

Gather across Differences

EXODUS 20:1-17; MARK 1:16-20;
1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17

GOAL

Participants identify characteristics that define *community* and are reminded that unity in Christian community centers on Christ.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

Thank you, O God, for drawing together those who embark on this study of *Live in Community*. Guide my preparation and leadership so that participants may know and form community in your name. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Practicing community involves more than existing as a loosely knit collection of people. Community forms around three elements: a call to come together, a binding experience or event, and a common goal or vision. Today's faith communities share common elements that also united biblical faith communities: a call to come together, a shared faith in Jesus Christ as Son of God, and a common vision of God's promised realm existing on earth as in heaven. What binds Christian community is not friendship or common history, ethnicity, race, class, or socioeconomic level; it is faith in God and Christ and the Holy Spirit.

THE BIBLE STORY

Exodus 20:1-17: While in the wilderness, God seals God's covenant with the people by giving them the Ten Commandments. These guides for faith and life and for their relationship with God solidify their identity as God's own people.

Mark 1:16-20: In forming a select group of disciples, Jesus called a variety of people together to follow him, offering a new vision and a new vocation: to become fishers for people.

1 Corinthians 1:10-17: With a glance toward Paul's letter to the Christian community in Corinth, the people are reminded that Christ is the central factor that holds them together even as they readily cling to differences that could just as easily drive them apart. Christ, however, is not divided.

SESSION PREPARATION

- This first session does not require participants to have read the *Adult Reflection Guide* before the session, but subsequent sessions assume most have read it.
- "Welcome and Introductions" (p. 5): Prepare to introduce this practice for the group by summarizing "Summary of the Practice" on page 3.
- "Opening Ritual" (p. 5): Write the lyrics to "O Look and Wonder" on newsprint to be used each session.

Depending on the options you choose:

- "Hymns and Songs" (p. 7): Gather hymnals or songbooks used in your congregation.
- "Faith Community Mission Statement" (p. 8): Provide copies of your faith community's mission statement.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities particular to your group such as introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements. Introduce the practice, *Live in Community*, by summarizing the “Summary of the Practice” on page 3.

Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 45 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* and encourage participants to read that essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING RITUAL

Before the session, write the lyrics to “O Look and Wonder” (*Glory to God*, #397) in English and Spanish on a piece of newsprint. Sing, or listen to, the song. To hear the tune, go to bit.ly/FMOLookTune (0:21). To sing along in Spanish (words not provided), show the YouTube video “*Miren que Bueno* (O Look and Wonder)” (bit.ly/FMOLook, 1:52).



Keep the newsprint with the lyrics for subsequent sessions in this unit.

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEOS

Show the “*Live in Community* Practice Overview” video and the “*Live in Community* Session 1” video from the Growing Faith Resources YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt as you introduce the session.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY

Invite participants to recall being part of a large group gathering, or to imagine an event in which a crowd gathers. This event could be a sports event, concert, rally, and so on. Discuss characteristics of the gathering that make it a community, with elements such as a common focus, a shared space, an expression of shared emotions, and a shared expected outcome. Ask:

- ➔ What similar characteristics do you find in your church community?
- ➔ How is church community different from other communities?

THE RULE OF BENEDICT

Refer to page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* where The Rule of St. Benedict is discussed. Read the quotation from St. Benedict’s rule. Discuss how practicing this rule enhances community and how it challenges community. Invite participants to talk about how practicing this rule would affect their participation in community.



“The community members, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility, and do not presume to defend their own views obstinately.”¹

1. Joan Chittister, ed., *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York: Crossroad, 2010), 52.

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- This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

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- Newsprint with lyrics to the song “O Look and Wonder”

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- Internet-connected device

BEST MEMORIES OF COMMUNITY

Refer to page 5 in the *Adult Reflection Guide* where it invites participants to name their best memories of Christian community. Invite participants to talk about their best memories. Affirm the stories participants share.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or more options.

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- Internet-connected device
 - Bibles

GOLDEN CALF AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Refer to page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, “Finding the Practice in the Bible.” Read the first paragraph, giving a description of the golden calf scene from the movie, *The Ten Commandments*.

