies on the whiteboard/notepad on top of three separate columns.

How do we find shared purpose in conflict?

Emotions Behind the Expression	Shared Community	Shared Values

Read the following scenario:

Seth and Emily have been married for 10 years. Within the past two years, Seth has received a significant promotion in his workplace. While his new job came with a significant raise, it also came with more time commitments and responsibilities. While she did not protest the new hours at first, within the past few months Emily has been persistent in encouraging Seth to stay home more often. Seth feels like Emily does not respect the time he needs to accomplish the work that is assigned to him, and becomes frustrated and agitated when she brings the topic up. In response she has withdrawn emotionally from the relationship, and frequently makes statements about how Seth doesn't care about her anymore.

Discussion:

Using the three highlighted principles, how could Seth and Emily find shared purpose in this scenario?

Have a participant help complete the table on the board as the group mentions possible strategies for finding mutual purpose through understanding emotions behind the expression, shared community, and shared values. The below table includes potential responses:

Emotions Behind the Expression	Shared Community	Shared Values
<p>Both communicated their distress poorly, but their reactions demonstrated emotional distress in the situation.</p> <p>Seth felt that his hard work and contributions to the family's income were not being properly acknowledged or respected.</p> <p>Emily felt fear that Seth's commitment to their relationship had changed.</p> <p>While their emotions are different, they share the experience of emotionally recognizing that the harmony of the situation and their relationship was out of balance.</p>	<p>Married couples share deeply entwined communities.</p> <p>Both share incentive to come up with a solution that benefits both their small community and the communities they are connected to.</p> <p>By establishing a commitment to a shared community, Seth and Emily can focus on a shared purpose of improving their community instead of attacking each other personally.</p>	<p>While Seth and Emily hold different perspectives on this particular situation, they both hold shared values within their marriage.</p> <p>For them, these values include loving and respecting each other, feeling loved and respected themselves and the desire to be someone in whom the other can confide.</p>

Discussion:

How could Seth and Emily use these mutual values to guide conversation?

Potential Response:

Seth and Emily can use their shared values to re-focus when conflict becomes personal and hurtful.

Offer the following example: Emily could exclaim, "Clearly you don't care about me anymore because all you do is work!"

Negative Response	Positive Response
"Sure, you complain about me working too much but you don't complain about the money I bring in!"	"I can tell this is something that upsetting you. We both want to see this marriage work and both care about being there for each other. Let's look at some ways we could make this situation work."

Part Three:

Ask for two volunteers to model these learned principles in a practice scenario. Give each person one of the following prompts:

Person 1: Your neighbors have left their grass overgrown and uncut for weeks now. You get that people are busy, but it's starting to look like the house is abandoned. It's not just the grass though, because every time you look over to their house, their kids' toys are all over the lawn, or lawn chairs have been left out from the night before. It's frustrating to spend so much time making sure that your yard and house are presentable for the community, and you feel like they bring the whole place down. You think you'll go give them a lecture on responsibility and organization.
Person 2: You're busy. With a full-time job, three young kids and a variety of community volunteer positions, you have plenty on your plate. Within the past few weeks, your lawn has been a little overgrown, but it's just grass. You'd rather spend time with your kids or work with one of your volunteer groups. You've noticed your neighbor's passive aggressive comments about your grass, but you mostly just ignore them. Why should you care that they're so concerned about petty things like grass? It's not bothering anyone else.

Do not allow volunteers to see the role of the person with whom they are conflicting. Volunteers should use the three strategies (shared language, person first perspective and mutual purpose) to guide how they enter into these scenarios. Have each set of volunteers attempt to navigate the conflict with the principles. When the scenario is finished, have the group critique the conflict in light of what they have learned during this session, offering affirmations for successful strategies and suggestions for improvement.

Then, divide the group into three smaller groups. In each group, ask for two volunteers to act out a different practice scenario. Use the Practice Scenarios handout to give volunteers in each group a prompt to guide their discussion. Do not allow volunteers to see the handout for the role

of the person with whom they are conflicting. Volunteers should use the three strategies (shared language, person first perspective and mutual purpose) to guide how they enter into these scenarios. Have each set of volunteers attempt to navigate the conflict with the principles. When each scenario is finished, have each small group critique the conflict, offering affirmations for successful strategies and suggestions for improvement. If possible, a facilitator should remain present in each group. After each group has finished, ask participants to share anything they learned from the scenarios.

Conclusion:

Facilitators should end the session with prayer. While facilitators are welcome to include additional content, the prayer should include the future of the UMC and spiritual guidance moving forward.

