



SESSION 4

**ONE  
FAMILY  
TREE**

## SESSION GOALS

### BY THE END OF THIS SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL

- understand that we're all part of God's family tree
- relate personally to the pain that results if a branch is separated from the family tree
- recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people are hurt and excluded by the practices of the church
- have identified a new step to take to include LGBT people and their families

## SESSION 4 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 Prayer (4 min)
- Opening Scripture (3 min)
- Song (7 min)

### Core Lesson Components

Choose one or more from:

- Reflections on the Previous Session (7 min)
- Video and Discussion (15 min)
- God's Family Tree (10 min)
- Bible Exploration and Discussion (15 min)
- Web of Connection (15 min)
- Teens at Risk (10 min)
- Blessings Available for All (12 min)
- Why I Am Involved in Reconciling Ministries (9 min)

### Call to Action

- Call to Action (10 min)
- Honoring Our Actions and Participation (12 min)

### Closing Activity

Choose from:

- Blessing and Sending Forth (5 min)
- Course Evaluation (5 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 PRAYER** (4 min)

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** United Methodist Hymnal (UMH).

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud the prayer on page 564 of the UMH: “For the Unity of Christ’s Body.”

**OPENING SCRIPTURE** (3 min)

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** a Bible.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Ask a volunteer to read aloud Galatians 3:26-28.

**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 our connection as members of God’s family, such as

UMH 114 Many Gifts, One Spirit  
UMH 122 God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale  
UMH 548 In Christ There Is No East or West  
UMH 558 We Are the Church  
UMH 560 Help Us Accept Each Other  
UMH 620 One Bread, One Body  
TFWS 2046 Womb of Life  
TFWS 2170 God Made from One Blood  
TFWS 2224 Make Us One  
TFWS 2225 Who Is my Mother, Who Is My Brother  
TFWS 2226 Bind Us Together

**Reflections on the Previous Session** (7 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. The theme of our last session was justice for all. What additional thoughts or reflections on this topic have come to mind during the past week?

2. At the conclusion of our last session, we committed to specific acts of justice or mercy aimed at LGBT people, acts that we would work toward as a congregation. What has happened in terms of that commitment during this week?
3. As individuals, we also committed to specific actions. Would some of you like to share what happened this week as a result of that commitment?

**Video and Discussion (15 min):** “Remember Me,” Bishop Hee-Soo Jung

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

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Watch the video together, then follow up with a discussion. You may view the video by visiting <http://vimeo.com/rethinkinclusion> and selecting the file labeled “One Family Tree”.

**INTRODUCTION:** Hee-Soo Jung, originally from Korea, was elected bishop in 2004. Assigned to be the episcopal leader of the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church, he is the first non-Anglo bishop to serve as the head of this ethnically diverse Conference. Bishop Jung is known across the denomination for his work on refugee, immigration, cross-cultural, and interfaith issues. This video presents an excerpt from the sermon he gave as one of the main preachers at the 2008 United Methodist General Conference.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Bishop Jung adds new depth to the meaning of the words “member” and “remember.” What are your thoughts on or reactions to his ideas?
2. The liturgy for confirmation and reception of new members in the UMH uses “members” in several places. What light does Bishop Jung’s sermon shed on being members of Christ’s universal church? Members of this congregation? Members of the household of God?
3. Bishop Jung says that as the body of Christ, each of us is important, that we belong to one another, and that we’re organically interrelated. In what ways do we demonstrate this interrelatedness? In what ways do we ignore it?

**God’s Family Tree (10 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** a blank piece of 8.5 x 11 paper and a pen or pencil for each participant.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Draw a tree on your piece of paper. (This isn’t a graded exercise or an art contest! Any tree you draw will be accepted as an offering, so have fun with it!)
2. The tree represents God’s family tree. Label some of the branches with God’s relatives. (Use people’s names, family names, or the names of tribes or groups of people. Your tree won’t be big enough to include the **entire** family. This is just a sampling.)
3. Share your tree with the people sitting next to you. Look at their trees.

4. Now imagine that a strong storm rips a large branch off your tree. Tear your paper tree so that a branch is removed.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What happens to a tree when a large branch is torn off?
2. What happens to God's family tree if a large branch is damaged or broken off? Which branches and limbs of God's family tree are being damaged or broken off at this point in history?

