

Women Called to Ministry

A Six-Session Study for The United Methodist Church

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Student's Guide

All Scripture readings are from the New Revised Standard Version
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*General Commission on the Status and Role of Women
in The United Methodist Church*



Introduction

The United Methodist Church and its predecessor denominations have just finished celebrating the 50th anniversary of full clergy rights for women (2006). Our denomination continues the opportunity to “celebrate our courageous past” and “claim our bold future” (theme used in 2006).

This six-session study invites women and men of The United Methodist Church to dig deeper into our past through Biblical study and stories from our history, and engage in the present understandings and calling. Why are women included in the full life of the church? Why are women ordained? Why are there disagreements and tension in our conversations? Full participation of women in the church is a dimension of the nature and function of the church—it claims who we are—and we are more trustworthy in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we continue to recognize our courageous past and move boldly into the future.

May you know the presence of Christ as you gather with brothers and sisters in faithful study, conversation and listening.

Session One: Outsider-Insider

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Have you ever felt like an outsider? Are others on the inside? Jesus' ministry was challenged by a Caananite woman, an outsider, and the story breaks open new understandings of who is on the outside and who is on the inside. (*Matthew*)

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Too often women's identities are defined by confining social prescriptions and roles by the world, rather than by knowledge and acceptance of one's identity as a child of God for ministry in the world. How do we, in our Christian tradition, understand and interpret the story of Adam and Eve?

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The United Methodist Church affirms the full participation of women, including ordination, through our Biblical and historical understandings. Yet, there are tensions within the Biblical text. Is there any way to find wholeness in the Biblical texts about the role and identity of women?

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The 1956 General Conference of The Methodist Church made the historic decision to grant full clergy rights to women; this resource shares the story.

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A brief annotated bibliography regarding women called to ministry.

About the Authors

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SessionOne

Outsider-Insider

THEME

Who are we as people of God in religion and in Christianity? The Canaanite woman's story (Matthew) breaks the societal boundaries of "outsider-insider," and recognizes God's welcome of all.

INVITATION

Have you ever felt like an outsider? Are others on the inside? Jesus' ministry was challenged by a Caananite woman, an outsider, and the story breaks open new understandings of who is on the outside and who is on the inside.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 15:21-28

BIBLICAL STUDY

(The words in italics are Greek. Please read the glossary at the end of the session for clarification.)

The Canaanite woman, an outsider, challenges religious barriers of her time. Her story, located in the middle of the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 15:21-28), confronts the insider-outsider concept that characterizes the Gospel of Matthew. Her encounter with Jesus opens the door to the transformation of boundaries. Her action invites us into a close study of the narrative.

The significance of this narrative lies in the actions of the Canaanite woman when she encounters Jesus. The woman cries out: "Have mercy on me, O Lord, son of David." This is followed by the woman exposing her problem. She says, "My daughter is tormented by a demon" (v. 22).¹ The woman needs Jesus' action to move the demon out of her daughter. Unfortunately, Jesus' response to the woman is silence. He simply ignores her because she is a Canaanite woman. His disciples intervene and ask him to send her away because she is shouting after them. They want her back in her place, that is, to remain confined within the social boundaries that she has just crossed. She is clearly "an outsider" or "the other." Jesus' words reinforce this sense of her "otherness," of her being an outsider, when he breaks his silence and answers the woman saying, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (v. 24).

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the Hebrew and Greek texts are by the author, Rev. Kabamba Kiboko.

Jesus' proverb (v. 24) and the disciples' attitude do not hinder this woman's action. Her response to Jesus' proverb is exceptional. She engages her whole self as she expresses her feelings through two motion verbs. First, in silence, she uses body language as if she were doing a liturgical move: "She came and knelt before him." Her silence, however, is different from that of Jesus. It is an active silence accompanied by this liturgical move. Second, she adds words to the motion in the form of supplication: "Lord, help me" (v. 26).

