

**EMBRACING WHOLENESS:
AN EARTH PERSPECTIVE
FOR COVENANTAL LIVING**

Leader's Guide

Faye Wilson and Ellen Lipsey



*Embracing Wholeness: An Earth Perspective
for Covenantal Living Leader's Guide*
by Faye Wilson and Ellen Lipsey

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United Methodist Women Purpose

The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.

The Vision

Turning faith, hope and love into action on behalf of women, children and youth around the world.

Living the Vision

We provide opportunities and resources to grow spiritually, become more deeply rooted in Christ and put faith into action.

We are organized for growth, with flexible structures leading to effective witness and action.

We equip women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, workplaces, governments and churches.

We work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems.

We provide educational experiences that lead to personal change in order to transform the world.

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Introduction

We are encouraged to dream. We are encouraged to strive for perfection. We are encouraged to improve our health each year: relax, sleep more hours, eat less sugar, eat more vegetables—the suggestions sometimes seem endless. For example, readers of the article “Younger Next Year” in the October/November 2016 issue of *AARP The Magazine* were challenged to believe that by making specific changes they could reverse the effects of aging. The authors of the article, Chris Crowley and Henry S. Lodge, M.D., propose that a commitment to aerobic exercise and eating clean (not processed) food is the key for everyone to be healthier, stronger, and to live longer.

Embracing Wholeness: An Earth Perspective for Covenantal Living makes a similar claim. Author Jessica Stonecypher introduces us to the idea that soil is the place to both begin and end when we reflect upon God’s creation. Referring to herself as “a kid at heart in a grown woman’s body,” she has believed since childhood that energy flows from the soil into the soles of her feet and then throughout her entire body.

The text encourages us toward wholeness by focusing on practicing spiritual disciplines and staying linked with and/or reconnecting to the places and people in our lives. Through these actions we are able to become the people of God we long to be. By remembering whose we are as part of the sacred creation, we will feel loved and become whole. By becoming part of a sacred community, we will find our worth as well as our responsibilities as children of God. Furthermore, by claiming that we are sacred beings, we will learn to step away from the “fast track” of food, fashion, and casual friendships and renew ourselves through focus, faith, and fellowship. The choice to live in a sacred context brings us to the true meaning of our existence—to create and live in a covenant community that joins us with our creator to make right the world in which we live.

The Leader's Guide invites you and the participants to explore covenantal living from an earth perspective to support wholeness for all. There are four study sessions designed to help study participants dig deep into the study book. It is our hope that through a variety of reflective experiences—writing, drawing, having conversations, remembering, and sharing—everyone who reads *Embracing Wholeness: An Earth Perspective for Covenantal Living* will covet and create for themselves a renewed sense of what it means to live in a place where wholeness is de rigueur for your family, your church, your community, and the earth.

The Leader's Guide is designed for the Mission u setting. However, it can be adapted for small groups such as Sunday school classes, class meetings, and circles and units. In anticipation that you are leading this study for Mission u, you will want to prepare yourself in a variety of ways:

- Pray for yourself and for those you will serve as a guide and leader. Pray that God will reveal new ways in which all of you are open to the Holy Spirit at work in your lives.
- Read through the study book at least twice. You may find it helpful to first read the book with a highlighter or pen in hand, underlining key phrases, circling words or phrases that you may need to look up, making notes of ideas and thoughts that stand out, and writing down questions that the text brings to mind. As you read through the book a second time, you may want to focus on creating a list of ideas and thoughts that you want to reference as you lead the Mission u class. You might consider creating a list of twenty key ideas and thoughts for each chapter. In this way, as class participants share the ideas that stand out for them, you can affirm them with a “this resonates for me as well” expression. As a study leader, you also will want to be sure to share key points that participants did not highlight.
- As you are reading through the study book and reflecting on the mission study, begin to create a folder of current writings and radio/television presentations that relate to the topics at hand. For example, as a leader you might want to watch television shows

that focus on health or on building caring communities. Read books listed in the “Selected Bibliography” of the study book; however, do not overlook popular magazines that may also contribute relevant information (i.e., *Good Housekeeping*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *O Magazine*, *AARP The Magazine*).

- Read through the Leader’s Guide thoroughly to become familiar with the flow of the sessions. The Leader’s Guide is organized into four sessions with these elements in common:
 - Worship
 - Digging Deep: Exploring the Text
 - Graffiti Wall
 - Wesleyan Wisdom
 - Time of Commitment

Also, become familiar with the various ideas for helping participants gather meaning from the text and for putting their ideas into action in various ways. Mission u is based on the premise that adults learn in a variety of ways. Suggestions are included to engage as many of the senses as possible; suggestions are also made to address various learning styles (including visual, kinesthetic, verbal, social, and solitary). In each session, there are opportunities for you as a leader and the study participants to make choices in terms of how you want to understand the text and explore the meaning of the study in general.

NOTE: Because many people are sensitive to fragrances and aromas, we do not promote the use of the sense of smell in a large way.

- Gather supplies that are needed in the session. Each session lists the materials specific to that particular gathering. While some materials may be provided at each Mission u, it is generally helpful to have basic supplies (scissors, markers, construction paper) available in case inspiration strikes you and you want to add an additional exercise that might not be in the Leader’s Guide.

- Review the scriptures and music resources suggested for each session. Choose the ones that you will use. Ask for help with any unfamiliar tunes or substitute others that are more familiar to you. (United Methodist Women has obtained permission for the songs suggested in this Leaders Guide, but if you choose to project or print the words of other hymns or songs, *you must follow the law*: You are responsible for obtaining permission and including the copyright notice on the sheet or slide. If you use hymnals or songbooks, this legal requirement is not necessary.)
- Keep a journal as you prepare and then lead the session (consider inviting study participants to do the same). The tradition of writing in a journal or diary is part of our Methodist church history. John Wesley captured his thoughts in journal form, which continue to be a basis for research and study about his life. There are many opportunities in each session for you and class participants to record thoughts about what you have read or questions that have been posed. You may encourage students to capture their thoughts in a new journal related to this study or to write in an existing journal they may already be keeping.
- Send an e-mail to study participants as soon as you receive your class list. Introduce yourself and encourage participants to read as much of the study book as possible before the first session. Suggest basic materials that may be useful during your time together including a Bible and writing materials. Be sure to ask them to bring some soil from their home (four to six tablespoons of soil in a snack-size plastic bag is appropriate). At the end of the first session, the soil will be layered in a clear container to create a visual of our beginning and end. It will also signify responsibility and dependence relative to earth. The container of soil will be used in later sessions.

Other aspects of preparation include setting up your classroom and building a caring and confidential experience for the study participants. For example, be sure to state in each session that every person's input is valued. Remind participants that it is important

that they refrain from sharing other people's stories without their permission. Sometimes what is shared with a friend at a dinner table might be overheard and misinterpreted.

CLASSROOM ORGANIZATION

Setting up the classroom to maximize learning involves guiding the sessions to include room for everyone who wishes to contribute as well as making the physical space comfortable for the participants.

There are several things to keep in mind in order to create emotional comfort for all participants. Ask the following questions of yourself and group members: Can everyone hear? Is the screen or newsprint visible to you? Is there something that you would like to share?