**Bible Exploration and Discussion (15 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** a Bible for each participant.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Have each participant, or small group of participants, read one of the following passages, then summarize it for the whole group. Follow with the discussion questions.

Matthew 25:31-46 (If you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to Me)

Matthew 12:46-50 (Whoever does the will of God is Jesus' brother and sister and mother)

Ephesians 4:4-5 (There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God of all, who is above all and through all and in all)

Ephesians 2:19 (So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God)

John 10:16 (I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold)

1 Corinthians 12:26 (If one suffers, all suffer)

1 Corinthians 12:12-17, 24 -27 (The body, though made up of many parts, is one)

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What do these passages say about God's family tree?
2. Who's included?
3. What's our relationship to God and Jesus?
4. What's our relationship with one another?

**Web of Connection (15 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** a large ball of yarn or string and one situation card for each participant.

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. Have the group stand in a circle.
2. Give each participant a situation card.
3. Make a loop in the end of the yarn or string and hold it.

4. Toss the ball of yarn to someone across the circle (it will unwind as it goes).
5. Have that person loop the yarn around a finger, then toss the ball to someone else in the circle.
6. Each person in turn should catch the ball of yarn, loop it around a finger, and then toss it to someone else. As the ball unwinds, it creates a web of interconnections. It's okay for people to get the ball more than once.
7. Continue until everyone has gotten the ball at least once and the web is nicely filled in (or you run out of yarn, whichever comes first).
8. Once the web-building has ended, play with the web a bit. Have people move it up and down. You could even drop an inflated balloon, Nerf ball, or beach ball onto the web and bounce it around. Experiment with what happens if one person pulls strongly on the yarn he or she holds.
9. Next invite someone to read a situation card, then let go of the yarn. Watch what happens to the web.
10. Then have someone across the circle from the first person read a situation card and let go of the yarn.
11. One by one, have random people around the circle read a situation card and let go of the yarn.
12. The web will gradually lose shape, form, connection, and life. When the web is lying on the floor, ask everyone to sit down and discuss what has occurred.

#### Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. When the web was created and we were playing with it, in what ways was it like the dynamic community of humanity?
2. What happened to the web when the first person let go of the yarn? The next person? How is that like what happens when people are excluded from a community?
3. As more and more people dropped the yarn, what happened to the web? How did this affect its usefulness (or playfulness)?
4. What lesson for community living could you draw from this exercise?

#### **TEENS AT RISK (10 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** copies of the LGBT Teens in Churches Handout (*included with this curriculum*) and copies of The Advocates for Youth GLBTQ [Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning] Youth Fact Sheet (*This fact sheet can be downloaded from the Advocates for Youth website as a pdf document. Go to <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/fsglbt.pdf>*)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Divide participants into small groups and give an assignment to each group from the Handout and Fact Sheet. Here are some possible group assignments:

1. Fact Sheet: Family rejection and school danger
2. Fact Sheet: Youth of color

3. Fact Sheet: Role models and substance abuse
4. Fact Sheet: Sexual risks and suicide
5. LGBT teens in churches

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What are your initial reactions to or reflections on the material you read?
2. Teenagers are part of God's family tree. What barriers do LGBT or questioning teens encounter in life? In our church?
3. The suicide rate for homosexual teens is twice as high as it is for their heterosexual counterparts. Would people in our congregation be concerned to know that? What are some things we could do that might make a difference?
4. How could our congregation be more understanding and helpful toward teens who are LGBT or who are struggling with sexual orientation or gender identity?

**▣ Blessings Available for All (12 min)**

**INTRODUCTION:** In this session, we've looked at how branches of God's family tree are harmed by people's exclusionary attitudes and the practices of the church. But what about the other side of the coin? What blessings and gifts could be available to the church if all members of God's family were celebrated for who they are?

