

Engaging One Another in New Ways
Session One of a four-week design
Living in More Than One World

Time needed: 60 minutes

Session Overview

This session is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to build community with one another by reflecting on Scripture, hearing part of one another's life story, and growing to appreciate differences. The session is based on the first Bible study in which the task force engaged through the leadership of the Reverend Steven Yamaguchi, presbytery executive of Los Ranchos Presbytery. Steve, a Japanese-American, focused on how God works through those of us who live in more than one world.

All four of the sessions in this series may present you with the challenge of not having enough time to cover the material and provide for important group discussions. The times given by each activity are estimates. Given your context, you will need to decide how best to divide the time without scrimping on the material or prematurely cutting off important conversation. If possible, you might consider adding an extra session or extending the time of each session.

Resources Needed

- Bibles
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Copies of questions for reflection (p. 4)

Advance Preparation

Invite someone who has a bicultural background to share part of his or her experience with the class, or become familiar with the story of Steven Yamaguchi (activity 4).

The Session Plan

1. (7- 10 minutes) Welcome everyone, introducing yourself. Lead an opening prayer. Ask participants to share their names and briefly answer the following question (if the group is large, divide into subgroups of five to seven participants in each small group):

- Where in your life do you feel as though you go back and forth between two different worlds?

2. (1-2 minutes) Give an overview of the four-week series, including the focus for this session.

3. (10 minutes) Divide the group into three subgroups and assign each subgroup one of the following Scripture passages to read silently and then summarize for the whole group

- Exodus 2—4:12
- Acts 16
- Philippians 3:4-11

4. (3 minutes) Share the following thoughts, condensed from Steven Yamaguchi:

Moses was tormented over his bicultural identity as both the prince of Egypt and the son of the Hebrews. His bicultural identity is also what made Moses fit for particular service to God. My bicultural friends think that the reference in Ex. 4:10 to Moses being “slow of tongue and speech” means that Hebrew was not his first language. Moses did not belong fully in either place—that of the Hebrew people or of the Egyptians. He was not completely at home in either world; people and aspects of each place made him feel like a foreigner.

Saul/Paul also carried a bicultural identity as both a Jew (but “not a Jerusalem home boy”) and a Roman citizen, native of the Roman colony at Tarsus. He received a Roman education and was steeped in Roman politics. Though Paul counts all of this as “rubbish” (Phil. 3:7), God used all of who he was to be an apostle who reached many.

Many people of our church feel as if they live in two worlds, particularly women and racial ethnic minorities. All of the members of the Theological Task Force live in two worlds. The General Assembly Moderators who appointed the task force felt they couldn’t scratch any member from being on the task force, because they are able to move in more than one world in a trustworthy way.

5. (5-10 minutes) Either invite a person to share his or her own experience of living in a bicultural world, or continue to share Rev. Yamaguchi’s thoughts, which follow:

I am a third generation Japanese-American who grew up in an urban Japanese-American neighborhood. Eighty percent of the students in school were Japanese-American. We had tofu delivery door to door. My Japanese-American parents and many neighbors had been ordered into internment camps during World War II. As a kid, I was part of the majority, part of the world on top. Jews, Chinese-Americans and African-Americans were in the minority. Later, I moved to Orange County where the John Birch Society reigned. It seemed as if I had died and gone to hell, but it was also the place I met Jesus Christ. There were numerous places I lived after that—serving an inner-city church, studying at the Ivy League Harvard Divinity School, attending Gordon-Conwell College and Fuller Seminary, living in Tokyo. Each place shaped who I am and the gifts I bring to the body of Christ. The people I feel most loved by and whom I can best serve are the ones who get to know the other worlds about me. In one congregation I served, ninety percent of the parishioners were survivors of detention camps, and no one had connected

their story with God's story. They were moved to recognize themselves as people held captive who are now freed.

One question for us is how do we adjudicate between competing truth claims? We live in more than one sphere of influence. My six-year-old and nine-year-old daughters have learned that if you look Japanese and are in a Japanese restaurant, it's considered polite and appreciative to slurp your noodles—but not when eating spaghetti in an American restaurant.