Be aware of possible distractions, such as other sounds in the surrounding environment (a buzz from lights, hums from heating or air-conditioning systems, outside noise—is someone mowing the lawn?). It also can relate to how softly or loudly people speak or the volume level of a DVD or music CD. People being able to see could be linked to how well a room is lit as well as their proximity to materials being displayed.

NOTE: Mission u deans request that participants indicate on their registration forms if they need specific accommodations and will share this information with study leaders.

In the learning environment, everyone is encouraged to participate. However, people's ability to participate can be influenced by whether they like to think about a topic before speaking or if they are comfortable sharing spontaneously. In the sessions, there are times when a learning activity is structured in order to offer options to a wider variety of people. One way to guide participation is something we call the "one-minute witness." Asking participants to share their thoughts within a time frame often does two things: one, it helps people to distill and share their key thoughts; two, it helps the listeners to focus on what is being said rather than wondering if (or when)

a person will bring their thought to a conclusion. No one should ever be forced to speak. No one should ever dominate the conversation. For additional suggestions for guiding group conversations, see Appendix A.

In the physical sense, the entire space should be dedicated to learning. Hang information from the ceiling and on the walls (using the recommended adhesives); place items on the floor. Arrange the seating so that people can see and talk to each other; a u-shaped setup works well for teaching and conversation.

Think ahead about what you need to have easy access to, such as books, supplies, folders, and other items you may use frequently. How many tables do you need? Do you need electronic equipment? If you are driving to Mission u, you might bring items such as card tables, colorful tablecloths, and unscented and/or battery-operated candles.

If you have space, think about creating various designated areas for learning and reflecting. There may be a conversation corner with three or four chairs where participants can sit and lean in to each other. There may be an arts and crafts area for folks to pick up supplies and get creative in their reflections. There may be an area designated as the prayer corner or the meditation area. There may be a listening area with a CD player and earphones for enjoying music in private. Using the allotted space in creative ways will help to tap into the various learning styles of class members.

CARING CLASSROOM

As a study leader, you have to be mindful that the mission study may evoke varying responses and memories for each participant. Therefore, it is necessary to think of ways in which everyone's experiences and responses may be honored and valued. You are encouraged to propose rules of engagement for the class to adopt in Session 1. Here is a sample that may help you think about values that may be important to the class:

- Every class member is valued.
- Everyone has a right to speak.
- No one is to use her or his voice or actions to hurt another.
- No one is to dismiss the words and concerns of another classmate.
- What is said in class remains in class.
- No one's story shall be shared without that person's permission.
- Treat everyone with empathy and care.
- Electronic devices should be put away unless they are being used for an activity—otherwise they may distract from learning.

As you prepare to lead this study, remember to give thanks for this wonderful opportunity to share God's message of self-care, wellness, and wholeness. Thank you for serving.

Chapter 1

Session

1

The Sacred Creation

CENTERING THOUGHT

“As we partner with God in the task of bringing about wholeness for all life, we first must understand what it means to be in a mutual and covenantal relationship with the entire creation. . . . ‘what it means to live in harmony with God, with other people, and with the whole creation.’¹ This is critical as we seek to know God and embody God’s love in the world” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 1).

SESSION GOAL

Explore our covenantal relationship with all of creation by identifying issues facing our planet today and sharing ways to make a difference in response to God’s call.

SUPPLIES

- Bag of potting soil or other type of soil (to supplement participants’ soil)
- United Methodist Women’s 13 Principles to Be Just. Be Green. found in Appendix B
- Bible
- Clear tape to connect paper quilt squares
- *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Faith We Sing*
- Journals
- Laptop/Internet access/projection equipment

- Large clear flowerpot or container (2–3 quarts) for layering soil (also used in Session 2)
- Markers/crayons/colored pencils
- Chart paper or newsprint for graffiti wall labeled with the heading: “Sacred is . . .”
- Paper footprint patterns
- Paper squares for commitment quilt
- Past issues of **response** magazine
- Access to “The Apple Demo: Earth’s Valuable Soil” activity and the “Apple as Planet Earth” demonstration found online at www.soils4teachers.org/lessons-and-activities (supplies for demo: large unpeeled apple, sharp knife, cutting board)
- Worship center materials (e.g. cloth, item from nature, unscented candle)

PREPARATION

- Set up the graffiti wall: Hang up some chart paper or newsprint in a space that’s convenient for participants to write with markers or add sticky notes. Display the title: “Sacred is . . .” The graffiti wall will be used in later sessions, too.
- Project or post the three components of the One-Minute Witness (see Appendix A) for the introductions, including name, place where you feel at home, and sentence starter: “The land/living thing I love is . . .”
- Prepare newsprint or a slide for the rules of engagement discussion.
- Create a simple worship center that incorporates the clear container to be used in the closing worship soil activity.
- Provide some footprint patterns for the footpath to sustainability option in Digging Deep: Exploring the Text. Post or project the 13 Principles to Be Just. Be Green. found in Appendix B, and select a space for the path across the floor, along a table, or up the wall.

- Determine an appropriate size for the paper quilt squares to be used during the Time of Commitment activity. Provide clear tape and a space large enough to connect the completed squares.
- Review “The Apple Demo: Earth’s Valuable Soil” activity, including the “Apple as Planet Earth” demonstration found online at www.soils4teachers.org/lessons-and-activities. (You will need a large unpeeled apple, sharp knife, and cutting board for the demo.)

GATHERING TIME

Welcome participants as they enter the room and invite them to complete the sentence starter on the graffiti wall using markers or by adding sticky notes. Encourage them to be alert to new ideas they may discover and add those concepts to the sentence starter at the end of the session.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS:

ONE-MINUTE WITNESS (20 minutes)

Welcome participants with a brief explanation of classroom logistics and then demonstrate the “one-minute witness” introduction by sharing your name, the place where you feel at home, and how you would complete this statement: “The land/living thing I love is . . .”

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT (10 minutes)

Create a sacred space for learning by establishing rules of engagement to govern your time together. You may suggest a basic code and allow participants to add or delete, or ask participants to share their expectations for interaction. Emphasize mutual respect, confidentiality, and participation. Post the rules on newsprint or project them for all to see and adopt.

OPENING WORSHIP (15 minutes)

Greeting: *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, no. 425

Every part of this earth is sacred.

**Every shining pine needle, every sandy shore,
every mist in the dark woods,
every clearing and humming insect is holy.**

The rocky crest, the meadow, the beasts and all the people,
all belong to the same family.

Teach your children that the earth is our mother.

**Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of
the earth.**

We are part of the earth, and the earth is a part of us.

The rivers are our brothers, they quench our thirst.

**The perfumed flowers are our sisters, the air is
precious, for all of us share the same breath.**

The wind that gave our grandparents breath also receives
their last sigh.

The wind gave our children the spirit of life.

This we know, the earth does not belong to us.

We belong to the earth.

This we know, all things are connected.

**Like the blood which unites one family, all things
are connected.**

Our God is the same God, whose compassion is equal for all.

For we did not weave the web of life.

We are merely a strand in it.

Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves.

**Let us give thanks for the web and the circle that
connects us.**

Thanks be to God, the God of all.

Credit: Reprinted from *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, no. 425

(inspired by Chief Seattle, Native American, USA, 19th century) with permission.

Sing: “*Cantemos al Señor*,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 149.

Credit: “*Cantemos al Señor*,” Words and music by Carlos Rosas; Arr: Raquel Mora Martinez ©1976 Resource Publications Inc.; Trans ©1989 The United Methodist Publishing House; arr ©1983 The United Methodist Publishing House/OCP Publications. Used under OneLicense #A-709087.

Breathing Exercise: “Breath Prayer with Trees,” *God’s Extravagant Garden: A Children’s Study on Climate Justice*²

Lead participants in the opening prayer experience with these words:

As we begin Session 1 today, let’s join in a breathing exercise adapted from the Mission u Children’s Study God’s Extravagant Garden. Please close your eyes if you’re comfortable doing so and take a deep breath.

(Pause)

In the next breath, think about breathing in God’s love as you inhale and as you exhale sending love out from your heart.

Do it again. Breathe in God’s love; breathe out sending love out from your heart.

Again. Breathe in God’s love; breathe out sending love out from your heart.

Now, I invite you to open your eyes.

Every breath you breathe exchanges breath with the plants of the planet.

As you breathe in, you breathe in the oxygen the plants give. You and other animals breathe this oxygen. The plants give this to us. We also give out what the plants need, the carbon dioxide that plants need to live.

(Optional: Play “Breathe on Me, Breath of God” instrumental while text is spoken.)

With this in mind, let’s breathe together again.

“Breathe in from the trees.”

“Breathe out for the trees.”

“Breathe in God’s love.”

“Breathe out God’s love to all.”

(Repeat)

DIGGING DEEP:

EXPLORING THE TEXT (30 minutes)

Invite participants to begin exploring Chapter 1 of the study book by digging deep to gain an understanding of the theological and biblical foundations for our relationship with creation. Read the centering thought aloud to participants and then invite them to explore the text together.

Centering Thought

“As we partner with God in the task of bringing about wholeness for all life, we first must understand what it means to be in a mutual and covenantal relationship with the entire creation. . . . ‘what it means to live in harmony with God, with other people, and with the whole creation.’³ This is critical as we seek to know God and embody God’s love in the world” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 1).

Invite each participant to choose two of the following exercises to document in writing, but try to ensure that all exercises in the Participant’s Guide are addressed by the group collectively. Allow time for participants to break into small groups to share one of their responses with others (see Appendix A). If there is sufficient time, ask at least one person from each small group to share with the whole group for each exercise.

1. Consider Chapter 1, “The Beginning.” Identify the challenges presented in the creation story for present-day people if we accept that we are created in God’s image.
2. Review “Population and Consumption” in Chapter 1, list three steps you could take to reduce consumption and/or work for justice for those most impacted by climate change. (Refer to United Methodist Women’s 13 Principles to Be Just. Be Green. printed in Appendix B.) Choose that first step you will take and write it on a paper cut-out of a footprint to create a group footpath to sustainability.
3. Review Chapter 1, “Building a Theology of Place.” God is calling us to the sacred work of place-making. Consider your place and the practice of contextual creation care explained in the text. How do you honor the local marginalized voices, both human and nonhuman?
4. Reread “From Anthropocentrism to a Theology of Mutuality” in Chapter 1. Identify one aspect or activity of your place and briefly describe what moving from anthropocentrism toward mutuality would look like.
5. Examine Dominican Sister Jamie T. Phelps’s idea in Chapter 1, “From Sin to Covenant,” that the poor in our midst often go unnoticed until natural disasters reveal the ways we have treated them as disposable people. Name ways this occurs in your place and consider what you might be required to relinquish to bring about wholeness for all.

WESLEYAN WISDOM (10 minutes)

Stonecypher shared words from John Wesley’s sermon on Romans 8:19–22 (“From Anthropocentrism to a Theology of Mutuality,” Chapter 1). Encourage participants to describe a way to “set [creation itself] free from slavery and decay” so that it may be “brought into the glorious freedom of God’s children.”

TIME OF COMMITMENT (15 minutes)

Share the final paragraph of “From Sin to Covenant” in Chapter 1 with participants. In small groups of three to five people, ask participants to consider Rasmussen’s concept of “anticipatory communities” and the “Steps for Success” at the end of Chapter 1. Each group will choose a common goal and create quilt squares using the materials provided to demonstrate attention to the “Steps for Success.” (United Methodist Women’s 13 Principles, found in Appendix B, may serve as one resource. Past issues of **response** magazine may also add support.) Provide a space for participants to connect the squares into a quilt for display.

TAKING CARE OF THE SOIL (10 minutes)

Stonecypher introduces this study with a story focused on soil and its relationship to all creation. Encourage participants to name the various connections to soil included in the Introduction and Chapter 1. Introduce participants to the soil of the earth using “The Apple Demo: Earth’s Valuable Soil” activity or the “Apple as Planet Earth” demonstration found at www.soils4teachers.org/lessons-and-activities. Additional soil activities can be found on the same site, including how to make edible dirt!

Invite participants to share the soil samples they brought from home by layering the soil in a large clear flowerpot or container during the closing hymn. The soil represents our beginning and end. Soil also signifies our responsibility and dependence relative to earth. Be prepared with additional soil in case some participants forget. (The container of soil will be used in Session 2.)

CLOSING WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Sing: “I Am Your Mother,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2059

Credit: “*I Am Your Mother*,” Words by Shirley Erena Murray ©1996 Hope Publishing Co.; Music by Per Harling ©1996 General Board of Global Ministries, GBC Musik. CCLI License #11221925.

Pray (unison)

May God's grace purify our reason, strengthen our will, and guide our action. May the love of God, the peace of Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit be among you, everywhere and always, so that you may be a blessing to all creation and to all the children of God, making peace, nurturing and practicing hope, choosing life, and coming to life eternal. Amen.⁴

FOR THE NEXT SESSION

Ask each participant to bring a packet of flower or vegetable seeds to add to the worship center during Session 2.

ENDNOTES

1. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," vol. 4 in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander E. Kech (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 774.
2. Pat Hoerth, *God's Extravagant Garden: A Children's Study on Climate Justice* (United Methodist Women, 2016), 13.
3. J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "The Book of Psalms," 774.
4. Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church, "God's Renewed Creation: Call to Hope and Action," Pastoral Letter, 2009, <http://hopeandaction.org/main/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Pastoral-Letter-Eng-Handout-2-col.pdf>.

The Sacred Community

CENTERING THOUGHT

“Finding meaning in our lives looks different for each of us because we have lived and experienced life in different places and in diverse ways” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 2).

SESSION GOAL

Identify and consider the soil from which we have come and share how we have used our foundation, our lifeblood, to create a sacred community for ourselves, our family, and our friends.

NOTE: There is a possibility that we have given birth to and support more than one sacred community.