Her gentle persistent resistance does not help Jesus soften his response to her. Jesus persists in his negative attitude when he replies to the woman: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to (Greek—*kunariois*) 'little dogs'"² (v. 26). The Canaanite woman's reply expresses her determination: "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters." Although the Canaanite woman accepts Jesus' degrading proverb, she uses it to challenge the insider-outsider concept and to invite Jesus to acknowledge the broader understanding of relationship. Finally, Jesus is awakened by the woman's soft persistent resistance. He is amazed by her faith and says to her: "O woman, great is your faith. Let it be for you as you wish." Consequently, her daughter was healed from that very hour.

The Canaanite woman helped Jesus' action to move beyond social boundaries and become inclusive. Jesus breaks an important Jewish tradition—since Canaanites were unaccepted by the Jews, and women did not have equal status with men—when he acknowledges the faith of the woman. The insider-outsider concept was gently challenged and reversed. The Canaanite woman helps Jesus' ministry to move beyond a confined region and become inclusive.

This narrative carries two messages, both taught by the Canaanite woman. First, she uses her courage, the urgency of her need, and her wisdom to transform barriers of race and gender into inclusiveness. As a Canaanite, unaccepted by the Jews, and as a woman in a male-oriented society, she extends Jesus' ministry to a wider population. Second, the woman teaches about the universality of God's grace; that God's unconditional love is available to all, no exceptions. At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus chooses the woman's understanding of relationship when he says: "All authority has been given to me; Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

REFLECTION WITH THE SCRIPTURE

What if the Canaanite woman had accepted her place, that is, a little dog under or around the table wagging its tail with no room at the table? If you were the Canaanite woman, what would you say to Jesus at that time in their conversation? When have you had a similar experience in which you were an outsider? Who are "outsiders," according to your understanding, in our society today?

(If you have time and interest in further Biblical study, please continue reading below.)

2 Some scholars interpret this as Jesus testing the woman's faith. Others contend that the evangelists (Matthew and Mark) used this account to convince "Jewish Christians that Gentiles are worthy of church membership." See Amy-Jill Levine, "Canaanite Woman," in *Women in Scripture* (ed. Carol Meyers, Toni Craven and Ross S. Kraemer; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 413.

FURTHER BIBLICAL STUDY

The significance of this narrative lies in the actions of Jesus and those of the Canaanite woman. The very first verb in the narrative is a motion verb *exerkomai* (in Greek), which means “to go out, or to come out.” It points to Jesus’ action—that is, Jesus’ motion *out of*. Jesus *went out of* that place and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon (v. 21). Similarly, the very first verb used in relation to the Canaanite woman’s action is the same motion verb, *exerkomai*. In both cases, the motion verb is in active voice in connection with a location. Jesus *went out of that place*. The woman from *that region came out*. Where is this motion going to end up? Are Jesus and the woman going to meet somewhere? What is going to happen when they meet?

They eventually meet. As we saw in the Biblical study, his disciples intervened. Their first action is expressed through a motion verb *proserkomai*—“to approach.” The disciples do not have to come *out of* anywhere; they simply approach or come forward. The narrator does not tell when the disciples did the motion *out of* their location. Their second action is a request to Jesus to send her away because she is shouting after them. The disciples want her back to her place, that is, to go back and remain confined within the boundaries that she has just crossed. She is clearly an “outsider.” Jesus’ words support this sense of her being an outsider when he breaks his silence and answers the woman saying, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (v. 24). The woman does not belong to the house of Israel, nor does she belong with the disciples.

The woman, the outsider, persists. She continues to encounter Jesus by moving forward and kneeling, and brings a petition, “Lord, help me” (v. 26). Jesus does not soften his response: “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to little dogs” (v. 27). The Canaanite woman’s reply to Jesus expresses her determination: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of their masters.” She challenges his understanding of relationship, of being on the “inside.” This is reflected in her use of the possessive pronoun “their.” The little dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the table of “their” masters. The woman argues that there is some kind of relationship, even if it is that of subordination. There cannot be masters without those who are subjugated. Jesus is awakened by the woman’s soft persistent resistance. He is amazed by her faith and says to her: “O woman, great is your faith. Let it be for you as you wish.” The text says that her daughter was healed from that very hour.