People are shaped and formed by their contexts and experiences. Sometimes "different" looks scary because we don't understand each other's worlds. We need to bear witness and give grateful testimony to our experience by listening and learning from each other. The prologue in the Gospel According to John describes truth as incarnational.

If we live in a different land, it's quite different from being a tourist. We learn to understand what seemed strange at first. There are many in our church who are afraid of "them others," and they often deal with each other as caricatures, not flesh and blood.

It takes grace—a gift of God—to listen and appreciate the experience and the ideas of others who come from different worlds. What I'm praying for is that we can use all of our experiences to lead the church on a spiritual discovery, to help the church search with not only our minds, but our whole souls and hearts and strength. It's a flesh-and-blood incarnational adventure that we need to be about. The Spirit alone can bless us with the gifts of recognition and appreciation.

6. (7 minutes) Distribute copies of page 10, "Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing." Invite the group to spend time in silent reflection on the questions, jotting down some notes if they want for sharing later.

7. (15 minutes) In groups of no more than five, share responses to the questions for activity 6 using the process of mutual invitation.

8. (3 minutes) Close either with prayer or by singing "Help Us Accept Each Other," #358 in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*.

9. Encourage participants to prepare for the next session by reading pp. 23-29 of the final report and/or the resource paper, *Principles of Polity: Their Contribution to the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Presbyterian Church*, which can be downloaded from the Theological Task Force's Web site, www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity.

Questions for Personal Reflection and Sharing

What are the places/worlds/contexts that God has used to shape me? (my loves, my language, manners, dreams, and passions)

How might these contexts have shaped my view of God?

How might they have shaped the things of Christ's church about which I care most passionately?

Engaging One Another in New Ways
Session Two of a four-week design
Balancing Complementary Commitments

Time needed: 60 minutes

Session Overview

This session is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to learn about complementary commitments, or “points of balance,” within the polity and theology of the Presbyterian church and to explore how to hold such commitments in equilibrium. An interactive exercise on polarity management is included. The times given by each activity are estimates.

Resources Needed

- Paper and pens or pencils
- Copies of the points of balance and G-6.0108 from the *Book of Order* (p. 9)
- Copies of the polarity map (p. 10)
- Masking tape if polarity maps are created on the floor

Advance Preparation

If participants number more than ten, they should be divided into subgroups of six to ten. Evaluate the room in which the class will meet to see if there is enough clear floor space for each of the subgroups to stand in a square. If there is enough space, create polarity maps with masking tape on the floor by making a cross with four quadrants, each quadrant being large enough for six to ten persons to stand in it (see polarity map on p. 10). Create enough maps on the floor for every subgroup. If there is not enough clear floor space, subgroups can gather around tables or in clusters of chairs and work with a copy of the polarity map.

For more on polarity management, consider Barry Johnson’s book, *Polarity Management: Identifying and Managing Unsolvables Problems* (Amherst: Human Resource Development Press *HRD Press*, 1996). Chapter 5 on “Crusading and Tradition-Bearing” is especially helpful when there is conflict within a group.

The Session Plan

1. (2 minutes) Describe the focus of this session. Read the following from the *Book of Order*:

Presbyters are not simply to reflect the will of the people, but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ. (G-4.0301d)

Lead the group in prayer or in singing “Open My Eyes That I May See,” #324 in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*.

2. (5-7 minutes) Distribute copies of p. 9 (points of balance and the text of G-6.0108). Ask participants to read in antiphonal fashion the two themes in each of the four points of balance. Provide a brief overview of pp. 23-29 of the final report of the task force. Read the following from the report (lines 798-813):

The discipleship of maintaining a healthy tension within these four sets of complementary commitments has always been a strenuous and complex exercise. The Presbyterian church has consistently looked to the Holy Spirit speaking through Scripture for its compass in navigating a faithful course to God's kingdom. But simply charting a course has never been sufficient. The opportunities and temptations of the culture that the church inhabits, discord over controversial issues, and other factors internal and external to the church can push the church to one side of the polity balance or the other. In certain situations they can even threaten to capsize the ship of faith by collapsing the necessary tension between its guiding principles. The church's calling in the face of such a challenge has been to seek flexible equilibrium rather than static and perfect balance. It achieves this goal by weighting its polity for a time in favor of those principles neglected by current trends in culture, controversy, theology, or practice. Such temporary maneuvers are essential to right the ship, but they too can endanger its faithful forward course if they are taken to be permanent or irreversible. When conditions change, equilibrium between the complementary commitments described above should be restored.