**INSTRUCTIONS:** *(This is a brief guided imagery exercise. Pause between phrases to allow participants to imagine.)* Close your eyes for a moment and take a deep breath and relax....Take a few moments to imagine...imagine a river. Imagine that on either shore of the river is a tree....Picture huge, beautiful, magnificent trees, one on each side of the lovely, flowing, peaceful river....These are trees of life....As you look at them in your mind's eye, you see fruit growing among the leafy branches—luscious, sweet, colorful fruit—and you see that it's not all the same kind....There are several different kinds of fruit growing on the same tree....How amazing!...Yes, as you look, you see even more fruit, 12 kinds in all....These trees produce fruit every month....What wonderful trees!...The leaves seem special, too....Ah, yes, God has said that these trees are the trees of life....Trees of LIFE....Their leaves are for the healing of nations....many different kinds of fruit and leaves for healing....*(Pause for a moment of silence to allow people to come out of their imagination and back into the room.)*

Open your eyes and imagine...imagine if all were welcome, all were loved, all were treated justly, and all were claimed and celebrated as God's family.

1. What could be available to us?
2. What gifts and blessings could be available to our church? To our denomination? To our world?

**PRAYER:** Oh God, forgive us. We have accepted the gifts of many while rejecting their bodies because of color, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, or appearance. Help us realize that if the gifts are beautiful, so are the givers. Help us celebrate others' value by their fruits, not the shape of the trees.



(Adapted from Chris R. Glaser, in *Shaping Sanctuary: Proclaiming God's Grace in an Inclusive Church*, compiled and edited by Kelly Turney. Chicago, IL: Reconciling Congregation Program; 2000, p. 138)

**■ Why I Am Involved in Reconciling Ministries (9 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** copy of Section VI. Called to Inclusiveness, ¶139, from *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008*; copy of the story, "Why I Am Involved in Reconciling Ministries."

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Read aloud ¶139, then read the story as an example of one person's response to the United Methodist call to inclusiveness.

Here's what *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008* says about inclusiveness:

**Part III – The Ministry of All Christians**

**Section VI. Called to Inclusiveness**

¶139. We recognize that God made all creation and saw that it was good. As a diverse people of God who bring special gifts and evidences of God's grace to the unity of the Church and to society, we are called to be faithful to the example of Jesus' ministry to all persons.

Inclusiveness means openness, acceptance, and support that enables all persons to participate in the life of the Church, the community, and the world; therefore, inclusiveness denies every semblance of discrimination. The services of worship of every local church of The United Methodist Church shall be open to all persons.

The mark of an inclusive society is one in which all persons are open, welcoming, fully accepting, and supporting of all other persons, enabling them to participate fully in the life of the church, the community, and the world....

In The United Methodist Church inclusiveness means the freedom for the total involvement of all persons who meet the requirements of The United Methodist Book of Discipline in the membership and leadership of the Church at any level and in every place. (*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2008*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press; 2009)

**Why I Am Involved in Reconciling Ministries**

A few years ago, our Bishop invited a number of LGBT United Methodists to meet with him to talk about church policy and its relationship to the LGBT community. I wondered



why non-LGBT persons were not invited? To me, this is not an LGBT “issue”—but rather, one that is central to who we are as United Methodists. All Means ALL!

Since that time I have become quite involved in our Conference-wide Reconciling United Methodists group. I have had the opportunity to meet Reconciling United Methodists from around the Conference and the nation: gay, lesbian, transgender, straight, questioning, young, old, in-between. We are United Methodists for whom the current status quo is not ok. We are United Methodists who believe our church is called to be a faith community for all persons.

Many times I have been confronted about why I, a non-gay, happily-married-for-30-years, female would concern myself with Reconciling Ministries? Because as long as any of my siblings in the faith are denied membership, ordination, or the right to openly and lovingly live with and marry their life-partner, I am called to witness to a different way of being the church. I see no other way to remain a member of the United Methodist Church than by openly witnessing to my belief that God’s Table is open to all...period.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. What does inclusiveness mean to you?
2. Are any in this group involved in Reconciling Ministries? Why?

**Call to Action (10 min)**

**INTRODUCTION:** When we think about the interconnectedness of the human family, we realize that being part of God’s family tree means that what we do affects others in our extended family. We have the power to damage this family tree or nurture it.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Think back over today’s activities and discussions.

1. What can we do to nurture God’s family tree, particularly the branches that include LGBT people and their families?
2. What can we do as a congregation?
3. What can we do as individuals?