GLOSSARY

<i>exerkomai</i>	(Greek); “to go out, or to come out;” used in the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:21
<i>kunariois</i>	(Greek); “little dogs;” used in the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:26
<i>proserkomai</i>	(Greek); “to approach;” used in the story of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:12 in reference to the disciples

SessionTwo

Call

THEME

All baptized Christians are called into ministry. No exceptions.

INVITATION

By our baptism, we are all called into ministry in the name of Jesus Christ. The invitation is always present. How do we respond? Will we risk following the call, even without the affirmation of the community? How does the story of the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John invite us to hear Christ's call in our life—and give us courage to answer “yes” with our lives?

SCRIPTURE READING

John 4:1-42; Acts 2:42-47

BIBLICAL STUDY³

All are called into ministry. A striking example is that of the Samaritan woman who risked following the call, even without the affirmation of her community. Through a transforming conversation, she and Jesus challenged the boundaries of racism, tribalism (*cultural or ethnic identity that separates oneself as a member of one group from the members of another*), and gender discrimination.

The story begins with Jesus coming to Sychar, a Samaritan city, and sitting by the well at noon (John 4:1-6). A Samaritan woman comes to draw water, and she and Jesus have a conversation (John 4:7-15).

As a Sanga⁴ woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I would ask a question. What was wrong with the woman who made her go to the well at noon? You see, in my village, as in most villages of the Congo, women do not go to the well at noon. Every woman tries to accomplish this task early in the morning, at the first call of a rooster, for several reasons.

First, in the morning the well is full; it is easier to draw the water since you do not have to bend down so far to reach it or work so hard to pull it up. Second, the earlier you go to the well, the better chance there is that you can draw clear and clean water. You can even tell about what time you were there in the morning by looking at the color of the water

³ Biblical Study material is written by Rev. Kabamba Kiboko and gives reference to her life as an African woman from the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

⁴ Sanga is an ethnic group of Southern Congo in Central Africa.

you offer a person to drink. Finally, the most important reason for going early to the well is that in the morning women get a chance to socialize as they walk there.

So, with this cultural background, a Sanga woman would rightly wonder, “Why would a woman go to the well at noon and why would a man be at the well at noon?” A conversation takes place between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (v. 7-15). First, Jesus asks her for a drink of water, and she replies, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a Samaritan woman?” Her reaction speaks not only of the antagonism that we know existed at that time between Jews and Samaritans, but also reveals the tension between men and women. She knows that by initiating a dialogue with her, Jesus has already violated both the prevailing gender norms (men-women) and the religious-ethnic barriers (Samaritan-Jew) of that time and place.⁵

Jesus continues the conversation: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked *him*, and he would have given you *living water*”(v. 10). But the woman wonders how Jesus would get such water, even if she had asked him for it, since he has no bucket and the well is deep.

The Samaritan woman continues to question Jesus, perhaps—we can imagine—in a challenging tone, asking whether he is “greater than our father Jacob who gave us the well?” Jesus again differentiates the water he gives from the water in Jacob’s well. “All who drink from the well will thirst again,” he says; but the living water he offers becomes “the spring of water welling up to eternal life” (v. 14). This first part of the story closes with the woman’s request: “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v. 15). The woman accepts the truth Jesus tells.

Now, Jesus continues identifying the woman by asking her to go and bring back her husband. The woman replies that she has no husband. Jesus agrees with her that she has no husband, and adds that she has had five husbands, and now she is with a man who really is not her husband (v. 18). Now we see (from a Sanga perspective) why the woman went to the well at noon: Her low status as an unmarried woman caused her to withdraw from the community life. She cannot participate in the social interactions that other women enjoy as they walk together to the well in the early mornings. An outcast from her village, the Samaritan woman has come alone to the well at noon, when the water is of poorer quality.

The Samaritan woman is now convinced that Jesus must be a prophet. Otherwise, how could he know such things about her? He must also be a prophet because there is nothing in him that resembles the six men that she has known thus far. This man looks at her with respect and dignity. He even asks her for water to drink. This must be a prophet!