3. (15 minutes) Invite participants to discuss the following questions:

- Do you agree that balance between competing themes and emphases is a strength of the Presbyterian church? Is balance important in your personal faith and the faith of the church?
- The paper, *Principles of Polity: Their Contribution to the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Presbyterian Church*, tells several stories from the history of the denomination. Do any of these help us to understand the denomination's challenges today? Do any of the stories suggest ways to address our challenges?

4. (5-7 minutes) Distribute copies of the polarity map. Present the following theory on polarity management:

Polarity Management: Sometimes groups and organizations address the same issue again and again because they are treating it like a problem that needs a solution when, in fact, the issue revolves around a set of polarities. Polarities are two values that appear to be opposite of, and in tension with, each other, but in reality are interdependent. They can't function well independently—both are needed for the long-term health of an organization.

Organizational consultant Barry Johnson created a tool called polarity management that can help a group recognize the difference between a problem

that can be solved and a set of polarities that can be managed. Johnson's approach helps a group move beyond dualistic, right/wrong thinking. Instead, persons can see the beneficial qualities of both poles, and the downsides of both that emerge if either side alone is emphasized.

Identify Polarities vs. Problems: To determine whether there is a polarity to manage or a problem to solve, two questions are helpful:

- Is the difficulty ongoing?
- Are there two poles that are interdependent? (Both are needed to thrive, such as with breathing—we need both inhaling and exhaling to live.)

Problems to solve have a solution, which can be considered an end point in a process. The solution can stand alone to work over an extended period of time. Polarities to manage, on the other hand, are ongoing and do not get "solved." There is continual shift in emphasis or focus from one pole to the other.

Movement among Poles: The polarity map is represented by two poles. The left half represents one pole, the right half the other. The upper half of each pole represents the positive outcomes that result from focusing on that pole. These are the benefits of that pole. The plus sign (+) in the upper half of each pole is a symbol that means whatever is written in that quadrant is considered positive or good. The lower half of each pole represents the negative outcomes that result from focusing *only* on that pole and neglecting the opposite pole. These are the disadvantages of that pole. The minus sign (–) in the lower half of each pole is a symbol that means whatever is written in that quadrant is considered negative or bad.

When one pole is valued to the exclusion of the other, the negative aspects of that pole are experienced. Whenever there is a push for a shift from one pole of a polarity to the other, it is because those pushing are: 1) experiencing or anticipating the negatives of the present pole which they identify as the 'problem,' and 2) attracted to the positives of the other pole which they identify as the 'solution.'

5. (2 minutes) Have the group choose one set of themes from the following points of balance to work with. Write the name of one pole on the left side of the map, and the name of the other pole on the right side with one of the following sets of poles:

- Communal Discernment/Individual Discernment
- Adherence/ Freedom
- Presbyterian Witness/Ecumenical Mission
- Original Jurisdiction/Oversight & Review

6. (20 minutes) Divide the group into subgroups of six to ten persons. Instruct them to do the following:

- a. Move to a polarity map on the floor (or one of the tables or clusters of chairs). Choose a scribe who will write persons' input on one of the polarity maps.
- b. All of you start in the L- (lower left) quadrant and make a list of the negatives of focusing *only* on that pole to the exclusion of the other pole. Get at least one contribution from each group member. You do not have to agree on the list. Write down whatever someone wants to add.

(Wait for a period of time between each quadrant. When it seems as though most have finished adding ideas, give the next instruction.)

- c. When you are finished, all of you now move up to the (R+) quadrant of the opposite pole. Here make a list of the positives of this pole. Try to get at least one contribution from each group member.
- d. Move to the R- quadrant (lower right side) and write down the negatives of focusing *only* on that pole to the exclusion of the other pole.
- e. Move to the L+ quadrant (upper left) and write down the positive aspects associated with that pole.