Misunderstandings Script

Person B is a customer at a restaurant. Person A, their server, approaches to take their order.

A: Good evening! Can I get you started with something to drink?

B: Yes, I'll have a tea, please.

A: Okay!

Person A walks away for a moment, then returns

A: Here you go!

Person B takes a sip

B: Ooh! What is this? It's so bitter!

A: It's tea. That's what you ordered, right?

B: This isn't tea! Tea is supposed to be sweet!

A: Oh, well we have sugar packets on the table. Here, you can just add what you like!

B: That's not how you make sweet tea! You can't get it sweet enough when it's cold!

A: Oh, well, that's the only type of tea that we serve here.

B: Ugh, fine, I'll take a coke then.

A: Okay.

Person A starts to walk away

B: Wait!

Person A comes back

A: I'm sorry, was there something else?

B: Yes! You didn't ask me what kind of coke I wanted!

A: What kind of coke? Coke is...coke. Coca-cola. The drink.

B: No, no, coke just means soda or pop.

A: Oh, well, that's not what coke means up here.

B: Ugh, it's like we're speaking different languages. Fine, I'll take a Sprite.

LGBT Language and Theological Views

Belief Name as Related to LGBT Inclusion	Other Related Terms	Related Beliefs
Conversion	Reparative Therapy, Side X, "ex-gay"	God created all males and females as heterosexual Same-sex attraction is the result of sin or choice Orientation can be changed
Traditional	Side B, Conservative	Sexual orientation is fixed and cannot be changed Same-sex sexual expression is prohibited by the Bible LGBT people are called to celibate partnership relationships or lifetime celibacy
Progressive	Side A, Affirming	Sexual orientation is fixed and cannot be changed The Bible affirms the relationship of same-sex couples operating within the same set of ethical standards as heterosexual couples LGBT people should be able to marry same-sex partners within the church

Terms To Avoid	Terms to Use
Gay Lifestyle Homosexuals Queers Transgenders Other known slurs, stereotypes and generalizations	Same-sex relationship Sexual and Gender Minorities LGBT or LGBTQ Trans person/people

Notes:

Practice Scenarios

Scenario 1

Person 1A: You're careful with your money, but you agree to go out to eat with friends for the evening. While there, you keep your purchase to a minimum so you can save some extra money. However, a few of your friends are ordering big, expensive items and lots of drinks. When the bill comes, the waitress only brings one check. Your friend decides to split the purchase evenly between you all, but you aren't up for this. When you try to object, she won't take you seriously and tells you to lighten up.

Person 1B: You're out to eat with some friends, and the waitress brings your group a check. You invited one friend who's notoriously stingy with her money, and of course she's the only one uncomfortable with splitting the check evenly. Little does she know that earlier this evening you had to talk your other friends into inviting her. Your friends think she's too stuck up and stingy. When she tries to split the check, you see a couple of your other friends roll their eyes. In an attempt to help her, you try to play her suggestion off as a joke and ignore her. It's not like you can tell her what people were saying about her in front of everyone right?

Scenario 2

Person 2A: You have three young kids, and it's important to you that they stay healthy. Every time they go over to your parents' house, they come back with lots of sugary and unhealthy food. You want them to have a good relationship with their grandparents, and you don't want your kids to think you're punishing them by taking it away. Whenever you ask your parents not to give them more sugary snacks, they get offended. While they might listen for a week or two, it always goes back to the way it was and ends in the same fight.

Person 2B: You love your grandkids, and love having them come visit. You've started this tradition of making sweet treats with the kids, and it's become one of your favorite things to do. You've tried making healthier snacks with them before, but they're just not as interested and you love spending time with them. Cooking and sharing food is a huge part of your culture, and it's important for you to pass this tradition on to the next generation. You don't understand why your child (their parent) is so intent on taking this valuable time with your grandkids away from you.

Scenario 3

Person 3A: Your boss introduces a new computer program the entire company is expected to use. The problem is, they never gave you a proper training on the program, and you're struggling to make it work. You're not someone who's naturally gifted at technology, and it's frustrating that you're being expected to figure it out. When you talk to your boss about it, they say the program is simple and doesn't require more training. They treat you like you're trying to find an excuse to get out of work, and that hurts your sense of pride.