SUPPLIES

- Assortment of flower or vegetable seed packets (one from each person)
- Bible (for reading the scripture)
- Blue painter’s tape
- Empty wine bottle
- Glue (for affixing paper to the wooden paint sticks)
- Large bag of potting soil (used for potting flowers or vegetable seeds)
- Large clear container of soil (from Session 1)
- Markers/crayons

- Paint stirrers (many paint stores will donate a quantity)
- Paper plates
- Pens/pencils
- Plain 3" x 5" index cards
- Sheet of newsprint for graffiti wall labeled with the heading: "I Am Grateful"
- Sheet of newsprint for posting the rules of engagement
- Sheet of newsprint for reflecting on how to become more joyful
- Sheets of plain paper
- Large (4" x 4") sticky notes
- Lyrics to "How Great Thou Art," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 77, and "For Everyone Born," *Global Praise 2*

PREPARATION

- Set up a worship center or add to the one created in Session 1. Include a pot of soil, paint sticks scattered at its base, an empty wine bottle, and the assorted seed packets.
- Ask someone to read the scripture John 2:1–12.
- Ask three people to act out the skit, "Just Do What Your Momma Says." The skit is also printed in the Participant's Guide.
- Set up the graffiti wall: Hang newsprint in a space convenient for participants to write with markers or add sticky notes. Display the title: "I Am Grateful."
- Hang newsprint for the rules of engagement in a place where notes can be easily made on it.
- Create a sample "Place of Spiritual Geography" placard for putting in the soil (see the Time of Commitment).

OPENING WORSHIP: THE THINGS WE DO FOR LOVE (10 minutes)

Sing: “How Great Thou Art,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 77

Credit: “*How Great Thou Art*,” Words and music by Stuart K. Hine. ©1953, renewed 1981 Manna Music, Inc. CCLI License #11221925.

Scripture (reader): John 2:1–12 (Jesus Changes Water into Wine)

Reflection on Scripture: “*Just Do What Your Momma Says*” Skit

Mary: I can’t believe that he acts as if I am bothering him when I say to him, “You’ve got to do something about this.” I mean there is no wine—not a cup, not a drop, not a sip. This is simply the most awful thing to happen. It’s embarrassing for the host family. I can see the furrow on the brow of the bride’s mother. I see the anxious pacing of her father. I am a mother; I pay attention to these things. Look, it was hard for me to understand that I am the biological mother of the Messiah. I don’t know all what is in store for him, but this I do know: He has greatness in him! And this is a key opportunity to help out! Take care of things, Jesus, just take care of things!

Responder 1: Ah, this story, this story I have known from my early Sunday school days. It was always about the miracle, the best wine being saved for last. Today I hear something new. I hear that I must accept my mission, my assignment—to do the good of which I am capable. I must bloom. I am prepared to wriggle my toes and dig my heels in the soil where I stand. It is time for me to *act*, to *do*, to *grow*.

Responder 2: Jesus modeled for us that many times we must put the well-being of others ahead of our own comfort. This story exemplifies what United Methodist Women is about: seeing a need and responding, moving from watching on the sidelines to rolling up our sleeves and getting it done.

Pray

Lord Jesus, you have formed us in your own image—one that cares about the needs of others. You showed us through your life that when we come from a solid foundation, we can do all things through you who strengthens us. Work miracles through us; we don't need credit, just results, Lord. Help us to create and be the sacred community for the world. Help us to do things because of the love you have for us, and the love we have for each other. Amen.

DIGGING DEEP: EXPLORING THE TEXT (30 minutes)

Invite the class to begin the process of digging deep into Chapter 2 to gain an understanding of the theological and biblical foundation for creating and living in a sacred community.

Read aloud the centering thought: “Finding meaning in our lives looks different for each of us because we have lived and experienced life in different places and in diverse ways” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 2). Encourage participants to explore the chapter by jotting down a couple of sentences in response to at least three of the questions that are listed in the Participant's Guide. To ensure that all questions will be answered, you may assign one question to everyone and then encourage participants to choose two others to answer. (If participants are keeping a journal or have a notebook, they may write their answers there; be sure to ask if anyone needs paper or a pencil to take notes.)

1. Identify a time when you allowed your life to be complicated by your interaction(s) with others (as Jesus allowed Mary to complicate his).
2. Identify a time when you felt like you were pushed to the outskirts of a community you once felt embraced by (as happened to Jesus).
3. Think of a person (other than yourself) who participated in “place-making” in a community that was new to her or him, or represented a return to a community once abandoned (see the story of Jayber Crow in Chapter 2, “Sacred Roots in Community”).

4. What in your worship community nurtures your spirit (music, sermons, scripture, coffee hour, etc.)?
5. How have you seen radical hospitality in practice (in your home, church, community, school, etc.)?
6. What are some false perceptions of ourselves to which we cling (I am a colossal failure; I am organized; I am financially savvy; I can never lose this extra weight; no one likes me; I am the smartest person I know)?
7. As a United Methodist Women member, what would it mean to transform into a more seasoned and compassionate person of faith? What is one more thing to do? To say? One more place to be? (See Chapter 2, “Ministries of Mercy and Justice in Community.”)

Share with each other: Have the participants meet in groups of two or three to share their responses to one of the questions. Bring everyone back together as a whole and ask for one volunteer for each question to share responses in one to two minutes.

After sharing, encourage participants to link their responses and the content of this chapter with their commitment to create and/or strengthen their current community’s commitment to health and wholeness. For example, as people answer Question 6 about false perceptions they hold of themselves, invite everyone to drop those unreal perceptions and create new, real, and positive perceptions.

WESLEYAN WISDOM (10 minutes)

Have the class reread the paragraph with John Wesley’s thoughts about the role of Holy Communion in the sacred community (Chapter 2, “Holy Communion and the Sacred Community”). List the effects of receiving Communion that are listed there. Ask participants to choose one effect and say how they see it being lived out in their life. Or, invite members to identify an effect that is missing in their lives and describe what might be done to make it a reality.

EXPLORING HOLY COMMUNION AND THE SACRED COMMUNITY (25 minutes)

The author reminds us that when we gather for Communion, no one is excluded. In the section of Chapter 2 titled “Ministries of Mercy and Justice in Community,” Stonecypher says (*read aloud to the class*): “Christ invites us to partake in this life-giving act with each other. No one, not even Judas the betrayer, is excluded.” That means that everyone from Jezebel the murderer to Thomas the doubter are all welcome at the table. Think—really think—of an individual or an organization that represents your “Judas”: Someone in your life who betrayed you through their behavior and/or language.

NOTE: The decision to use a pseudonym for the individual you choose might be a caring gesture when participating in this exercise.

Breakfast with Jesus and “Judas”

Give everyone a paper plate and markers. Tell them that they are being invited to a breakfast with Jesus and “Judas.” Participants are to invite a person or organization that symbolizes a “Judas” to them (someone who betrayed them while pretending to be a friend). Since all are welcome, whom would they invite to the table to extend, strengthen, and heal the sacred community?

Have them write that person or organization’s name (or a pseudonym) in the center of the plate. Around the edges, write a favorite scripture or a favorite song that might help build unity in the community.

NOTE: The concept of sharing a meal with someone who has actually betrayed them may be too personal or painful for some individuals in the class. Offer the option of having breakfast with Jesus and someone else.

