Making the Vision Plain
An event for congregations around Minnesota
Digital Resource Packet

WORSHIP OUTLINE:

Call to Presence: Canticle of Love UMH 646

One: Let love be genuine and live in harmony; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good. Outdo one another in showing honor; be humble and never conceited.

All: Love is stronger than death and jealousy cruel as the grave. Floods cannot drown love and wealth cannot buy it.

One: Put love above all else; let Christ’s peace rule your hearts Always be forgiving, as Christ has forgiven you.

All: Love is not jealous or boastful, arrogant, rude, or stubborn, irritable, resentful, or possessive. Love is patient and kind.

One: Do not love in word or speech only; love also in deed and truth. Receive each other in sincerity, find mercy and grow old together.

All: Love rejoices in the right; it bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things, for love is faithful and endless. We gather as a people dedicated to living love.

Hymn: The Gift of Love UMH 408

Though I may speak with bravest fire, and have the gift to all inspire, And have not love, my words are vain, as sounding brass, and hopeless gain.

Though I may give all I possess, and striving so my love profess, But not be given by love within, the profit soon turns strangely thin.

Come, Spirit, come, our hearts control, our spirits long to be made whole. Let inward love guide every deed; by this we worship, and are freed.
Scripture Reading 1 John 4: 16- 21 - The Message

This is how we know we’re living steadily and deeply in him, and he in us: He’s given us life from his life, from his very own Spirit. Also, we’ve seen for ourselves and continue to state openly that God sent the Son as Savior of the world. Everyone who confesses that Jesus is God’s Son participates continuously in an intimate relationship with God. We know it so well, we’ve embraced it heart and soul, this love that comes from God.

God is love. When we take up permanent residence in a life of love, we live in God and God lives in us. This way, love has the run of the house, becomes at home and mature in us, so that we’re free of worry on Judgment Day—our standing in the world is identical with Christ’s. There is no room in love for fear. Well-formed love banishes fear. Since fear is crippling, a fearful life—fear of death, fear of judgment—is one not yet fully formed in love.

We, though, are going to love—love and be loved. First we were loved, now we love. God loved us first.

If anyone boasts, “I love God,” and goes right on hating his brother or sister, thinking nothing of it, he is a liar. If he won’t love the person he can see, how can he love the God he can’t see? The command we have from Christ is blunt: Loving God includes loving people. You’ve got to love both.

Reflection Question (3 minutes): How can becoming a more inclusive church bear witness to the gospel of love? Please turn to your neighbor and share one way you have experienced the gift of inclusive love for all people through the Body of Christ called “church”.

A Celtic Profession of Faith from the Iona Community, Scotland

One:  Let us affirm our faith.
All:  We believe
That God is present in the darkness before dawn;
In the waiting and uncertainty
Where fear and courage join hands,
Conflict and caring link arms
And the sun rises over barbed wire.
We believe in a with-us God
Who sits down in our midst
To share our humanity,
A feasting God.
We affirm a faith,
That takes us beyond a safe place
Into action, into vulnerability,
Into the streets.
We commit ourselves to work for change
And put ourselves on the line;
To bear responsibility, to take risks,
Live powerfully and face humiliation;
To stand with those on the edge;
To choose life
And be used by the Spirit
For God's new community of Hope. Amen.

(from Iona Abbey Worship Book by The Iona Community)

Hymn:  Song for Love       by Anna Briggs
(Tune, All Through the Night)

Now we sing to praise love's blessing all through our lives,
laughter, joy, surprise confessing, all through our lives.
Love that dreamed a new creation, love that dared an incarnation,
love that offers transformation all through our lives.

How our wounds ache for love's healing all through our days.
How our world needs love's revealing, in all its ways.
Fearful hearts suspect the stranger, hardened nations arm for danger,
love lives on, the powerful changer, all through our days.

Love's the grace that makes us caring all through our lives,
urges us to warmth and sharing all through our lives,
speaks in us, oppression naming, strives in us, injustice shaming,
lives in us, true peace proclaiming all through our lives.
It is God’s truth and central to our Wesleyan tradition that we are loved because it is God’s nature to love. We follow the way of Jesus because we are deeply and profoundly loved. While John Wesley shared with many other Christians a belief in grace, justification, assurance, and sanctification, he combined them in a powerful manner to create distinctive emphases for living the full Christian life. Grace pervades our understanding of Christian faith and life. By grace we mean the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit.