Person 3B: You lead a small company, and just introduced a new computer program that will makes things run more efficiently. You gave a basic overview and the program is user-friendly and simple. Most of your employees can use it well by the end of the first day, but one employee will not stop complaining about how they don't get it and can't use it. You feel like you have already explained all there is to be explained. It just seems like they are using this as an excuse to not get as much work done, and it's starting to really frustrate you.

Session Five: Sharing Our Stories

Note to Facilitators

Session Five and Session Six shift to a less structured format in which individuals within churches are encouraged to bond and move forward together as a congregation or small group. This session focuses on sharing stories and creating shared vulnerability. If possible and fitting for the environment, groups are encouraged to bring a potluck meal to be shared during Session Five or Six.

Session Objectives

- To practice skills of dialogue and communication regarding topics of LGBT inclusion.
- To share stories and develop relationships with participants of different beliefs.

Curriculum Instructions

Introduction:

Facilitators should briefly re-introduce themselves, welcome participants, review the purpose of the six-week series and introduce the current session topic. In addition, facilitators should review the bolded principles of the Conversational Covenant from Session One. Facilitators should encourage participants to draw on their experience with the previous sessions to shape the way the conduct the conversations during this session.

Part One:

Facilitators will divide participants into groups of four-six individuals. If possible, arrange groups so that the maximum amount of diversity of belief and experience exist within each group. While the groups are in dialogue, facilitators should be mindful of emotional escalation in situations and intervene only when necessary and appropriate. Otherwise, facilitators should allow groups to discuss uninterrupted.

Post the following discussion questions on the whiteboard or notepad for groups to reference during their discussion:

1. How does the discussion of sexual and gender minorities in the Methodist church affect you personally?
2. How would you like to see the church address this conflict?
3. How can we continue together when we share different perspectives?

Part Two:

Following about 45-60 minutes of discussion, facilitators should gather the group back together. Using the following reflection questions, lead a brief discussion on participants' experiences sharing their stories with their groups:

1. How did sharing your story personally affect you and your understanding of the issue?
2. How did hearing the stories of others affect your understanding?
3. How did your group dialogue about continuing together moving forward?

Conclusion:

Facilitators should end the session with prayer. While facilitators are welcome to include additional content, the prayer should include the future of the UMC and spiritual guidance moving forward.

Session Six: Moving Forward

Note to Facilitators

Unlike the previous five sessions, session six should be a space where the larger congregation is encouraged to attend.

Session Objectives

- Educating congregant members on potential futures of the UMC.
- Establishing goals and standards of behavior for individual congregations.
- Connecting individuals with current and future resources and programs related to LGBT inclusion.

Facilitator Instructions

Facilitators are encouraged to tailor this session to best suit the needs and culture of their church environment. One possibility includes a panel discussion open to the entire congregation. The following are suggested for maximum benefit of a panel-style event:

- Three-five total panel participants, one of whom comes from church leadership.
- Diversity in panel participants regarding race, age, gender, orientation and perspective.
- At least one panel participant who is well-informed on issues regarding Methodist polity, history and practice.

Session Six is designed to be customizable to address the needs of the individual church. Regardless of the venue, discussions should center around the topic, "What is our next step as a congregation?" Additional discussion questions may include:

- How do people from your background/perspective move forward in preparation for the 2019 Called General Conference decision?
- What goals do you have for this church in navigating this discussion in the future?
- Why are unity and reconciliation important to you in this conversation?
- How can we be working towards positive growth in a church, community and conference level?
- What are ways that congregation members can get involved?
- How do we support LGBT members of our church and community during this conversation?

Bibliography

Christian LGBT Organizations

1. [Reformation Project](#) (Progressive)
2. [Spiritual Friendships](#) (Traditional)
3. [Queer Christian Fellowship](#) (Multi-perspective)
4. [Queer Grace](#) (Multi-perspective)

Demographics and Definitions

1. [Asexuality-Asexuality.org](#)
2. [Intersex-Intersex Society of North America](#)
3. [LGBT Data and Demographics- Williams Institute](#)
4. [LGBT Population Statistics-Williams Institute](#)
5. [Transgender Individuals- American Psychological Association](#)

Resources and Organizations

1. [LGBT Glossary](#)
2. [Support Resources](#)

Risk Factors

1. [Harassment and Assault](#)
2. [LGBT Healthcare Discrimination](#)
3. [LGBT Youth Risk Factors- CDC](#)
4. [Suicide Rates among LGBT individuals- Williams Institute](#)

Spiritual Beliefs and Religious Participation

1. [LGBT Individuals Religious Beliefs](#)
2. [LGBT Individuals and Families in Religious Settings](#)