As the dialogue continues, it becomes clear that, in a real sense, Jesus is a prophet. He presents to the woman a different way to worship, “neither in Jerusalem, nor on this mountain,” (v. 21) “but in spirit and truth” (v. 23). He says further, “God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth” (v. 24). The woman does not disagree, but she suggests that such things would be cleared up by the coming Messiah,

5 Ronald R. Youngblood, ed., “Samaritans” in *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. (Nashville, Tenn: Nelson, 1995), pp 1119–20.

who would reveal everything—a belief Samaritans shared with the Jews. And Jesus responded, “I am he” (v. 26).

In this second part of the story, Jesus reveals himself to the woman. Now the woman carries with her a message that only she has. She is entrusted with a message that even Jesus’ disciples do not have or understand (v. 31-38). The Samaritan woman moves from a feeling of shame, despair and embarrassment about her lifestyle to a life full of hope and courage.

With the living water within her, the Samaritan woman now responds by leaving behind her water jar and going to the city to tell the people, “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” (v. 29). People come out of the city to see Jesus (v. 30). This woman who is rejected and outcast in her society becomes the first Christian missionary, first evangelist, first preacher; she preached to reach. She reached men and women and brought them to Jesus.

Something about her must have changed during the conversation with Jesus. She is now able to go and face all those men and women who despised her with the good news of one “who told me all that I ever did.” Upon her preaching, they leave the city and go with her to Jesus (v. 30). They hear him and ask him to stay for two more days (v. 40). This story could well be referred to as “The Acts of the Samaritan Woman” in the same way we have the Acts of the Apostles, which is marked with Peter’s preaching. The narrator reports that many more believed because of Jesus’ own word (v. 41). The narrator also reports that the people say to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” Here the people admit the truthfulness of her testimony; they now have also heard it from Jesus himself and they know now that her preaching has been truthful. He is the Savior of the World.

The Samaritan woman’s call into preaching ministry teaches us that the call starts with an encounter with Jesus. During the encounter, a conversation takes place. During the conversation, conversion happens; and as a result, one cannot resist the call, but has to share and invite others to encounter Jesus.

The narrative seems to be missing some pages. For some reason nothing is said about the part where the Samaritan woman came back to the well and picked up her jar. After all, she still had to drink water and to cook. We keep on with our everyday life even when we are in the midst of a life-changing spiritual experience!

REFLECTION WITH THE SCRIPTURE

Imagine being the Samaritan woman, standing at the well in conversation with Jesus. What do you hear? What do you say? Does it matter that you are a male or a female, a Jew or a Samaritan? How have you heard the “call” within your own life?

The writing says that we first have an encounter with Jesus, then a conversation, followed by conversion, and finally a willingness to share with others. How is our call based upon an encounter with Jesus rather than societal and cultural norms such as gender, race and ethnicity?

HISTORICAL

(Read Acts 2:42-47 for an understanding of Mary Bosanquet's reasons for living a life of service and community.)

Who is called to ministry? All Christians! By our baptism, each of us is commissioned to ministry—to proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ.⁶

Building upon biblical foundations, the organizer of the early Methodist movement, John Wesley, encouraged men and women, young and old, rich and poor to fulfill their baptisms and serve in Christian ministry. Wesley valued preparation, training and appropriateness of gifts. He did not exclude those without access to such resources. Instead, he provided resources and insisted upon the high expectations for heart and life.

Among the women encouraged by John Wesley within early Methodism was an affluent young woman from outside of London. Mary Bosanquet was willing to sacrifice her inheritance for the opportunity to affiliate with the Methodists.

