



Week 1 Small Group: Celebrate Diversity

OPENING PRAYER:

Good and gracious God our creator, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we welcome you into this place. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

Quote

"Diversity: the art of thinking independently together." Malcolm Forbes

BREAKING THE ICE:

- Organize a fun potluck party in which small group members bring in dishes from or inspired by their cultures and heritage. Then, have each person share why they chose to share this dish.
- If you wanted to serve a visitor a meal that would help them to understand your cultural heritage, what meal would you serve?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-20

As the body of Christ, we are called to celebrate the diverse ways God is reflected in each and every person.

- The passage says we are baptized into one body regardless of our backgrounds (e.g., Jew, Greek, slave or free). Why would Paul address this at the beginning of this passage?
- What would it be like to have a church where everyone was "the same," with the same outlook, experience, and gifts?
- Why does diversity in the body of Christ tend to be stifled? How can we guard against this?

NEXT STEPS:

- Aside from cultural diversity, consider what other kinds of differences you can celebrate.
- Now choose an activity that you can engage in as a group to celebrate diversity. For example:
 - Visit an exhibition or a museum dedicated to other cultures (in person or virtually).
 - Learn about another religion; look for virtual services you can respectfully attend.



- Plan an international movie night. Check your local library for suggestions.
- Research about the Indigenous land your church is on. Learn more about the tribal nation and their stories.

Following these activities, have some conversation about how you as individuals and as a church can celebrate diversity.

CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for the beautiful and unique ways that you have made us. Help us to see your image in all of your children. Give us the desire to be open to learning and embracing the diversity in all of creation. Amen.



Week 2 Small Group: Celebrate Unity

OPENING PRAYER:

Good and gracious God our creator, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we welcome you into this place. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

Quote

"For Christians, who believe they are created in the image of God, it is the Godhead, diversity in unity and the three-in-oneness of God, which we and all creation reflect." Desmond Tutu

BREAKING THE ICE:

Even though we are diverse, with each individual having their own unique talents, skills, and resources, we can still unite and collaborate with others to make our community a better place. Name some of the talents and gifts that people in your congregation have. Remember to think of some of the less obvious ones, like compassion and hospitality.

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Ephesians 4:1-16

Celebrate that unity does NOT mean uniformity! Our diversity is knit together in the unity of faith; it is a growing process, as we grow together into Christ.

- Ephesians lifts up seven different ways to promote unity. What are they? What is one quality that you would work on in yourself? How might that lead to unity in the body?
- Define unity. How do unity and diversity work together?
- Why does unity require so much effort?

NEXT STEPS:

- God has given your group various gifts to use to build up unity in the church and in your community. Consider some different ways you can explore your gifts and/or put them into practice for the specific goal of creating unity.
 - Do a spiritual gift assessment and share with the group how you are feeling called to use your gifts.
<https://www.umc.org/en/content/exploring-your-spiritual-gifts>



- Sponsor an activity that has to do with environmental awareness, conservation, and protection. These activities are also a great way of uniting people.
- Commit to deep listening; invite group members to have coffee or take a walk with someone and ask them what they think might need to happen for the church to be in unity to build up the body.

CLOSING PRAYER:

God, we thank you for the gifts and the graces you have given us. Enlighten us in the ways we can use them to build up and support unity in our church, community, and world. Amen.



Week 3 Small Group: Celebrate Promise

OPENING PRAYER:

Good and gracious God our creator, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we welcome you into this place. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

Quote

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees, And looks to God alone; Laughs at impossibilities, And cries it shall be done."
Charles Wesley

BREAKING THE ICE:

What was something in your life that was challenging to do but rewarding in the end?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Romans 4:3, 13-25

We make promises all the time. Some are kept, others are forgotten, others we break because of new circumstances, and others we never were able to keep from the beginning. Abraham is a model of grasping hold of promise through faith.

- What is the difference between believing *in* God and believing *God*?
- How does believing God's promise bring Abraham into a new reality? Why does this only come by faith?
- How can Abraham's example help you strengthen your faith?

NEXT STEPS:

Summer is the perfect time to come together in different settings to learn more about your small group. Consider meeting outside the church and having informal conversations. Gather around a firepit, go out for dessert and coffee, or go to a local park or beach and star gaze.

- What was the most joyful, celebratory moment of your faith journey so far? What made it significant?
- How can you as individuals and as a small group share the promise of God's grace?



CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you for the example of Abraham. I pray that we, too, can embrace your promise, trust your love and be strengthened in our faith. Amen.



Week 4 Small Group: Celebrate New Life

OPENING PRAYER:

Good and gracious God our creator, we invite you into this place. Jesus, we welcome you into this place. Spirit of wisdom and understanding, enlighten us. We pray that we keep our hearts and minds open to new ideas and that we may grow in our understanding of your ways. Amen.

Quote

"The resurrection power of Jesus secured for us a newness of life." Lailah Gifty Akita

BREAKING THE ICE:

What was one of the most exciting times in your life when you were able to get rid of something old and replace it with something new?

WRESTLING WITH THE WORD:

Read Mark 5:35-43

Celebrating new life is about celebrating the transformation that leads us into thriving and joy.

- It was an act of faith that Jairus put his trust in Jesus to not only heal his daughter, but to bring her back to life. Are there places in your life that feel like they are gone, beyond hope? How might you trust Jesus with these situations?
- Jesus did not perform this miracle for the crowds that were present. Why do you think he chose to do this privately?

NEXT STEPS:

"Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it comes to us. Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or as joy. It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity." Henri Nouwen

- How are you watching for the new life that is offered each day?
- Celebrations matter; they identify what we value. What do you celebrate?
- Use your time to celebrate the gifts, the promises, the unity, and the diversity of your group. Then, pray over each member to close.



CLOSING PRAYER:

Dear God, thank you that by grace we have been raised to new life. We celebrate your love for us and for all of creation. May we use our days to share the blessings of being transformed by you. Amen.