Learning from Strangers Follow-up sessions

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Objective: | To create space for continued reflection on CRCC ministry following reading “Learning from Strangers: Joys and Challenges of Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural Ministry in the United Methodist Church” |
| Format: | Small group discussion questions for pastor and congregation leaders/members  2 Sessions   1. Theological & Biblical reflection 2. Sharing and listening to our stories and God’s story |

**Session 1**  Strangers Bearing Gifts

*(Note to the facilitator: Find a quiet and comfortable space for the group to convene.*

*The group should not be more than ten persons for deep and intimate sharing.*

*While waiting for everyone to gather, prepare with prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to be present in your midst.)*

Introduction:

God is Good! All the time!

All the time! God is Good!

Indeed, God is Good! God’s goodness is experienced everywhere, all around us. One of the ways through which we experience God’s goodness is through people God surrounds us with… our family, friends, neighbors, our pastor and our church family.

In this session, we are going to explore God’s goodness to our church, our community and to each other through everyone here around this circle in our Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural (CRCC) ministry context.

As we begin, let us covenant with one another to listen without judgment and with an open heart and open mind. Also commit to a covenant of confidentiality that what is shared in this group stay in the group. All are invited to share their reflections and learnings and be a source of God’s goodness to one another.

Opening Prayer *(by the facilitator or a participant)*

Exploring God’s Goodness:

Having read “Chapter One: Strangers Bearing Gifts”, reflect and share together following questions.

1. How do you define “strangers”?
2. Read Luke 2:22-40. Who are strangers in this story? What happened through the strangers? Imagine… What would have happened if Mary and Joseph did not run into these strangers or they simply ignored them?
3. In this chapter, it is stated “Jesus was a stranger.” In what ways was Jesus a stranger to the people living in those times? How is Jesus a stranger to us in our times?
4. How has your understanding of “Strangers” shifted through reading the “Learning from Strangers” and the Scripture reflection from the Gospel of Luke 2?
5. In chapter one, on page 5, Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural (CRCC) ministry is described as “Christians as Strangers to Each Other” exploring opportunities for the pastor and congregation to be gifts to each other. What are new things you can expect to learn from your pastor and/or in what ways is your pastor a gift to you and your congregation? What are some learning your pastor can expect from you and the congregation and/or in what ways are you a gift to your pastor?

Perceiving God’s Goodness:

1. What do you believe are God’s plan of goodness for your ministry as Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural (CRCC) congregation?
2. Share one thing you take away from this session that will help you to be a gift of God’s goodness to your pastor and strangers in your midst?

Responding to God’s Goodness:

Take a moment to bask in God’s goodness for your church.

Close with sentence prayer around the circle as each person expresses gratitude to God for the gifts of goodness through your pastor, congregation and CRCC ministry.

**Session 2**  Our stories, God’s Story

*(Note to the facilitator: Find a quiet and comfortable space for the group to convene.*

*The group should not be more than ten persons for deep and intimate sharing.*

*While waiting for everyone to gather, prepare with prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to be present in your midst.)*

Introduction:

Bible is a collection of stories of faithful people of God. These stories are of lives lived against the backdrop of various times, places and circumstances. One unique feature about the biblical stories is that the stories are not just stories about people, but they are stories of God. These stories shed light on who God is and what God has done in their midst. Through these stories we meet God, we learn God’s character and we get to know God in intimate way.

As faithful people of God, we also have stories to share. Our stories reveal who we are, our fears and our hopes. Our stories like the ancestors of faith are not only about us, but they are also God’s story revealing to us what God is doing in our midst, loving us and building up the community of believers.

As we begin, let us covenant with one another to listen without judgment and with an open heart and open mind. Also commit to a covenant of confidentiality that what is shared in this group stays in the group. All are invited to share their stories so that we can hear God’s story emerge out of our collective stories.

Opening Prayer *(by the facilitator or a participant)*

Exploring God’s story in Our story:

Having read Chapters two and three of “Learning from Strangers”, reflect and share together following questions.

1. Briefly share your story of encountering “strangers” from another cultures and races.
2. Read Deuteronomy 26:1-11. What is this passage about? Who is to tell/declare the story? How does this story reveal something of God?
3. The chapters two and three are compilation of stories of the pastors serving in Cross-Racial and Cross-Cultural (CRCC) appointments and also of the

congregations who are engaged in the CRCC ministry as they serve with their pastor who is of another race and culture.

What are you hearing of the challenges and joys of the CRCC pastors and congregations in the stories shared?

1. In what ways do you identify with the stories shared in these two chapters as a pastor? As a congregation?
2. As we heard in Deuteronomy 26, Israel people had their own story to share. Put together a story for your own congregation thus far. In what ways is your story God’s story?

Living into God’s story:

1. Imagine how your story, God’s story is going to be shared a year from now in your CRCC ministry? Five years from now?
2. Share one thing you take away from this session that will help you to live into God’s story?

Continuing God’s Story:

Take a moment to hear God’s story for your CRCC ministry.

Close with sentence prayer around the circle as each person expresses gratitude to God for being a part of God’s story with your pastor and congregation in CRCC ministry.