While the grace of God is undivided, it precedes salvation as “prevenient grace,” continues in “justifying grace,” and is brought to fruition in “sanctifying grace.” (2016 BOD, pp. 51-53)

God is the “ground of all being,” (Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology) ever creating in our midst, while entrusting us as partners and stewards of God’s vision for our world. As such, we remain open to God’s creating action within us, both individually and collectively. Jesus is our foundation, the One who teaches us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to love our enemies and welcome the stranger. He is our peace, breaking down the dividing walls and ending the hostility. Christ is the very embodiment of Love; Emmanuel – “God with us.” It is our love for him that calls us to keep his commandments. Christ brings salvation by restoring broken relationships between humankind and our Creator, and reconciling broken relationships between one another. After giving his whole life, including death on the cross, God raised Him on the third day, showing the power of Love and the hope of resurrection. Christ’s promise that an Advocate would be sent was fulfilled through the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit, as Divine Presence, who enlivens us, transforms us, sustains us, and empowers all God’s children who would bring peace on earth.

The Holy Spirit calls us into community and sends us forth bringing good news to the oppressed, binding up the broken hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and building a sustainable world for future generations. We envision this to be a world where workers receive a just reward for their labors, and the value of corporate structures is measured by their benefit to the community at large.
MODULE 1 WORKSHEET: Personal Reflection Questions

1. What is my connection to Methodism and/or Wesleyan theology? How did I get here? Why am I here now?

2. What is the role of the Bible in my faith? What authority does the Bible hold for me personally? What authority does the Bible hold in the faith community?

3. What struck me in the video about the Bible and Wesleyan theology? Was anything new to me or shared in a new way?

4. How can this conversation be helpful to me in walking alongside others toward an inclusive expression of Methodism in Minnesota?

MODULE 1 WORKSHEET: Group Reflection

1. Share around the table about something (not everything!) you wrote or thought about in the personal reflection time. Make sure to listen well as others are sharing.

2. How can congregations in Minnesota work together to share understanding of how an inclusive church is a biblical and Wesleyan expression of Christianity?
Minnesota Annual Conference Vision: Section 3

Our baptism is by water and the Spirit into God’s new creation, bringing us together as one in Christ, rejecting that which divides and demeans us. To work toward such a new creation, we take to heart our baptismal covenant to “renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin; to accept the freedom and power God gives us to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves; and to confess Jesus Christ as our Savior, putting our whole trust in his grace, serving him as our Lord, in union with the Church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations and races.” (1992 UM BOW, p. 88)

With joy and thanksgiving, we welcome all God’s people, celebrating the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as signs of God’s grace, open to all who love Christ, earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another.

We reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, and understand as John Wesley did: that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason, with Scripture being the primary source through which the other sources are engaged. (2016 BOD, p. 82)

MODULE 2 WORKSHEET: Personal Reflection Questions

1. Have I had to have difficult conversations about sexuality and gender identity before? What makes the conversations most difficult?

2. What’s most important to me when having a difficult conversation with someone? What is generally the goal of having such a conversation?
MODULE 2 WORKSHEET

Reflect on these prompts from Angela Jimenez, and then have a talking and listening conversation with someone you don’t know as well to practice.

WHAT IS YOUR NAME? WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

WHERE/WHAT IS HOME TO YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR IDENTITY? (roles, identities, work, titles, belongings, accomplishments, etc.)

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN LIFE NOW? IN THE PAST?

WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU WISH PEOPLE KNEW ABOUT YOU?

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST FEAR IN LIFE AT THIS POINT?

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST HOPE IN LIFE AT THIS POINT?

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO MATTER THE MOST TO YOU?

MAKE UP YOUR OWN QUESTIONS.....
Minnesota Annual Conference Vision: Section 3

We understand that faithful people come to different conclusions on theological and political matters, and resolve to unite in love as John Wesley preached in his sermon on “Catholic Spirit” saying, “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may. Herein all the children of God may unite, notwithstanding these smaller differences. These remaining as they are, they may forward one another in love and in good works.”