After class members have prepared their plates, ask for four or five volunteers to share (in one minute or less) who they have invited to come to the sacred table. Then on a designated wall or a vacant table, have everyone place their plates in a circular or rectangular pattern

to resemble place settings at a table. Invite participants to create pictures or other items to place on the table during their free time to make it a sacred space for God's people to gather.

Then, share these words: "We hear over and over in the scripture that Jesus eats with sinners, forgives their sins, and welcomes them to the feast of love. Let us pause and ask God to help us to be just a little bit more like Jesus in all our relationships—so that even when we cannot forget totally, we can forgive wholly, moving ourselves closer to Jesus, the one who loves us and died for us."

Sing: "For Everyone Born," *Global Praise 2*

Credit: "For Everyone Born," Words by Shirley Erena Murray ©1998 Hope Publishing Co.; Music by Per Harling ©2000 Ton-Vis Produktion AB/Per Harling. CCLI License #11221925.

HAPPINESS AS A SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (10 minutes)

Share what the author says about happiness as a social responsibility, referring in particular to the writings of Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister that are found in Chapter 2, "Happiness as a Social Responsibility." Then, ask for ideas about how we can become more joyful in establishing and maintaining our sacred community. Ask for a volunteer to record these ideas on newsprint and post them in the classroom. Remind the group that these thoughts are a springboard for building and nurturing the sacred community to which we belong.

CREATE A GRATITUDE WALL (15 minutes)

Chittister defines happiness not as obtaining things to enjoy but as an expression of gratitude and living authentically; see "Happiness as a Social Responsibility" in Chapter 2 of the study book. Distribute a sticky note to each participant. Ask them to think about one thing they are grateful for and write it on the note. Bring the group together and invite individuals to share what they wrote on their

notes one by one. After sharing, have everyone place their notes on the graffiti wall labeled “I Am Grateful.” (If desired, class members may use markers to write directly on the newsprint. During the sharing time, they can talk about what they wrote on the wall.)

TIME OF COMMITMENT:

THE SOIL BENEATH MY FEET (20 minutes)

Make a “Place of Spiritual Geography” placard, representing the soil beneath your feet. Give each participant a paint stick and two index cards.

On one card, ask participants to write their first name and their state or country of origin. On the second card, ask participants to write the spiritual geography from which they come. Your “spiritual geography” refers to the people and places that have supported your spiritual growth and figuratively provided the soil where your faith took root. It could be your home church, college experiences (such as joining a faith in action club), or time with family (prayers before going to bed, prayers at celebrations such as Thanksgiving and Christmas). It also could be a learning experience (reading a book, being part of a retreat, or attending a concert).

Ask participants to glue the cards to a paint stick (show the class a finished placard that you created in advance). As moved by the spirit, or as you direct, invite each participant to come forward, say her or his name, and place the paint stick in the soil using a phrase such as “My name is _____ and this place [church or state] or this person [name the individual] represents the soil beneath my feet.”

After all have shared, bring the group’s attention to the items on the altar and discuss how they relate to the session (i.e., soil symbolizes our roots and foundation; seed packets symbolize how we are to bloom where we are planted and create caring communities; the empty wine bottle is a symbol of Communion, our communion with Christ, with each other, and all who are our neighbors).

CLOSING WORSHIP

Pray (unison)

God, you have required us to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you as we build a sacred space for each and every person to grow and thrive. Stay with us as we wriggle our toes deep into the soil in which we have been placed, vowing to help make the culture of love a vital part of a sacred community in and around us. Amen.

Chapter 3

The Sacred Self

CENTERING THOUGHT

“We were created as ‘divine’ beings, children of a God who cares so much as to give us responsibilities and a place in the work of co-creating the world. We do not have to be people of great societal significance to be noticed and utilized by our creator. We simply need to look to God for leadership in our lives as we seek to honor our sacred worth” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 3).

SESSION GOAL

Explore the biblical command to love ourselves and reflect on our sacred natures by looking at ourselves through different lenses, especially the lens of our creator, God.

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Bible
- *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Faith We Sing*
- Journal
- Laptop/Internet access/projection equipment
- Markers/crayons/colored pencils
- Mask materials: paper plates, scissors, and pipe cleaners, string and paper hole punch, or masking tape and popsicle sticks

- Newsprint for graffiti wall labeled with the heading: “Sabbath is . . .”
- Paper and/or index cards for Sabbath blessings and representations
- Lyrics for “Take Time to Be Holy,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 395

Credit: “*Take Time to Be Holy*.” Words by William D. Longstaff, Music by George C. Stebbins, 1880s. *United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 395, Public Domain.

PREPARATION

- Set up the graffiti wall: Hang newsprint in a space where it’s convenient for participants to write with markers or add sticky notes. Display the title: “Sabbath is . . .”
- Provide hymnals, project, or post the lyrics to “Take Time to Be Holy.”
- Prepare newsprint or a slide with a description or example of a Sabbath blessing.
- Arrange the worship center to incorporate the shared Sabbath blessings and visuals during closing worship.
- Organize mask materials and an example of a completed mask. The mask may cover your full face or half. Cut two holes in the paper plate for eyes. Decorate both sides of the mask according to the instructions in the Time of Commitment activity. Masks may be worn by punching holes on either side for threading pipe cleaners or string to tie them on, or they may be completed with a popsicle stick for holding the mask in front of the face.

OPENING WORSHIP (10 minutes)

Pray (unison): *Worship and Song Worship Resources*, no. 69

Creator God, how great is your name!

All creation sings of your glory, and so do we.

You have exalted us and crowned us with honor—
even the infants join stars and moon in singing
your praise.

How great, O God, is your name in all the earth! Amen.

Credit: Prayer by Richard Eslinger ©2006. Used with permission by Upper Room Books.

Sing: “God the Sculptor of the Mountains,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2060

Credit: “*God the Sculptor of the Mountains*,” Words by John Thornburg. Music by Amanda Husberg. ©1996 Abingdon Press. OneLicense #A-709087.

Psalter: Psalm 8, *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 743

O Lord, our Lord,

how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Your glory is chanted above the heavens
by the mouth of babes and infants:

**you have set up a defense against your foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.**

When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars which you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
and mortals that you care for them?

Yet you have made them little less than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
O Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Credit: Johann J. Schütz; Trans. by Francis E. Cox. Public Domain.

DIGGING DEEP: EXPLORING THE TEXT (30 minutes)

Invite participants to begin the process of exploring Chapter 3 of the text, which focuses on the sacred self and the biblical command to love ourselves. Begin by reading the centering thought aloud.

Centering Thought

“We were created as ‘divine’ beings, children of a God who cares so much as to give us responsibilities and a place in the work of co-creating the world. We do not have to be people of great societal significance to be noticed and utilized by our creator. We simply need to look to God for leadership in our lives as we seek to honor our sacred worth” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 3).

Invite participants to choose two of the following exercises to document in writing. Allow time for them to share one of their responses with others in small groups, or choose a different sharing strategy from Appendix A.