**Honoring Our Actions and Participation (12 min)**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** a chalkboard and chalk or whiteboard or several large pieces of newsprint/chart paper and markers.

**INTRODUCTION:** We’ve been on a journey together over the weeks of this course. We’ve heard stories, we’ve told stories, we’ve made lists, we’ve thought about things in different ways, we’ve learned about others, and we’ve made commitments.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Using the chalkboard, whiteboard, or paper, jot down people's answers to the following questions. Use a section of the board or paper for each question. Put the answers randomly in "popcorn" fashion all over that section instead of in an orderly list.

1. Where have we been?
2. What have we done?
3. What won't be the same?
4. What could we do beyond this course?

Look at the lists and take a few moments to appreciate and celebrate the journey we've shared. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the participants in this adventure, for their willingness to share their thoughts and ideas, for the specific actions that have been taken, and for the changes that will come about in the future.

**Blessing and Sending Forth (5 min)**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Stand in a circle and form a circle of intertwined hands.

Each of you should reach your right arm in front of the person on your right.

Then reach your left arm in front of the person on your left.

Take hold of the hands you find there.

You should now be holding hands with the person two down from you in the circle on either side.

This will form a circle of intertwined hands.

Go around the circle and have each person who wants to say a one-sentence prayer of hope for the well-being of God's family.

**Course Evaluation**

**MATERIALS NEEDED:** copies of the course evaluation or a blank piece of 8.5 x 11 paper and a pen or pencil for each participant.

**INSTRUCTIONS:** a few minutes and answer the following questions.

1. How many sessions of this course did you attend?
2. What did you like about this course?
3. What did you learn during this course?
4. What do you intend to do differently as a result of this course?



Notes





## LGBT TEENS IN CHURCHES HANDOUT 1

In 2000, the nonprofit organization Christian Community conducted a research project on teenage sexuality and religion. A total of 5,819 teenagers (grades 9-12) from around the United States were surveyed about their religious faith, their congregational activity, their sexual values, and their sexual behavior. The survey involved 635 congregations. Surveys were collected from 4,198 Protestant youth in 38 denominations. This study is fully reported in Steve Clapp, Kristen Leverton Helbert, and Angela Zizak. *Faith Matters: Teenagers, Religion, and Sexuality*. Fort Wayne, IN: Lifequest; 2003.

This text is reprinted from Steve Clapp. *Silent and Undecided Friends: Motivating Greater LGBT Rights Advocacy among Clergy and Congregations*. Fort Wayne, IN: Lifequest; 2007: pp. 47-50. Used with permission.

If we had a preconceived idea of what we would find about the sexual orientation of teens who were involved in faith-based institutions, it was that we would likely discover a smaller percentage of teens self-identifying as homosexual or bisexual than has been found in secular studies. Our assumption was that teens of homosexual or bisexual orientation would be somewhat less likely to be involved in a faith-based institution, given the number of traditions with a negative view of homosexuality....

What we found, in fact, was that a surprisingly high number of teenagers who are involved in faith-based institutions self-identified as homosexual or bisexual. In fact most secular studies have reported lower percentages of teens who self-identify with homosexual or bisexual orientation than we found. As we have shared the results with clergy and other congregational leaders, most have been surprised by the percentage of teens who didn't identify a heterosexual orientation. Remember that these figures reflect self-identification of orientation, not behavior:

	MALES	FEMALES
<b>Heterosexual</b>	86%	89%
<b>Homosexual</b>	7%	5%
<b>Bisexual</b>	5%	4%
<b>Don't know</b>	2%	2%

Those figures are among the highest percentages of gay, lesbian, and bisexual teens that have been identified in any study. We do not necessarily conclude from this that congregational teens are more likely than secular teens to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. We do think that the way in which our study was conducted made it more likely for teens to feel safe in expressing their sexual orientation than has been the case in some other studies. Studies, for example, that rely on telephone interviews of teens are very likely to find gay, lesbian, and bisexual orientation and behavior under-reported. There has also been a recent trend toward teens not wanting to identify themselves by any particular orientation, though that is not reflected in our surveys or interviews from the 2000–2001 *Faith Matters* study.