7. (5 minutes) Share the following with the whole group:

To manage a polarity effectively, people in an organization need to see the whole picture, or all four quadrants of the polarity map, and get out of an either/or mindset. When everyone can see the consequences of emphasis on one pole or the other, they will more likely work together. We just moved through the quadrants in the normal flow of L- to R+ to R- to L+. Sometimes that flow is resisted in a group when some persons do not see or want to move to the positives of the opposite pole or acknowledge the negatives of a current pole. When resistance happens, it can be helpful to move through the quadrants in the flow of L- to L+ to R- to R+. *(Drawing the flow on newsprint may be helpful).*

8. (5-7 minutes) Invite each subgroup to discuss among themselves:

- How can the church manage to enhance the positive qualities of each pole and avoid the negative consequences of too much or exclusive emphasis on either pole?

If time allows, invite subgroups to share their insights with the whole group.

10. (1 minute) Ask everyone to join hands in one circle and close with prayer.

11. Invite participants to prepare for the next session by reading the resource paper, *Discernment and Decision Making*, which can be downloaded from the Theological Task Force's Web site, www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity.

Points of Balance within Presbyterian Theology and Polity

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|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to honor communal discernment of God’s will and the Spirit’s leading | <p><i>while</i>
<i>also</i></p> | <p>recognizing that God alone is Lord of the conscience under the authority of scripture</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to adhere to essential and necessary beliefs and practices that bind the faithful into the body of Christ | <p><i>while</i>
<i>also</i></p> | <p>respecting freedom in non-essential matters of belief, worship, piety, witness and service</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to maintain a distinctive Presbyterian and Reformed witness to the world | <p><i>while</i>
<i>also</i></p> <p>and</p> | <p>engaging in mission with other Christians with whom they share a catholic identity</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to uphold the rights and responsibilities of governing bodies that have original jurisdiction in church governance | <p><i>while</i>
<i>also</i></p> | <p>sustaining the rights and responsibilities of governing bodies that have the power of oversight and review</p> |

Book of Order, G-6.0108

Freedom of Conscience – Individual and Corporate

a. It is necessary to the integrity and health of the church that the persons who serve as its officers shall adhere to the essentials of the Reformed faith and polity as expressed in *The Book of Confessions* and the Form of Government. So far as may be possible without serious departure from these standards, without infringing on the rights and views of others, and without obstructing the constitutional governance of the church, freedom of conscience with respect to the interpretation of Scripture is to be maintained.