1. In Chapter 3, Stonecypher discusses the importance of play and creativity in the lives of children and adults. Identify an example of “play” that is part of your approach to everyday life and describe its spiritual benefits.
2. According to Stonecypher, “Sabbath entails doing things that bring healing, rest, and joy to a person” (Chapter 3). Consider

the lyrics to “Take Time to Be Holy” (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 395). Create a visual representation of Sabbath or write a Sabbath blessing. Sabbath blessings may praise God or ask for God’s favor. They may be blessings for children or for creation, over bread or during ritual. An example of a Sabbath blessing might be:

*May the love and peace of God be with you. In your rest, may God replenish your soul and refocus your heart and mind.*¹

3. In the Chapter 3 sections titled “Loving Ourselves” and “Love Through the Lens of the Creation and Community,” the author shares how her relationship with her child has reframed her understanding of loving oneself. Record at least two ideas from those pages that may have enlightened your journey to love yourself.

WESLEYAN WISDOM (10 minutes)

The author reminds us of our Wesleyan theology and heritage in the section titled “The Fall Still Matters” in Chapter 3. Invite participants to identify methods they use in their journey toward Christian perfection and honoring their own sacred worth.

A MODEL FOR SELF-CARE (20 minutes)

In the section titled “Self-Care and Sabbath” in Chapter 3, Stonecypther shares Walter Brueggemann’s three important truths about God. Using Brueggemann’s concept of Sabbath as inspiration, guide participants as they work independently or in small groups to plan a Sabbath routine, setting balanced personal boundaries.

TIME OF COMMITMENT: LIVING BEYOND MASKS (30 minutes)

Invite participants to consider the section “Identity and Vocation” in Chapter 3 and the “walls of rationalization” we build around our own identities. Each participant will create a mask out of a paper plate. One side of the mask will represent the identities that keep us from living into our whole sacred self. The other side of the mask will represent our commitment to an action of personal discernment, a specific choice made to follow the path of discipleship. Participants may share using the Inside-Outside Circle strategy described in Appendix A.

CLOSING WORSHIP (20 minutes)

Sing: “Come and Find the Quiet Center,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2128, or “May You Run and Not Be Weary,” *The Faith We Sing*, no. 2281

Credit: “*Come and Find the Quiet Center*,” Words by Shirley Erena Murray. ©1992 Hope Publishing Co. Music (attr.): B.F. White. Public domain. CCLI License #11221925; “*May You Run and Not Be Weary*,” Words and music by Handt Hanson and Paul Murakami. ©1991 Changing Church Forum, Inc. CCLI License #11221925

Pray

Invite participants to share Sabbath blessings and visual representations of Sabbath. Blessings and visuals may be placed at the worship center as they are shared.

ENDNOTES

1. Matthew Sleeth, M.D., *24/6: A Prescription for a Healthier, Happier Life* (Nashville: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012).

Chapters 4 and 5

Session

4

Covenantal Living—

Let's Make It Work!

CENTERING THOUGHT

“The heritage offered to us as people of faith through the stories and people of scripture is one way that God helps us discern our role in God’s redeeming work in the world” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 4).

SESSION GOAL

Identify scriptures that support our faith and connect with the heritage we have from the covenant communities with which we are currently linked, with the emphasis on using these experiences to build and strengthen communities wherever we go.

SUPPLIES

- Battery-operated candle
- Bible
- Biblical concordance
- Blue painter’s tape
- Index cards (4" x 6") or sheets of construction paper torn in half
- Markers/crayons
- Newsprint for graffiti wall labeled with the heading: “Covenantal Living”

- Newsprint or butcher paper to make a sign: “Hallway of Heroines and Heroes”
- Pens/pencils
- Pot of soil and seed packets (from previous sessions)
- Sheets of paper
- Small resealable bags
- *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Songs of Zion*

PREPARATION

- Set up or add the following to the worship center: pot of soil with “Place of Geography” placards inserted; assorted seed packets; and candle.
- Ask two volunteers (a reporter and Noah) to perform the “Interview with Noah” skit.
- Ask a volunteer to read Celeste Savage’s story aloud.
- Decide which Noah-themed song the group will sing in the Opening Worship. Look for songs in various songbooks or hymnals or choose a song that you know. You may want to use the song “Forty Days and Forty Nights” (see *Put Your Arms Around the World: Global Songs and Activities for Children*); “Who Built the Ark?” (an old camp song); or the spiritual, “God Put a Rainbow in the Sky.”
- Set up the graffiti wall: Hang newsprint in a space where it’s convenient for participants to write with markers or add sticky notes. Display the title: “Covenantal Living.”
- Hang the “Hallway of Heroines and Heroes” sign.
- Fill out your commitment card: Ask each participant to write one thing that they will do to build and/or strengthen the covenant community in which they have been called to live and serve.
- Post the rules of engagement in a place that is visible to all.

OPENING WORSHIP (15 minutes)

Sing: Lead the group as they sing a song related to Noah building the ark. Or ask members of the group if they know another song that they can teach their classmates.

“Interview with Noah” Skit

Reporter: What are you doing? I mean you have been hammering and hammering for years now. Why?

Noah: God told me to build an ark. I trust God.

Reporter: You have to know that the people are laughing at you—I mean, they are doubled over with laughter thinking you are just aimlessly and mindlessly banging and putting planks of wood together.

Noah: God told me to build an ark, to be prepared for rain. I trust God.

Reporter: What is rain? That is a new word for me.

Noah: I am not sure what rain is, God mentioned that there would be water falling from the sky. I know about the dew, which appears on the grass overnight. Maybe it is something like that? Dew that we will see falling from the sky. But you know what? God told me to build an ark. I trust God.

Reporter: Well, it looks like I am not going to get any information from you. You just say the same thing over and over again: “I trust God; I trust God.”

Noah: I don’t know when the rain is going to come. I have always walked with God. There is no need for me to change. I will do what God asks me to do. I trust God.

After listening to the interview, invite the group to close their eyes and take several deep, calming and centering breaths. Think about Noah’s statement, “I trust God.” Ask class members to think of a time in their lives (either a personal experience or an event that they witnessed) when they or someone they know simply trusted God. What feelings come to mind? What does it mean to trust God? (*Allow two to three minutes for reflection.*) Ask if anyone would like to share their story and call on just one or two people. If no one volunteers, share a story from your life when you trusted God.

Sing (choose one): “My Heavenly Father Watches Over Me,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 69; “I Will Trust in the Lord,” *Songs of Zion*, no. 14; “Trust and Obey,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 467.

Credit: “*My Heavenly Father Watches Over Me*,” Words and music: Charles H. Gabriel ©1949, ©1953. Arr: J. Jefferson Cleveland ©1981 Abingdon Press. All rights reserved. Arrangement used with permission by Abingdon Press/UM Publishing. “*I Will Trust in the Lord*,” Words and music: J. Jefferson Cleveland ©1981 Abingdon Press. CCLI License #11221925. “*Trust and Obey*,” Words by John H. Sammis; Music by Daniel B. Towner, 1887. Public domain.

Pray (unison)

Lord, let us find in the story of Noah and his trust in you—where you used him to save the entire creation—a message of hope and direction for us. Tap us on the shoulder and urge us to build and strengthen caring and holy communities where people are saved from their sins and find your will for their lives. Amen.