Show the YouTube video “The Golden Calf” (bit.ly/FMGoldenCalf, 3:39).

Ask:

- ➔ How did the crowd respond in the different scenes of this clip?
- ➔ What influence did the leader(s) appear to have on the crowds?

Read the second paragraph on page 8 and discuss the questions there:

- ➔ What would keep the people together in the future?
- ➔ What would they do without an imposed structure?

Have volunteers take turns reading the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20:1–17. Invite participants to listen to the commandments as tools to establish community among the Hebrew people. Following the reading, discuss:

- ➔ In what ways do the commandments establish a common focus for the people?
- ➔ How do these commandments provide structure to the community?
- ➔ Which commandments offer guidance for living in community?
- ➔ How do these commandments guide community today (God’s people in community as well as secular communities)?

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- Internet-connected device
 - Bibles

CALLING THE FIRST DISCIPLES



Select from these recommended video clips:

- “Jesus Calls the Disciples” (bit.ly/FMJesusCalls, 3:23).
- “Prepare Ye– Godspell (1973)” (bit.ly/FMPrepareYe, 2:36).
- “God Save the People” (bit.ly/FMGodSaveThePeople, 3:51).

Read Mark 1:16–20. Show a video clip from the list above illustrating Jesus’ calling of the disciples. Following the video(s), discuss:

- ➔ What do you notice about the variety of people Jesus gathered around him?
- ➔ What do you think these people had in common prior to gathering around Jesus?
- ➔ What does Jesus do to create community with these people?
- ➔ What would it have taken for you to drop your commitments, as these characters did, to live in community with Jesus?

UNITED IN CHRIST

Refer to page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, “Finding the Practice in the Bible.” Read the paragraph about the setting of the New Testament letter, 1 Corinthians 1:10–17. Have a volunteer read aloud the Scripture passage. Ask:

- ➔ What differences did Paul name that he observed among the people?
- ➔ How might these differences serve to divide the Christian community in Corinth?
- ➔ Why was it important that Paul emphasized his belief that Christ is not divided?
- ➔ How can this acknowledgment serve to bring people together across their differences?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

Refer to page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, “Finding the Practice Then and Now.” Read the opening paragraph and briefly mention the four examples of people coming together in faith.

Form two groups and assign them to explore the mission and history of the World Council of Churches (WCC) through its website. Mission: bit.ly/FMWCCMission; history: bit.ly/FMWCCHistory.

Gather the groups to talk about what they discovered about the history and focus of the WCC, and the current mission and uniting activities of the WCC. Following discussion, ask:

- ➔ What vision initially motivated Christian churches to form a worldwide community?
- ➔ What is the shared focus of the WCC?
- ➔ What activities grow out of this common focus?
- ➔ What do you think has been the reason for such growth in the WCC from post–World War II to today?
- ➔ What is the expected outcome of bringing together diverse Christian communities across the globe?
- ➔ How are differences among communities bridged within this organization?

EXPLORING MISSION STATEMENTS

Refer to page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, “Mission Statements.” Read the first two paragraphs in this section. Ask:

- ➔ How might the mission statement examples draw people together in community?
- ➔ What is the common focus in each statement?
- ➔ What is the stated outcome for the community?
- ➔ How could this understanding of a common mission allow for bridging differences in the community?

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Have participants read the examples of mission statements and underline the lines that resonate with them. Invite participants to tell about the lines they marked and their significance. Use the questions on the resource page for discussion.

Bibles

Internet-connected device

Copies of Resource Page 1

Pens

Hymnals

HYMNS AND SONGS

Explain that faith communities have a long tradition of writing and singing hymns that affirm unity in Christian community. Invite participants to name familiar hymns or songs sung in your congregation. List these on newsprint.

Distribute hymnals and have participants locate some of the listed hymns.

- ➔ Notice the texts of these hymns. What references or images of community are found?
- ➔ Notice the years in which the hymn texts were written (generally listed in a line placed either above or below the hymn score). What do the dates indicate about the value of singing about community across the history of the church? What more recently written hymns are included on our list?
- ➔ If the hymnal includes indexes, find a list of other hymns in the hymnal that reference community and explore them. What did the hymns say about community?
- ➔ How can singing hymns as a community inform or strengthen a sense of community within a congregation?