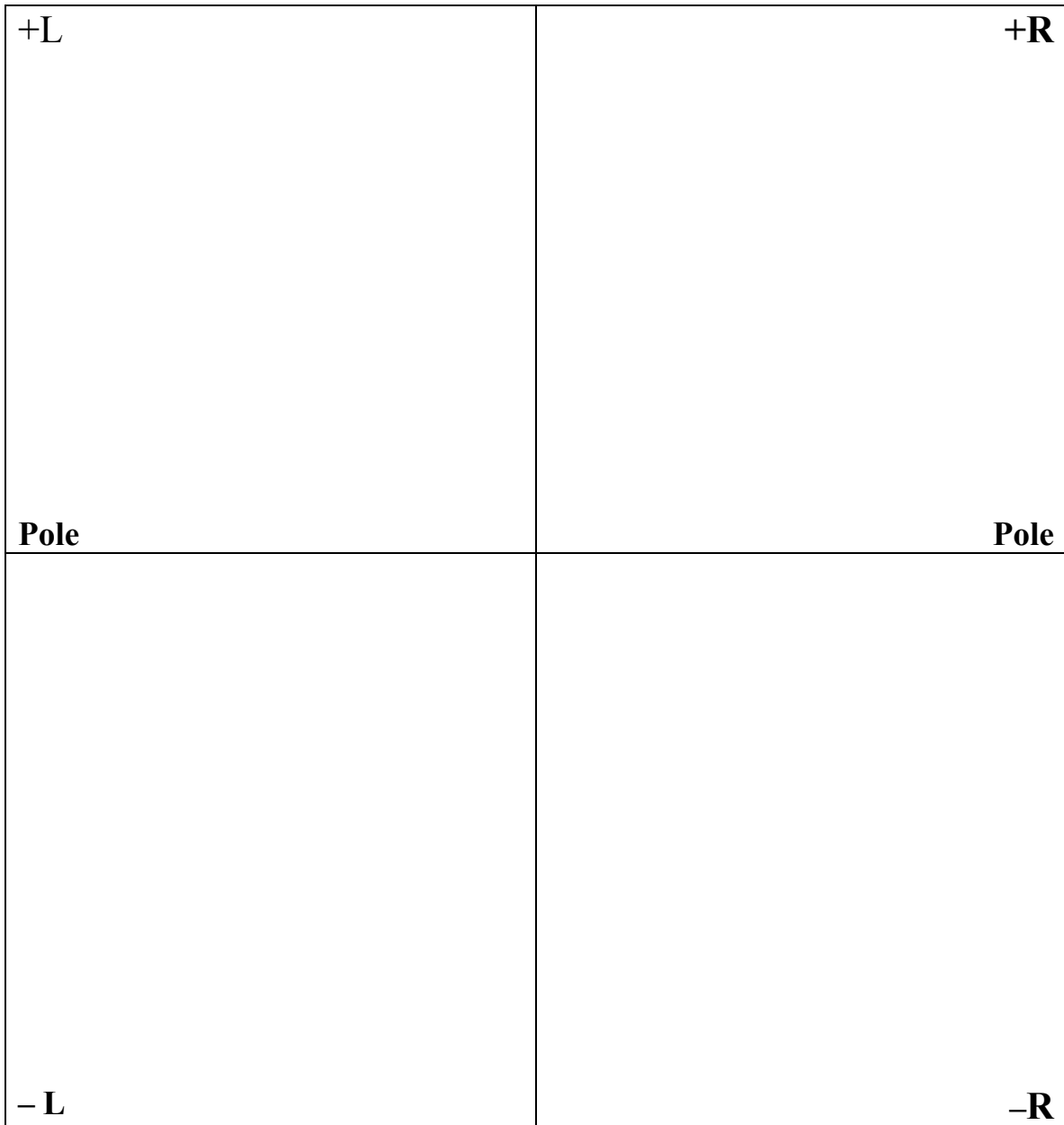
Within Certain Bounds

b. It is to be recognized, however, that in becoming a candidate or officer of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) one chooses to exercise freedom of conscience within certain bounds. His or her conscience is captive so long as he or she continues to seek or hold office in that body. The decision as to whether a person has departed from essentials of Reformed faith and polity is made initially by the individual concerned but ultimately becomes the responsibility of the governing body in which he or she serves (G-1.0301, G-1.0502)

Candidates for Ministry

c. Persons seeking to be received as candidates for ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) shall have their attention drawn to the constitutional documents of the church including its statement on freedom of conscience. (G-14.0304)

Seeing the Whole Polarity Map



Engaging One Another in New Ways
Session Three of a four-week design
Discerning the Movement of the Spirit

Time needed: 60 minutes or more

Session Overview

This session is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to experience one way to discern God’s movement in their lives by reflecting on how God has been at work in the past. It also can build community by inviting participants to talk about same-gender issues from a personal viewpoint. Ideally, this session needs a two-hour block of time for each group of ten to twelve persons. With one hour, subgroups of six could work.

Resources Needed

- One or more long sheets of butcher paper for each subgroup
- Three different colored marking pens for each subgroup
- Newsprint for each subgroup
- Masking tape
- Paper and pens or pencils
- Copies of questions for reflection (p. 14)

Advance Preparation

A facilitator and scribe are needed in each group of six participants for activity 4. Mark the butcher paper with decades at the top beginning with “1930” and ending with the current year. Each sheet of paper should be taped to a different wall for each group.

The Session Plan

1. (2 minutes) Read aloud Jesus’ words, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matt. 18:20). Follow with prayer or by singing “God Is So Good,” (#2056, *Sing the Faith*) first as written, then changing “me” to “us.”

2. (5 minutes) Introduce the session by sharing the following:

Spiritual discernment of the Holy Spirit is much broader and deeper than simply a decision-making process. It is:

- Cultivating sensitivity to the presence of God
- Sorting or unmasking what is of God
- Noticing God’s leadings
- Growing into a sense of God’s gracious presence¹

¹ Adapted from notes of Shaun McCarty, Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation.

Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), is an acknowledged specialist in discernment within the Christian tradition. He taught ways to notice the movement of the Holy Spirit through consolations (peace, vitality, joy) and desolations (discomfort, loss, sadness). We are going to engage in an exercise developed by a Jesuit priest, Fr. John English, called Graced Communal History. It is designed to assist a group to become aware of the impact of its past on its current life, since one way to discern is through memory. The premise of the exercise is that one's personal graced history is within communal history, which is within God's salvation history. God is present in each person's life story and also in the history of a community or group. This history can be reflected upon in the context of God's constant, loving presence. The three classic movements within salvation history are grace, sin, and resurrection/hope. There may be overlap among the three categories.

We are going to reflect on these three movements of grace, sin, and resurrection in our lives around issues related to same-gender covenantal relationships. We will do this by taking time for personal reflection on our own past, then sharing with others as you are comfortable, and, finally, creating a timeline of our experience.

3. (10 minutes) Distribute the handout on p. 13. Ask participants to take 15 minutes to reflect on the questions listed as the basis for sharing with the group in the next activity.

4. (45 minutes) Divide participants into subgroups of no more than six in each group (*if necessary*), each with its own facilitator and scribe. Give these directions:

The facilitator of each group will recognize one person at a time to address each of the three questions (from activity 3). It is not a time for any comments by others, unless the facilitator or scribe has a question for clarification. At the end of each sharing, the person who shared will tell the scribe what few words to use to capture his or her own thoughts on the butcher paper—the history line. The scribe will use a different color for thoughts related to grace, to sin, and to resurrection. You may take your turn as you are moved to do so. If anyone prefers not to share, that is fine. Let some silence come between when people share so we listen well to one another. Make sure the facilitator and scribe are also given an opportunity to speak.

Once everyone in your group who feels led to do so has shared, discuss this question:

- What common themes or dimensions do you sense from the sharing of persons in your group?

These can be recorded on newsprint to share with the larger group.

5. (5-7 minutes) Reconvene as one group. If time allows, invite each subgroup to share from their newsprint, and have the whole group reflect on any commonalities that surface.

6. (2 minutes) Thank the group for their openness with one another. Close with prayer or by singing or saying the words of verses one and two of “Lord, Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing,” #538 in *The Presbyterian Hymnal*.

7. Invite participants to prepare for the next session by becoming familiar with the study paper *Same-Gender Relationships in the Church: Seven Theological Viewpoints*, which can be downloaded from the Theological Task Force’s Web site at www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity.

Graced Communal History—Personal Reflection

Reflect silently and individually on the following questions:

How have you encountered God's grace (forgiveness, liberation from oppression, reconciliation, restoration, cleansing, homecoming, blessing) as you have engaged issues surrounding same-gender covenantal relationships, whether through the study of Scripture, life encounters with others, or membership in a denomination that is in a conflict over matters of sexual orientation?

How have you encountered sin (exile, disobedience, bondage, brokenness, constricted vision, judgment, separation from God and others)—in your own life as well as elsewhere—having been part of a church that struggles over issues surrounding same-gender relationships?

In the midst of our church's struggle over issues surrounding sexual orientation, what have you encountered as signs of resurrection (dying and rising, hope, forward movement, drawing good out of evil, creating new life)—points at which God is working in you and through our struggle as a denomination to bring new life?

Engaging One Another in New Ways
Session Four of a four-week design
Understanding Different Viewpoints

Preface

This session is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to explore and discuss the study paper, *Same-Gender Relationships in the Church: Seven Theological Viewpoints*, written by task force member Stacy Johnson. The paper grew out of a presentation that Dr. Johnson made to the Theological Task Force in 2004.

What follows below is taken from a separate facilitator's guide for the study paper, which was written by Louise Lawson Johnson. It is one of several models in the facilitator's guide, ranging from this one 60-minute session to a full-day retreat or workshop.

The study paper and facilitator's guide are available online at www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity.

One-Hour Presentation of All Seven Viewpoints

This format is ideal for groups that want a large amount of information in a short amount of time. Needless to say, this format is not conducive for in-depth study or meaningful discussion. Make sure each person has a copy of the study paper. Ideally, each person should have read the paper in its entirety in advance.