What the *Faith Matters* study does clearly show is that most congregations have some teens who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. There are also teens who are unsure about their orientation. Many of these teens have concerns both about how to relate their sexual orientation to their faith and about how accepted they would be if their sexual orientation were known by the congregation....

We found that almost all the congregations participating in the *Faith Matters* study had at least one teen who self-identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or questioning his or her orientation. ***Eighty-six percent of those teens, however, said that their clergyperson was not aware of their orientation or their struggle; 46% of them indicated that their parents did not know about their orientation or their struggle.*** When we surveyed the clergy in those congregations, only 18% thought that they had one or more LGBT teens in the congregation, and only 12% knew the name of a gay or lesbian teen.

Most of these teens do have at least one young person in the faith-based institution who knows about their orientation, so they are not completely isolated....

Non-heterosexual teens in our study were almost twice as likely as heterosexual teens to have seriously considered suicide. This should be a matter of significant concern for those of us in faith-based institutions.

<p>I'm a teenager and I think I'm gay. My parents don't even know I worry about this.</p>	<p>I've always felt like I was the other gender, but I'm embarrassed to talk with anyone about it.</p>	<p>I know that God loves me, but would people in the church still love me if they knew?</p>
<p>This church provides loving support to people going through a divorce. Can I tell them that I just broke up with my life-partner of 9 years?</p>	<p>Every activity in this church is called a "family" activity. As a single person, I sometimes feel that this doesn't include me.</p>	<p>Our new baby was born with ambiguous genitals. It's awkward when people ask, "Is it a boy or a girl?"</p>
<p>We love our adult daughter and her partner of many years; they want to get married in Massachusetts. We'll be there, but wish we could share our joy with our church friends.</p>	<p>As a bisexual man, I often feel like I don't fit in. I'm not gay, but I'm not straight either.</p>	<p>Although I was born a woman, I've lived as a man for several years now. Most people have no idea that I'm transgender.</p>
<p>My husband of 25 years finally decided to transition from male to female. I know it's the right thing for her to do. But now I'm in the unusual position of being a straight woman married to a woman.</p>	<p>My son asked for a Barbie doll for his birthday. I got it for him, but I wonder what would happen if his friends knew.</p>	<p>My teenager tells me that kids suspected of being LGBT are harassed at school—called names, pushed into lockers, and picked on. I wonder if that ever happens at our church youth group.</p>
<p>Why is everyone so eager to categorize people as either this or that—female or male, gay or not, black or white. Why can't people just be who they are?</p>	<p>This church says, "Everyone welcome!" Do we really mean it? Would we welcome a transgender pastor? A lesbian youth director? A bisexual president of United Methodist Men?</p>	<p>I love my son and worry about him. Will he be happy? Will he find love? Now that he's told me he's gay, I also worry about his safety in the world.</p>
<p>I love the United Methodist Church I grew up in. But ever since a church member told me that she "loved the sinner" (me) but "hated the sin" (the fact that I'm gay), I have no desire to set foot in church.</p>	<p>Every day I drive by a church that flies a rainbow flag. It's hard to imagine a church that accepting of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people! I should visit there someday.</p>	<p>I'm a single mom with two kids. This church has welcomed me warmly. They even help get my oldest to youth group. Would this change if they knew I'm dating a woman?</p>
<p>Whenever we talk about "families" in the Sunday School class I teach, I always try to expand the children's views to include all different kinds of families.</p>	<p>When I told my friend that I was a lesbian, she informed me after much crying and praying that she could no longer be my friend unless I repented.</p>	<p>I preached a sermon where I suggested that being gay wasn't a sin. Then I got a call from the District Superintendent telling me that I shouldn't say that again.</p>
<p>I wish our pastor would use more inclusive language in sermons, prayers, and examples. Always saying "husband and wife" leaves some people out.</p>	<p>As a pastor, I believe that the church should be open and welcoming to everyone, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. But I don't think this church is quite ready for that.</p>	<p>I'm a layperson and I believe the church should be open and welcoming to everyone, including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. But I don't think my pastor is quite ready for that yet.</p>
<p>My wife and I have been married for many years. I'm gay, but I'm also committed to this marriage. Our pastor knows about our mixed-orientation marriage, but few others do.</p>		