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

Copies of your faith community's mission statement

FAITH COMMUNITY MISSION STATEMENT

Review the information on page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, "Mission Statements." Distribute copies of the mission statement from your faith community. Have participants read it and discuss:

- ➔ How might this mission statement draw people together in your faith community?
- ➔ What is the stated common focus of your faith community? Do you agree that this is a shared focus?
- ➔ What is the stated outcome for the community? Do you agree that this is a shared outcome?
- ➔ How could this common mission allow for bridging differences in your faith community?
- ➔ What additional elements would you add to this mission statement?

If participants want to work together to add or adjust their community's mission statement, encourage this. Discuss how they could communicate their recommendations to your congregation's leadership.

Pens

DEVELOPING COVENANT

Refer to page 11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, "Covenant." Read together the information on the page about covenant. Invite participants to identify and discuss different covenants they have entered into: marriage vows, work contract, mortgage or rental agreement, adoption agreement, and so on.

Ask:

- ➔ How do these agreements compare to or contrast with biblical covenants, like the one between God and God's people at Mount Sinai?
- ➔ How do our various covenants and agreements impact the way we live in community?

- ➔ What covenants exist within your faith community? How do these guide your community?
- ➔ What covenant could you develop as a group to guide you in living as a community of faith?
- ➔ How would such a covenant draw you into closer community? How would it bring you closer to God? How could it help you bridge differences among you?

Invite the group to develop a covenant for your group, such as an agreement to read the foundational essay for this practice, or to read session 2 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, or some other promise to one another. Have them write their group covenant in their *Adult Reflection Guide*.

FOLLOWING JESUS IN CHRIST THERE IS NO EAST OR WEST

Refer to page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*, “Following Jesus.” Read together the two verses of the hymn “In Christ There Is No East or West.” Identify words or images from these verses that guide people as a community of faith. Discuss ways that participants can live as companions in faith to one another, even as they leave this place after the session.

CLOSING LITANY

Close with this litany adapted from 1 Peter 2:10. Have participants repeat each line after you.

Once we were not a people, /
now we are God’s people. /
Once we had not received mercy, /
now we have received God’s mercy. /
We go into the world as God’s people. /
Amen. /

Exploring Mission Statements

Instructions: Read these examples of mission statements. Underline words or lines that resonate with you. Use these questions for group discussion:

- How might these mission-statement examples draw people together in community?
- What common focus is found in each of the statements?
- What is the stated outcome for the community?
- How could this understanding of a common mission allow for bridging differences in the community?

Beechmont Presbyterian Church, Louisville, Kentucky
God calls us to be an inclusive, intercultural family of faith led by the Holy Spirit, bound together in worship, study, service and prayer, growing as disciples and partners with Christ in our ever-changing church, neighborhood, and world.

Leeds Community Church, Leeds, Maine
We are a Christian church that is committed to carrying out the mission of Christ. We, therefore, are socially active. Our church is open to all people, regardless of background or any other status. “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family” is never far from thought. We pray that every person will feel acceptance, the love of Christ, the joy of the Holy Spirit, and the wonder of God’s grace.

Hanover Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, Delaware
In ministering to each other and the world our guide is the light, life, and love revealed in Jesus Christ. We seek to see the light in every child of God, believing that diversity is of God’s desire and design. We strive to embrace the gift of life by offering unconditional hospitality. We serve to express the love of God by working for justice for all of God’s children.

Noble Road Presbyterian Church, Cleveland Heights, Ohio
The mission of Noble Road Presbyterian Church is to welcome all people into the presence of Jesus Christ.

- We have embraced a vision of unconditional love and hospitality for all.
- We welcome and include persons without regard to cultural boundaries including race, age, gender identity, mental condition, sexual orientation or economic class.
- We partner with communities of peace, justice and inclusion.
- We share our gifts of time, talent and treasure to serve in this community and to grow.
- In this day that God has made, we can rejoice and be glad.