Suggested schedule:

- 5 minutes: welcome and prayer
- 55 minutes: a summary of each viewpoint followed by an illustrative dialogue (*approx. 4 min. per summary; 4 min. per dialogue*)

Allow at least 90 minutes if discussion is added to this format.

The obvious challenge is to do justice to each viewpoint in such a limited amount of time. It is possible to summarize the major points of each position using "Major Ideas to Emphasize in Each Section of the Study" found on page 16 of this guide. These condensed summaries can then be used as a Powerpoint presentation, projected on an overhead projector, or made into handouts. Having this kind of visual aid is particularly effective when the crowd is large. An example of a one-page summary for Viewpoint One is below.

A particularly engaging way to present this material is to follow each condensed summary by the dialogue that illustrates that position (see dialogues below). By using this summary/dialogue format, you can add interest while staying within the 8-minute limit for each viewpoint.

Background: Principles Underlying Non-affirming Beliefs in General

All same-gender sexual behavior is sin; therefore it is wrong to “affirm” such conduct in any way. These conclusions are based upon the following beliefs:

- a judgment that Scripture is clear in prohibiting same-gender sexual behavior
- sexual expression must be limited to marriage between a man and a woman
- arguments from “natural law,” according to which sexual relationships between persons of the same gender are against nature
- centuries of Jewish/Christian moral teaching against same-gender sexuality
- opening the doors to gay and lesbian relationships will undermine the institution of monogamous marriage

Viewpoint One: Prohibition (pg. 19 of study paper)

- All homoerotic *behavior* is an absolute violation of the will of God; some adherents believe that any form of homoerotic *desire* is an expression of perversion.
- Persons who engage unrepentantly in same-gender sex acts should be ineligible to hold church office.
- Within society at large, “heterosexual marriage” should be affirmed and all forms of homoeroticism (including gay marriage or unions) should be discouraged.

Creation: Same-gender sexual expression is not a part of the goodness of creation nor is it a gift of God. Such acts violate nature, undermining the “gender complementarity” visible in the created world.

Reconciliation: To come into right relationship with God, gays and lesbians must repent of their conduct; some would add homoerotic desires; others add a duty to try to achieve a heterosexual orientation through “reparative therapy.”

Redemption: Living a life of redemption requires that one return to one’s “true,” God-given heterosexual nature or remain celibate.

Summary and Critique of this Viewpoint

Strengths: The conclusions follow effortlessly from the major premise, which is that certain forms of homoerotic behavior have been clearly prohibited by Scripture, tradition, and morality. If this is true, then such behavior must not be sanctioned by the church or by society at large.

Weaknesses: Prohibitionists resist allowing the truth of their interpretation to be tested in the light of everything else that we know. There are other alternative readings of Scripture, tradition, and morality, which some prohibitionists either ignore or belittle. Everything rests on deductive reasoning derived from definitions put forward in advance. Little attention is paid to empirical or scientific study, except where it supports the prohibitionist stance.

Dialogues Illustrating Each Viewpoint
requires a female (F) and a male (M) reader

Viewpoint One: Prohibition

- F:** Did you hear about Ted and Alice's son, Brantley? When he was home over Christmas, he told them he was gay.
- M:** Oh, no! That's horrible news. What a terrible shock. Brantley wasn't raised that way, that's for sure.
- F:** No kidding. Ted and Alice had him at church every time the doors opened. I took Brantley through confirmation class myself. How can he not see that being gay is not God's will?
- M:** Sin is sin, whether Brantley recognizes it or not. I think we need to pray that he will ask God to remove all homosexual desires from his life.
- F:** Amen!

Viewpoint Two: Toleration

- M:** It's just a tragedy about Brantley's being gay. I don't understand why some people are wired that way. Think of how hard that must be, not only for Ted and Alice, but also for Brantley.
- F:** There go any hopes for a grandchild. I know Ted and Alice had hoped Brantley would marry that cute girl he dated in college. Now he's destined to be single and celibate, and Brantley is such a people person.
- M:** It's just a crying shame.

Viewpoint Three: Accommodation

- F:** You know, I just can't get Brantley off of my mind. Ever since he was a little boy, he's been different. I couldn't put my finger on it then, but now it makes sense.
- M:** What I hate to think about is Brantley being all alone in the world. After all, human beings were created to be in relationships with one another. My life surely would have been different without you in it.
- F:** Different?! Don't you mean "impoverished?"
- M:** Yes, right! Of course. But that's my point. Would it be so horrible if Brantley were to find a partner with whom to share a committed life of love and faith?

