



SESSION 2

**CALLED
TO LOVE**

SESSION GOALS

BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL

- better understand the biblical call to love one another
- recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are often not treated with love in churches
- recognize that the United Methodist Church has specific practices and policies that don't treat LGBT people with love
- have identified a new action to take to show love to LGBT people and their families

SESSION 2 OVERVIEW

Each component lists the appropriate time the activity takes and is ranked to help you select the activities that best fit your group.

Opening Activity

Choose one or more from:

- Opening Scripture (4 min)
- Opening Prayer (4 min)
- Opening Prayer Meditation (6 min)
- Song (7 min)

Core Lesson Components

Choose one or more from:

- Reflections on the Previous Session (10 min)
- Video and Discussion (15 min)
- Love Litany (4 min)
- Bible Exploration (20 min)
- Loving Self-Assessment (20 min)
- "Where's the Love?" Role-Play Scenarios (20 min)
- A Story of Hope (4 min)

Call to Action

- Call to Action (12 min)

Closing Activity

Choose from:

- Closing Song (5 min)
- Blessing and Sending Forth (3 min)

Key to Component Ranking

CAUTIOUS

A comfortable, safe activity suitable for all, even the most cautious and timid

READY FOR MORE

An activity that requires more critical thinking and sharing: suitable for groups that are ready to take more risks and expand their views

ADVENTUROUS

An activity suitable for groups that are eager to tackle tough subjects, are open to new ideas, and are willing to challenge the status quo

OPENING SCRIPTURE (4 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Copies of the United Methodist Hymnal (UMH) for each participant.

INSTRUCTIONS: Read responsively the Canticle of Love, UMH 646.

OPENING PRAYER (4 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Copies of the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

INSTRUCTIONS: Read together the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi.

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.
O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.*

OPENING PRAYER MEDITATION (6 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: A computer with Internet access.

INSTRUCTIONS: Watch and listen to the 3Ds sing a beautiful version of the *Prayer of St. Francis* on YouTube <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PqPqwmALD70>

SONG (7 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Copies of the UMH, The Faith We Sing (TFWS), other songbooks or song sheets, and piano or song leader.

INSTRUCTIONS: Sing a song from the UMH, TFWS, or other songbook that reflects God's love, such as:

UMH 111 *How Can We Name a Love*
UMH 156 *I Love to Tell the Story (verse 1)*

UMH 191 *Jesus Loves Me*
 UMH 384 *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (verses 1 and 2)*
 UMH 408 *The Gift of Love*
 UMH 430 *O Master, Let Me Walk with Thee (verse 2)*
 UMH 549 *Where Charity and Love Prevail*
 TFWS 2145 *I've Got Peace Like a River (verse 3)*
 TFWS 2168 *Love the Lord Your God*
 TFWS 2193 *Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying*
 TFWS 2219 *Goodness Is Stronger than Evil*
 TFWS 2223 *They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*

REFLECTIONS ON THE PREVIOUS SESSION (10 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: a list of action items from the end of the previous session.

INSTRUCTIONS: Check briefly with participants about actions, thoughts, and reflections since the last session.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Our last session together focused on God's generous hospitality. What additional thoughts or reflections have come to mind during the week?
2. At the end of that session, we generated a list of specific things our congregation could do to expand its ministry of hospitality to LGBT people and their families and friends. From that list, we chose to _____ (*name the task that was chosen*). What actions did we take this week with that task in mind?
3. At the end of the last session, each of us also made a list of **individual** actions we could take to express generous hospitality. Would anyone care to share what happened with the hospitality action he or she committed to practice this week?

VIDEO AND DISCUSSION (15 min): "God is Always a Loving God," Rev. Dr. Eunice Musa Iliya

MATERIALS NEEDED: a computer ready to play the video file accompanying this curriculum.

INSTRUCTIONS: Watch the video together, and then follow up with a discussion. You may view the video by visiting <http://vimeo.com/rethinkinclusion> and selecting the file labeled "Called to Love".

Introduction: Dr. Iliya is the director of the newly created Directorate of Evangelism and Stewardship of the United Methodist Church in Nigeria. She joined the ministry in 1991 and has worked in different capacities as associate and senior pastor for many United Methodist congregations in Nigeria. She received a master's degree in theological studies and a doctorate in pastoral care and counseling from the Claremont School of Theology. Dr. Iliya was elected a delegate from Nigeria to the United Methodist General Conference in 2008. This video is an excerpt from a sermon she preached in September 2009.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What's the relationship between love and seeing God in everyone?
2. What are the obstacles to loving and seeing God in others? What facilitates loving and seeing God in others?
3. What did Dr. Iliya mean when she said, "To love is not a choice"?
4. In what ways do you think love sets us apart and distinguishes us from others?