DIGGING DEEP:

EXPLORING THE TEXT (30 minutes)

Invite the class to begin the process of exploring Chapters 4 and 5 to renew our appreciation of our biblical heritage and let that guide us as we develop our own plans for covenantal living and intentional spiritual growth.

Read the centering thought aloud: “The heritage offered to us as people of faith through the stories and people of scripture is one way that God helps us discern our role in God’s redeeming work in the world” (*Embracing Wholeness*, Chapter 4).

Lead the class in an overview of the story found under “Covenant as Solidarity” in Chapter 4.

Ask for volunteers to answer questions such as:

1. What do you find fascinating about Noah’s response to God? What do you find challenging?
2. What was Noah called to do?
3. How is Noah’s relationship with the animals depicted?
4. What can we learn from Noah’s trust in God?

Emphasize to the group that we are offered a heritage of faith through scripture. Ask the class to make a list of three to five biblical heroines and heroes in their notebook, journal, or on a sheet of paper. Along with their list, ask them to explain in a sentence or two the significance of these heroines and heroes for them. (*Be prepared with an example of a biblical heroine or hero from your own experience.*)

Next, on a 4" x 6" index card, ask each participant to write the name of one of their biblical heroes or heroines along with the scripture reference if known. Using tape, ask class members to post their cards under the “Hallway of Heroines and Heroes” sign.

After everyone has posted their choices, randomly select (or point to) a few cards on the wall and ask the persons who placed those names there to share why this biblical person brings meaning to their life.

NOTE: If the person whose card is chosen is uncomfortable with sharing, quickly move on to the next card/person.

Direct everyone's attention to the section in the study book titled "Covenantal Living and the Incarnation" in Chapter 4. Ask participants to use their notebooks, journals, or sheets of paper to jot down a two- to three-sentence response to at least three of the following questions:

1. When is it most challenging to love your neighbor as yourself?
2. How would you guide someone in the goal of loving God completely? What is your road map?
3. What harm do you see in the environment in the geographical location of your home? Or in a place that is important to you?
4. What environmental challenge ripped your heart out: Water crisis in Flint, Michigan? Love Canal in New York? Fear of poisoning of Native American sacred lands—long ago or recently due to the Dakota Pipeline Access in North Dakota?
5. Think of Nati Passow's assertion that we have sinned by "messing with natural cycles in a very serious way,"¹ and Stonecypher's analysis that "we need to step back and realize that the concept of sin is not simply an individual act." What do you think is meant by that?
6. What does Norma Wirzba mean when he says "eating is the most intimate thing we do"?²
7. How does the story of bison rancher Will Harris encourage you to be more connected with the food you eat, to take your food seriously?

Share with each other: Ask participants to gather in groups of two or three and share their responses to one of the questions. Bring the group back together as a whole and ask for one volunteer per question to share her or his response in one to two minutes. (*If a question remains unanswered, be prepared to share your thoughts on that question.*)

SELF-REFLECTION (20 minutes)

Stonecypher confessed that her privilege is significant; ask participants to reread the third item under “Steps to Success” in Chapter 1 or read it aloud to them. Then, ask participants to take a sheet of paper and make two columns. At the top of the right-hand column, write “My Privileges Are” and list at least five things they believe fall in that category. At the top of the left-hand column, write “My Challenges Are” and list three to five things that fall in that category. As a study leader, consider sharing one example for each column from your own life as a way to encourage reflection.

Ask the class to gather in groups of two or three. Ask them to talk about privileges and challenges and how this may affect the communities in which they find themselves. Bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to share their thoughts.

WESLEYAN WISDOM (10 minutes)

Ask the class to revisit the paragraph that shares John Wesley’s thoughts about how caring for ourselves is part of the discipleship process. (See “Healthy Eating and Exercise” in the “Practices for Covenantal Living” section.) As a group, make a list of steps for wellness and well-being as a result of thinking about Wesley’s advice; place the information on newsprint to make it visible to all. Invite members to share what suggestions seem easiest to implement and which ones would probably be the most challenging.

MAKING IT WORK (30 minutes)

Celeste Savage is a leader in addressing the needs of persons who are homeless in Salisbury, Maryland. Hear her story (ask a volunteer to read):³

I was driving a school bus and saw a bedroll under a tree.
I became obsessed with finding out to whom it belonged.
Finally, I met “Bill,” an injured and out-of-work wallpaper

hanger who had worked steadily but had no health insurance. The injury ended his livelihood and soon he lost his apartment. His story was my impetus to change my attitude about persons who were homeless from “just go get a job” to “how can I serve you?” It was the impetus to found HALO (Hope and Life Outreach), a conglomerate of ministries which includes year-round overnight shelters for men and women; an eighteen-month life reclamation program called Journey of Hope; a partnership with social service agencies to help people get back on their feet; and a bargain center where people of all incomes can shop and contribute funding to helping those who are homeless. This is God’s will for my life.

Point out that Celeste Savage is an example of how to “make it work” and that now it is time for us to do the same. Have participants review the subsections in Chapter 4 titled “Life in Community: Becoming Rooted in Place” and “Meaningful Work,” noting the latter’s emphasis on “leaving our mark in the world.” Then, re-examine the material in Chapter 5, especially the concept of creating a rule of life and Richard Rohr’s thoughts on the Holy Trinity as community. Lead the group in a discussion of what they have learned and solicit ideas that they have for making their mark in the world.

Finally, look to the sets of questions in the section titled “Physical, Mental, and Spiritual Health.” Ask participants to choose one set of questions (i.e., Movement, Nutrition, Mental Health, Spiritual Health) for personal consideration. Allow time for participants to record their thoughts related to the questions in their notebook, journal, or on a sheet of paper. Tell them that this writing is just for them, to help them think about how they can respond to the challenges and insights shared in the study book.

Prepare the class for closing worship by distributing 4" x 6" index cards. Ask participants to write one thing on their card that they will do to build and/or strengthen the covenant community in which they have been called to live and serve. Feel free to share the example from the card of commitment that you created.

TIME OF COMMITMENT:
PUT IT ON THE ALTAR (15 minutes)

Place the pot of soil that was prepared in Session 2 in the worship center on the prepared altar space. If possible, gather in a circle around the table. Light the candles. Sing a familiar song such as “Here I Am, Lord,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 593; or “Send Me Lord,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, no. 497.

Invite participants to come one at a time to place their card of commitment on the altar. Encourage individuals to share their commitment aloud and pray for strength as they take the next step in their lives before they return to their seats.

After all who wish to have shared, distribute a small resealable bag and a plastic spoon to each participant. Ask them to return to the altar and take a spoonful of the soil with them as a reminder of the community from which they have sprung in this sacred space. Invite them to find a way to use that soil in some way (place it in their garden, in a flowerpot, around a shrub, or grow something new from it). Encourage participants to take a seed packet from the altar as well.

Finally, ask participants to send an e-mail to the study leader and/or to each other within the next thirty days that shares how they have used the soil in their community.