F: Well, that would sure beat the alternative of the singles bar scene with its promiscuous lifestyle.

Viewpoint Four: Legitimation

B: Brantley's situation bothers me at another level besides just the social one. Brantley is a person of deep faith, and I think he would make a great church officer. But according to our current church polity, if Brantley is ever in a relationship with someone—even a committed and exclusive relationship—he is disqualified from ordained service to the church.

F: That's not fair. That makes Brantley a second-class citizen.

M: Precisely. No matter what we think about Brantley's being gay—and frankly, I'm not sure *what* I think—there is a basic justice issue involved.

F: I can see that. Even if having a gay orientation or lifestyle is a sin, we're *all* sinners. On most holidays, I'm an unrepentant glutton myself. I don't believe we are entitled to isolate some folks for special exclusion and others for special privilege in the church.

Viewpoint Five: Celebration

M: Last year, one of my co-workers, Joan, came out of the closet. She said she was tired of hiding who she was. Now she talks openly about being a lesbian. She says God made her that way and it's nothing to be ashamed of. She even speaks of being lesbian as God's good gift.

F: Wow. But isn't she lonely, and won't she miss getting married and having children?

M: She is in a committed relationship with her partner, Jean Ann. She and Jean Ann have been together for over 5 years—it's just that they were in the closet until now. They are planning to adopt a child together in the future.

F: Sounds like they see no difference morally or ethically between their situation and that of a heterosexual married couple.

M: Correct. They believe their gay identity is a fact to be claimed and even celebrated—not denied. Joan said it's time for them to live openly with integrity and to stop hiding in the closet. Since Joan and Jean Ann are both Christians, they hope one day to have their union blessed by the church.

Viewpoint Six: Liberation

F: Talking about Joan and Jean Ann reminds me of the research that my cousin is doing at the University on gender roles. He says there are folks who contend that gender itself is a social construct, and that what we associate with being masculine and feminine is nothing

more than learned behavior. The evidence is that what is considered masculine and feminine varies quite a bit from culture to culture and from age to age.

M: That's interesting. But one thing that *doesn't* vary from culture to culture and from age to age is our sexual equipment. There is a pesky appendage whose absence or presence determines a lot, if I'm not mistaken!

F: Believe it or not, you *are* mistaken. Most of us don't grow up learning this, my cousin said, but in about one in every thousand births, a baby is born with indistinguishable genitalia. In other words, the baby's gender can't be determined by looking at the sexual equipment, as you called it. There are also people whose psychological identity does not match their biological bodies—they have a female awareness, but a male body—or vice versa.

M: Wow. How does all of this figure into the notion of all people being created in the image of God?

F: Well, it certainly calls into question the assumption that there is only male and female, and that all people can be expected to be heterosexual without question. Apparently the human family is far more complex than that.

Viewpoint Seven: Consecration

M: I've been thinking a lot about this whole gay union thing. What would it look like for the church to bless the monogamous unions of gay people like Joan, Jean Ann, and Brantley? How would consecrating their relationships hurt anyone?

F: You mean for the church to just drop all sexual standards entirely? I think that is an awful idea. Sexual ethics has already gone to hell in a hand basket in our society. Just look at all that smut on TV, in movies, and on the radio—not to mention what's on the Internet!

M: Wait, you misunderstand. I'm not talking about the church abandoning sexual standards. Quite the contrary. I'm talking about the church holding up the same sexual standards for gay unions as they do for heterosexual couples who marry. Why shouldn't Brantley and a gay partner or Joan and Jean Ann have their unions blessed by the church and recognized as a committed covenant if they are in a mutually exclusive relationship that they intend to be lifelong?

F: I'll have to admit, the church seems to gladly bless the unions of countless people who have been unrepentantly "living in sin," as we used to call it, without batting an eye.

M: Consecrating gay unions is a far cry from endorsing a promiscuous, "anything goes" sexual ethic. As a matter of fact, it is a call to sexual accountability and commitment, values that the church has always stood for. Why should the church object to that?