We value the General Rules as John Wesley established: First, by doing no harm; Secondly, by doing good; and Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God; while striving to fulfill our baptismal vows by promoting the General Rule of Discipleship: “To witness to Jesus Christ in the world, and to follow his teachings through acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” (2016 BOD, pp. 77-80 and ¶1117.2a)

We celebrate our heritage of ecumenism and commit to continuing intentional interfaith encounters and explorations between Christians and adherents of other living faiths of the world. (2016 BOD, p. 90)

We are a Church created to participate in God’s redemptive work in this world. We hold an unwavering commitment to the hard work of advocacy, justice, reconciliation and liberation. We work together in unity to build God’s Beloved Community with more creativity than each of us can bring individually. And we encourage each congregation and its leaders to lead boldly within their context to realize our mission “to make disciples for Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” (2016 BOD, ¶120)

MODULE 3 WORKSHEET: Personal Reflection Questions

1. Do I belong to a congregation that is reconciling? Why or why not?

2. What value do I see in a church becoming reconciling?
MODULE 3 WORKSHEET: Group Reflection

Discussion 1 (following testimonials from churches):

Take a little bit of time to talk around your tables or in small groups about these testimonies from local churches.

Where is your congregation sitting with regard to inclusion?

Where do you dream it could be going?

What would need to happen to get there?

What inspires you about these stories from congregations?

Discussion 2 (following RMN video):

Share around your table about what reconciling ministry means to you.

Have you experienced being part of a reconciling church?

Would your church be open to having a conversation about becoming reconciling? Have you already taken some of the steps described by Rev. Alvaran? What next step would make the most sense for your congregation?
LOCAL CHURCH PLANNING AND ACTION STEPS

Church:
People present today from this church:

How we would describe our congregation’s current position related to full inclusion in the life of the church:

A logical next step for our congregation is:

Who might be involved in leading that next step?

Who from our group will follow up to set this in motion?

By what date?
Two additional action steps we can take as a church are:

1. 

2. 

**IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS:**

- Have a conversation with our pastor about our desire to be more inclusive
- Hold a small group gathering (or several) to do the congregational study of the Minnesota Annual Conference Vision
- Commission a Reconciling Church team to begin the process of becoming a reconciling congregation
- Write letters to Bishop Ough and the Cabinet as a congregation to share our values around inclusion and our expectations about the handling of complaints against clergy in our conference
- Hold a small group book study around a book that will help us open up new conversations within our congregation
- Gather a group in our congregation to review the videos and materials we’ve seen today (materials will be available in January)
- Invite a speaker to our church for a Sunday school class, forum, or to speak during worship
- Connect with another UMC congregation near us to encourage them in living the inclusive vision – offer our resources, expertise, prayer, etc.
- Come up with ideas that are unique to your context, congregation, community! Share them with us!
Making the Vision Plain
An event for congregations around Minnesota

RESOURCE GUIDE
Originally Prepared
Saturday, December 7, 2019

Books:
A Church for All by Gayle E. Pitman
Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church’s Debate on Same-Sex Relationships by James V. Brownson
Changing Our Mind, second edition: A call from America’s leading evangelical ethics scholar for full acceptance of LGBT Christians in the Church by David P. Gushee
God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships by Matthew Vines
God, Gender, Sex and Marriage by Mandy Ford
Making Sense of the Bible: Recovering the Power of Scripture Today by Adam Hamilton
Sexuality and the Black Church: A Womanist Perspective by Kelly B. Douglas
Together at the Table by Karen P. Oliveto
Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians by Austen Hartke

Local Speakers:
OutFront Minnesota, https://www.outfront.org/
Justin Sabia-Tanis, https://www.unitedseminary.edu/academics/faculty/justin-sabia-tanis/
Online Resources:

Building an Inclusive Church Toolkit from Reconciling Ministries:

Many Voices, A Black Church Movement for Gay & Transgender Justice
http://manyvoices.org

Minnesota Annual Conference Vision Study Guide:
http://mnnumc-email.brtapp.com/files/inclusive+vision+resources/vision+study+guide+8.5x11.pdf

Minnesota Methodists
http://minnesotamethodists.org

Queer Grace
http://www.queergrace.com

Reconciling Ministries Network
http://www.rmnetwork.org
Digital Resource Packet

FEEDBACK

Name, Email, Church (optional):

Why I attended this event:

One thing I learned or considered in a new way today:

One thing we didn’t cover that I wish we had:

One action step I am committed to taking after today (personally or together with others from my congregation):