LOVE LITANY (4 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Copies of the litany for each participant.

INSTRUCTIONS: Ask for volunteers to read the parts for Voice 1 and Voice 2. Read this litany together.

Voice 1: As Christians, we *love* LOVE!

ALL: We love LOVE!

Voice 2: We're taught from an early age that God is love.

ALL: God is Love.

Voice 1: We sing songs about the importance of love in our faith, such as "Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Love Lifted Me," "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," and "Love Came Down at Christmas."

ALL: Yes, Jesus loves me.

Voice 2: We learn to recite portions of the famous chapter on love from 1 Corinthians: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends.... Faith, hope, and love abide."

ALL: "But the greatest of these is love."

Voice 1: Love is central to our faith...

Voice 2: but we also know that loving isn't easy.

Voice 1: Anyone who has loved someone knows that.

ALL: We're human beings, and when we love, we love imperfectly.

Voice 2: And imperfection in the realm of love can cause real hurt and harm.

ALL: Learning to love and love well is a lifelong task. Our goal is to learn to love like Jesus loved — everyone, with no exceptions, no one left out.

BIBLE EXPLORATION (20 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: A Bible for each scripture reader; copies of the vignettes for each vignette reader.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Invite volunteer readers to look up and read aloud the following scripture passages one at a time. Plan for the readers to stand (or sit) in various places around the room when they read.

- Invite volunteer readers to read aloud the vignettes following each scripture reading.
- Read as many scripture/vignette pairs as you choose.
- Afterward, observe a moment of silence to let the impact of the words and stories sink in.

Introduction: The word “love” occurs over three hundred times in the Bible, describing God’s love for people, exclaiming our love for God, or calling people to love one another. Let’s take a few minutes to surround ourselves with some of the passages that call us to love one another. Between each passage, we’ll hear stories about people.

Luke 10:27 (Great Commandments)

Vignette: I just got a phone call telling me that three people were beaten by a gang screaming anti-gay/lesbian epithets. One of the victims, my sister, is in critical condition. No one at church even knows that I have a lesbian sister.

(Adapted from Ann Thompson Cook, And God Loves Each One. Washington, DC: Dumbarton United Methodist Church; 2004, p. 13)

1 Corinthians 16:14 (Let all that you do be done in love)

Vignette: Someone at church said to me, “When it comes to homosexuality, we love the sinner, but hate the sin.” When I heard this, I did not feel loved; I felt like I was being judged and pushed away. I’m a Christian and I also happen to be gay—I felt like I was being forced to choose between being part of the church that I love so much and being who God made me to be.

Romans 12:9-13 (Let love be genuine)

Vignette: It was a lonely day when our daughter came out to us as a bisexual. I knew immediately that she was still the child we’d loved and cherished for 25 years and was totally accepting of what she’d discovered about her sexual identity. Yet I still felt isolated and alone — worried for her safety and praying that she would find acceptance in her world — and, yes, wondering what my friends and fellow church members would think if I told them.

(Adapted from Helen Andrew, “The Story of a Stole,” The Kindred Connection, Newsletter of the Parents Reconciling Network, Winter 2009, p. 3)

John 15:12 (Love one another as I have loved you)

Vignette: After months of trying to work things out, my same-sex partner of seven years and I have decided to separate. The minister just announced a new

support group for people going through a divorce. Should I join the group and share my pain?

(Adapted from Ann Thompson Cook, And God Loves Each One. Washington, DC: Dumbarton United Methodist Church; 2004, p. 14)

Romans 13:8-10 (Love one another)

Vignette: In the sermon, the pastor tied the story of the 10 lepers to how LGBT people are treated. The pastor stressed how important it is to love those who are hurting, especially those whom many treat as outcasts.

John 13:34-35 (Everyone will know you as my disciples if you love one another)

Vignette: I'm gay. When my partner was dying, members of the congregation brought food and sent loving notes. I don't know what I would have done without them.

(Adapted from Ann Thompson Cook, And God Loves Each One. Washington, DC: Dumbarton United Methodist Church; 2004, p. 13)

1 John 4:7-11 (Let us love one another because love is of God)

Vignette: As hard as it's been to tell my parents and my friends that I'm a lesbian, it's even harder to tell my LGBT friends that I'm a Christian. They ask me, "Why do you bother with such hateful and hurtful people?"

