

## Discussion Guide

### *Introduction*

This brief guide is designed to facilitate discussion of the task force's three preliminary affirmations about the peace, unity, and purity of the church, as written in their preliminary report to the 216th General Assembly (2004). Theological reflection groups can use the guide with or without a facilitator. A more extensive curriculum entitled "Three Theological Affirmations," is available on the task force's Web site at [www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity](http://www.pcusa.org/peaceunitypurity). Each participant should have read a copy of the preliminary report in advance.

Engaging in discussions about this report may lead to personal sharing among group members that runs the gamut from unshakable expressions of faith to deep-seated doubt. It is important to create a space in which participants feel safe to express themselves honestly and freely. A newly formed group especially needs to spend time getting to know one another and building trust before engaging in serious discussion. Helpful tools for fostering this kind of community can be found in segment one, "Fostering Community," of the task force's first video, "Seeking Peace, Unity, and Purity," and a resource called "Resources for Fostering Community and Dialogue," which can be found on the task force's Web site.

Decide early on how you want to structure your time as a group. You may discuss the entire report in one session or choose to devote one session to each of the three affirmations. Schedule yourselves in a way that will provide ample time for discussion.

As you discuss the following questions, consider using an approach such as mutual invitation or prayerful listening, which are described in the resources named above. If the group is large, divide into sub-groups of five to seven participants in each small group. Provide each small group with Bibles, and with newsprint and markers if you choose to have them record the highlights of their discussions to share with the larger group.

### *Preliminary Affirmations About the Peace, Unity, and Purity of the Church:*

- People yearn for peace rather than turmoil and conflict. How might this yearning be a sign of God at work? Name some instances when God has brought reconciliation or peace. People seek honesty, truth and purity. How might this search be a sign of God at work? Name some instances when God has been at work to produce honesty, truth, or purity.
- "The only way forward, as the reformers long ago insisted, is the way that leads through grace." Why is grace so important to the Christian faith? To us? Why do we need to extend God's grace to others? What does it look like to live graciously with those who differ from us?

### *Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church's Peace:*

- Read Ephesians 2:13-16. The task force affirms that the peace made real in Jesus Christ offers us “more than a temporary halt to conflict; it is an enduring peace based on reconciliation achieved for us at great cost.” What is the difference between a temporary truce and enduring reconciliation? Have you experienced the gift of peace in your congregation? Your presbytery? What led to and resulted from this gift?
- The task force affirms that the church “has already been given the resources it needs for peacemaking.” What are these resources?

*Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church’s Unity:*

- “The new life that is ours in Christ is corporate in nature, meaning that there is no unity with Christ that is not also a unity with other believers.” What do you find hopeful about this? What do you find challenging? How may God be inviting us to live into unity with one another?
- “The achievement of unity is complicated by a long-standing tension between the call to exercise mutual accountability and the affirmation that ‘God alone is Lord of the conscience’ [*Book of Order*, G-1.0301(1)(a)].” Share your thoughts about the value of mutual accountability. Now name an example of when conscience might lead someone to do something that differs from the consensus of a group. When have you seen this tension lived out in positive, productive ways?

*Jesus Christ Himself Is the Church’s Purity:*

- What does it mean for a group of people, the church, to be pure? If Jesus Christ himself is the church’s purity, what is being said about purity? About the church? About Christ?
- “The quest for purity is a call to self-examination, repentance, and mutual accountability in love.” When has the church examined itself, found itself to be in error, repented, and then gone in a new direction? Did this lead to greater purity?

*General Discussion:*

- The task force lists criteria for any “process” or “instrument” that they discover or devise. What do you think of these criteria? What would you add?
- How might peace, unity, and purity that have already been given by God to the church best be expressed in the life of our denomination? How do you see peace, unity, and purity already at work within the church?
- Some people say that disagreements in the church are not the problem, but rather the problem is our letting differences divide us. How might we approach our diversity in a new way?