CLOSING WORSHIP

Pray (unison)

While still seated, ask the class to pray together:

Holy and gracious God, you have reminded us of what we are called to do. You have reminded us of our heritage through biblical and everyday spiritual leaders and mentors. You have challenged us to be place-makers and to be community builders. We sit, kneel, or stand in your presence asking for strength and vision so that we can be all that you would desire for us. In the name of our loving Savior Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Fred Bahnson, *Soil and Sacrament: A Spiritual Memoir of Food and Faith* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), 206.
2. Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 156.
3. Celeste Savage, director of HALO, interview with Faye Wilson on PAC 14 (Wicomico County, Maryland, Public Access Channel), October 2011.

Appendix

Strategies for Summarizing and Sharing

GIVE ONE-GET ONE

Participants number their papers from one through five. They write three ideas. They must talk to at least two more people to get two additional ideas and to give two of theirs “away.”

INSIDE-OUTSIDE CIRCLE/CHAT CIRCLE

Arrange participants in pairs. One partner from each pair moves to form a circle facing outward (this is the inside circle). The remaining participants face their partners to form the outside circle. Assign someone to be the first speaker—inside partner will talk, outside partner will listen. Then the partners will switch roles—outside partner will talk, inside partner will listen. After that, the outside circle will rotate and stop on the leader’s signal to form a new pair and repeat the sharing process.

MINGLE-PAIR-SHARE

Participants mix with various people around the room as music plays. When the music stops, each person finds the partner closest to them, then each partner has a minute to share. When the music starts again, participants mix to find a new partner.

ONE-MINUTE WITNESS

This teaching strategy is designed to provide an opportunity for people to share while giving each speaker relatively equal time. It is a management tool to guide people in reflecting and choosing their most precious thoughts, the most key aspects of their story, and sharing that information. It has three components. Be sure to:

1. Identify the most important parts of one's story or experience and organize what information will be shared first, second, etc.
2. Commit to observing the time frame (use a timer) and give a 30-second or 15-second warning—visually or orally—to allow a speaker to finish.
3. Stop the person from speaking within 15 seconds if time limits are ignored; use phrases such as “thank you for sharing; we must move on” or “I have to interrupt in order to give everyone equal time.”

PAIR-N-SHARE/THINK-PAIR-SHARE

Participants pause for thinking/writing time. After the allotted time, participants pair with a neighbor and each partner has one to two minutes to share ideas.

SNOWBALL SHARE

Participants choose a response to share and write it on a piece of paper. Then they wad up the papers and, on your signal, they toss the “snowballs” gently across the room. Participants look at the messages on the “snowballs” they receive.

Appendix **B**

Facts and First Steps to Sustainability

FROM USING THE 13 UNITED METHODIST WOMEN PRINCIPLES

THE 13 PRINCIPLES TO BE JUST. BE GREEN.

Accessibility, Affordability, Carbon Footprint, Healthy Food and Beverages, Just Economic Opportunities, Local Solidarity, Multi-generational Inclusion, Paper Use, Racial Justice, Toxin Reduction, Waste Reduction, Water Use, and Well-Being of Participants make up the 13 Principles for Sustainability.

These principles form the core of the social justice concerns of United Methodist Women. There are measurable, practical steps to implementing the 13 Principles when planning meetings. These actions have the potential to impact personal choice and change lifestyle habits.

The following sampling of facts and steps provides examples that may inform choices for health and wholeness. Comprehensive and detailed information can be found at **www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/climate-justice**.

PRINCIPLE 3: CARBON FOOTPRINT

Minimize transportation's carbon footprint by choosing public transportation options, car-pooling and ride-sharing, or by choosing electric, hybrid, or biodiesel fuel-powered vehicles.

Minimize business or home footprint by updating accommodations and facilities with energy-efficient measures for waste, water, lighting, and toxins. Arrange an energy audit to inform decisions. Choose "climate-friendly" thermostat temperatures—less air-conditioning in warmer weather and less heat in cooler times.

Minimize food and waste footprint by planning low-carbon footprint menus. This involves eating lower on the food chain (no red meat, more vegetarian and vegan meals, no food ingredients air-freighted long distances).

PRINCIPLE 4: HEALTHY FOOD AND BEVERAGES

If possible, patronize local farmers (within 250 miles). Create menus that are based on in-season foods for your region and utilize certified organic options when possible.

Patronize food providers and sources with positive employment and labor track records and avoid those that do not. Buy fair-trade products such as organic teas and coffees.

The average American eats 270 pounds of meat per year, nearly four times the global average. "The single most effective choice you can make to lower the global warming emissions resulting from your diet is to eat less meat, especially beef. Meat causes more global warming emissions than almost any other type of food . . . In the United States, beef production accounts for more than one-third of all heat-trapping emissions from our agricultural sector" (Source: Union of Concerned Scientists, *Cooler, Smarter*, Island Press, 2011).

PRINCIPLE 10: TOXIN REDUCTION

We need to phase out our direct use of toxic products. We also must alter what we consume so that we do not use goods that require toxic chemicals in their manufacture or produce toxins during the disposal process. Studies show that toxic waste dumps in the United States are disproportionately located in or near communities whose inhabitants are predominantly people of color.

- Choose chlorine-free paper and paper products, and when arranging for printing, use soy or vegetable-based inks.
- Measure the amount of energy you use (heating, air-conditioning, lights, etc.). Energy production creates major environmental health problems.
- Practice a no- or least-toxic policy (for landscaping, pesticides, paints, cleaning supplies, etc.).

PRINCIPLE 11: WASTE REDUCTION

Practice waste prevention. Before purchasing anything, ask, “Do we really need this?” If you do, then purchase the least amount possible, in the most sustainable form, with no or minimum packaging. Plan for reuse if possible.

Compost food waste. Create your own compost system. Some municipalities and waste haulers do this. Some community gardens or master gardener programs associated with a botanical garden or agricultural extension service may be willing to assist.

Recycling one aluminum can saves enough energy to run a television for two hours (Source: MeetGreen).

PRINCIPLE 12: WATER USE

Choose low-flow faucets, showers, and toilets and landscaping designs that minimize watering.

According to *National Geographic*, it takes about 70 gallons of water to fill a bathtub; showers generally save on water.

The water it takes to produce the average American diet alone—approximately 1,000 gallons per person per day—is more than the global average water footprint of 900 gallons per person per day for diet, household use, transportation, energy, and the consumption of material goods (Source: *National Geographic*).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Faye Wilson is a writer, educator, and musician. For twenty-one years she was a staff member with the General Board of Global Ministries and was involved in mission education with United Methodist Women. Wilson has written materials for ten mission study themes. In 2015, she provided leadership for the plenaries on transformational learning. In 2014, she wrote the leader's guide for *How Is It With Your Soul?* In 2012, she wrote the children's poverty study, *The Girl Under the Bridge*, and produced the Poverty DVD, *Standing in Need: Systemic Poverty in Our Midst*.

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She currently serves as part of the team of jurisdiction guides for United Methodist Women's Be Just. Be Green. program promoting wholeness and justice in the way meetings and events are planned. She also represents New Mexico Conference United Methodist Women on the board of McCurdy Ministries, a National Mission Institution.

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