(Adapted from Barbara Olson, "Why We Are Involved in the PRN," The Kindred Connection, Newsletter of the Parents Reconciling Network, Winter 2009, p. 2)

1 John 4:19-21 (We love because God first loved us)

Vignette: I'm a single gay man in seminary. My married classmates are all looking forward to moving into a parsonage after ordination. I worry about what will happen when I find someone I want to settle down with.

(Adapted from Ann Thompson Cook, And God Loves Each One. Washington, DC: Dumbarton United Methodist Church; 2004, p. 13)

John 3:16 (For God so loved the world)

Vignette: My spouse and I wanted to get our child baptized. We were married and had our child before I transitioned from male to female. Now we look to the world like two women raising a child. Because of this, the pastor refused our request for baptism. How could the church be the body of Christ and turn people away like that?

1 Corinthians 13 (Love chapter)

Vignette: What I've discovered is that if you find a church where people truly love God and they also love one another, things will work out. Even though there are the differences of opinion around issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, the message behind it all—love—is still there and shines through.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

Allow several moments for participants to absorb what they've heard.

1. What's it like to hear these words about love from scripture alongside these situations?
2. What is it that makes loving one another both rewarding and challenging?

LOVING SELF-ASSESSMENT (20 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: a chalkboard and chalk or dry-erase board or newsprint and markers.

INSTRUCTIONS: Using a large chalkboard or dry-erase board, create four roughly equal squares. If you use paper or newsprint instead of a board, use four separate sheets. Label each quadrant or sheet as follows:

	Our Congregation	United Methodist Church
Does Well		
Falls Short		

In each square make a list of specific activities, customs, practices, or policies toward LGBT people in our midst.

- Where does our congregation do well at showing love for LGBT people and their families?
- Where does the United Methodist Church do well at showing love for LGBT people and their families?
- Where does our congregation fall short of showing love for LGBT people and their families?
- Where does the United Methodist Church fall short of showing love for LGBT people and their families?

As a leader, be sure to mention these items if they don't appear on the lists:

- Denying or offering membership*
- Expecting LGBT people to keep silent or be open about their relationships and/or gender identity*
- Offering or denying ordination*
- Offering or denying baptism to LGBT people and/or their children*
- Offering or denying the blessing of a relationship or marriage*

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. After generating and looking at these lists, what observations could you make about love in action?
2. If LGBT people and their families were to rate the practice of love in our congregation on a scale of 1 to 5, what score would we get?
How often do we show love like Jesus?
 - 1) Most of the time
 - 2) Often
 - 3) Sometimes
 - 4) Rarely
 - 5) Almost never
3. If LGBT people and their families were to rate the practice of love in the United Methodist Church on a scale of 1 to 5, what score would it get?
How often does it show love like Jesus?
 - 1) Most of the time
 - 2) Often
 - 3) Sometimes
 - 4) Rarely
 - 5) Almost never

■ **“WHERE’S THE LOVE?” ROLE-PLAY SCENARIOS (20 min)**

MATERIALS NEEDED: a copy of one scenario and list of tasks for each small group of three to four people.

INSTRUCTIONS: Divide the group into smaller groups with three people in each group. (If necessary, a couple of groups can have four people.) Give each group a scenario and the list of tasks. Read the list of tasks aloud to make sure that everyone is clear on the instructions. Begin the role plays.

1. A new family in the neighborhood

ROLES: pastor, church layperson, new person in the neighborhood

SITUATION: A new person who just moved into the neighborhood with a same-sex partner and two children visits the church for the first time and is inquiring about Sunday School for the children.

2. Young adult call to ministry

ROLES: young adult, pastor, chair of the Staff/Parish Relations Committee

SITUATION: A young adult who has grown up in this congregation and has always been actively involved...attended Sunday School regularly, was confirmed, was a leader in the youth group, helped in the nursery, sang in the choir...is home for the summer before senior year in college. The past couple of years it has been increasingly clear to most observers that this young person is not heterosexual. Now, feeling a call to the ministry, this young adult wants to begin the process toward ordination and needs the recommendation of the local church. This conversation is about that recommendation.

3. Older adult at a potluck

ROLES: older person, pastor, church layperson

SITUATION: The older person has been a member of the congregation for many years. For almost as many years, this person has shared a house with another person of the same sex who recently died. Although it was never openly talked about, the two had been life-partners. This conversation takes place at a fellowship supper at church.

4. A youth in church

ROLES: youth of high school age, pastor, church layperson

SITUATION: The youth, who has spiky purple hair and many piercings, has recently started coming to youth group with a friend who's a church member. Today, the youth appears in church wearing a T-shirt that says



Tasks:

Have the small group read the scenario.

Have each person choose a role.

Begin the role-play conversation.

Stop the role play after 2 minutes.

Each actor, in turn, should share with the small group

1. What the character least wanted to have happen in this situation
2. Some feelings that the character was experiencing during this conversation
3. What the character most wanted to have happen in this situation

As a small group, come up with some additional lines that each character could say that would be modeling the love of Christ.

A STORY OF HOPE (4 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: a copy of the story.

INTRODUCTION: Read this story aloud as an example of how a church transformed an unloving reaction into an action of love.

After I visited a church with a friend of the same sex, three people sent letters of concern to the Church Council. I'd planned to visit again for the Easter service, but was "invited" to worship elsewhere if I planned to bring my friend with me. Both my friend and I were quite hurt by this reaction.

Later, I was surprised to learn that in response to this incident, the Church Council set up a task force to consider how to respond to future visitors--LGBT people and others. A committee

member said to me, "When you visited, we did it all wrong. It's happened before, and it'll happen again, so we want to do it right the next time."

Over time, the Church Council came to understand that Jesus calls us to love everyone and that therefore everyone is welcome in this church at any time. My friend and I each received a written letter of apology, were notified of the decision by the Church Council, and were invited to visit at any time.

I was especially struck by two things: The realization by the members of the committee that homosexuality was, is, and will be part of the fabric of their congregation and their desire to respond differently in the future! It was a difficult process for this church, but love won out!

■ CALL TO ACTION (12 min)

INTRODUCTION: Love must be an integral part of the fabric of *our daily lives* as Christians and must also be the foundation and practice of the *daily life of our church community*. How will we respond to the biblical imperative to love and specifically to love LGBT people and their families?

INSTRUCTIONS: Think back over today's activities and discussions.

1. In what ways do LGBT people regularly fall outside the circle of love in our church?
2. What are two specific actions we could commit to that would include LGBT people and their families and demonstrate God's love? In our congregation? As individuals?

□ CLOSING SONG (5 min)

MATERIALS NEEDED: Copies of the UMH or TFWS and piano or song leader.

INSTRUCTIONS: Sing together UMH 666 Shalom to You or TFWS 2242 Walk with Me (chorus only). Sing it through a couple of times and look around at others in the group while you're singing. If your group prefers not to sing, you can speak the words from one of these songs as a blessing and sending forth. The leader can read a line, and the group can repeat it. Focus on blessing the people in the room with your words and sending them forth to love.

□ BLESSING AND SENDING FORTH (3 min)

INSTRUCTIONS: With the group standing in a circle and holding hands, repeat each line of this blessing after the leader:

**I see the presence of God in each of you.
I celebrate the love of God that extends to all.
Go and share that love.
Amen**



Notes



**PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI
HANDOUT 1**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
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grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
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for it is in giving that we receive,
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**LOVE LITANY
HANDOUT 2**

Voice 1: As Christians, we *love* LOVE!

ALL: We love LOVE!

Voice 2: We're taught from an early age that God is love.

ALL: God is Love.

Voice 1: We sing songs about the importance of love in our faith, such as "Jesus Loves Me," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Love Lifted Me," "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," and "Love Came Down at Christmas."

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Voice 2: We learn to recite portions of the famous chapter on love from 1 Corinthians: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. Love never ends....Faith, hope, and love abide."

ALL: "But the greatest of these is love."

Voice 1: Love is central to our faith...

Voice 2: but we also know that loving isn't easy.

Voice 1: Anyone who has loved someone knows that.

ALL: We're human beings and when we love, we love imperfectly.

Voice 2: And imperfection in the realm of love can cause real hurt and harm.

ALL: Learning to love and love well is a lifelong task. Our goal is to learn to love like Jesus loved—everyone, with no exceptions, no one left out.

**BIBLE VERSES AND VIGNETTES
HANDOUT 3**

Luke 10:27 (Great Commandments)

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1 Corinthians 16:14 (Let all that you do be done in love)

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Vignette: It was a lonely day when our daughter came out to us as a bisexual. I knew immediately that she was still the child we’d loved and cherished for 25 years and was totally accepting of what she’d discovered about her sexual identity. Yet I still felt isolated and alone — worried for her safety and praying that she would find acceptance in her world — and, yes, wondering what my friends and fellow church members would think if I told them.

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