“Can I do more for the souls or bodies of those about me?”⁷

Mary Bosanquet (1739–1815) emerged as one of Methodism's most influential figures because of her radical devotion to counter-cultural ideals such as singleness, simplicity and vocations of leadership for women. Bosanquet was born to an affluent Anglican family in Leytonstone, Essex. She was one of four children, the second of two girls. She often felt in conflict since her religious enthusiasm and devotion to the Methodists were not aligned with her parents' Anglican and socially affluent sensibilities. Although baptized and confirmed within the Church of England, among the Methodists, her experience of sanctification (*growing in relationship with God*) and pursuit of personal holiness led her to evangelistic ministry forming and nurturing Christian disciples among the poor and disenfranchised in intentional communities of faith.

Bosanquet recognized a Christian vocation in herself from a very young age. “From a child I have ever believed, God had appointed me for some work, in which I should be much blest if I was faithful.”⁸ This vocation included a clear call to simplicity of living within intentional Christian community caring for abandoned children and the sick and poor. “Often have I panted after an outward, as well as inward, conformity to the will of God; greatly desiring to live as the first Christians did, when all that believed were of one soul, and counted not any of the things they possessed their own.”⁹

As an adult, Mary Bosanquet would share a rich friendship with John Wesley, through which she often sought his counsel. He expressed strong support for her ministerial endeavors, which included a variety of roles within the Methodist movement including class leader, sick visitor, exhorter and preacher. Bosanquet's practices of sharing the

6 *The United Methodist Hymnal*, “Baptismal Covenant I” and “Baptismal Covenant II,” see pp. 35, 40.

7 Mary Bosanquet, “A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley by a Gentlewoman,” (London: 1764), 10. Bosanquet excerpts this line from a letter she wrote at the age of 17 describing herself.

8 Mary Bosanquet, “A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley by a Gentlewoman,” (London: 1764), 9.

9 *Ibid.*

Gospel were informed by Wesley's teachings and formed by her participation in these leadership roles within the Methodist movement.

Bosanquet shared in ministry with two other Methodist women, Sarah Ryan (1724–1768) and Sarah Crosby (1729–1804). Their ministry was profound for a number of reasons, including its

- outreach to the poor and disenfranchised,
- ordered life of this intentional community, and
- opportunity and cultivation of women's leadership.

Wesley maintained caution during the prior decade with regard to women's public speaking, offering Crosby discreet approval and detailed instructions to avoid the appearance of preaching and the possible incursion of severe opposition to the movement. Eventually, Wesley's position developed into one that allowed the occasional acceptance of preaching by a woman with an "extraordinary call."¹⁰

This openness from Wesley seems to rely, at least in part, on both the ministry and correspondence of Bosanquet. Her correspondence to Wesley during the summer of 1771 represents the first known serious defense of women's preaching in Methodism.¹¹ Bosanquet argued that Methodist women should be given the right to preach based upon the now familiar theological interpretation of I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14 that do not imply an exclusive prohibition on women speaking in church. These texts are directed at specific disciplinary practices, since I Corinthians 11, in which women are described as praying and prophesying, provides a contradiction.¹² (*Session Five looks at these Scripture passages.*) Wesley's response to Bosanquet's letter defended both her calling and the Methodist movement in general in a clear and definitive statement.¹³ In a letter to Bosanquet in November of the same year, Wesley underlined the impetus of their ministries: "What have we to do, but to make the best use of all our talents; and according to our power to glorify Him with our bodies and with our spirits?"¹⁴

Women across the centuries continue to look to Mary Bosanquet for inspiration as an example of one who challenged the norms by her call to Christian faithfulness.

REFLECTION ON THE HISTORICAL MOMENT

In our Methodist history, we note that women were called forth and supported by our founder, John Wesley. This was a daring adventure within the current culture, yet one that was supported by experience. The women who came before us chose to affiliate with the movement of Methodism, both piety and justice, rather than argue the belief systems.

¹⁰ Quoted in Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 142.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Sean Gill, *Women and the Church of England* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1994), 61 summarizes Bosanquet's argument.

¹³ Chilcote, *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, 143.

¹⁴ John Wesley, Letter to Mary Bosanquet (November 17, 1773), *Letters*, vol. XII of *The Works of John Wesley* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1986), 404.

- How do we, in our age and culture, listen to the call within women and empower one another for leadership?

The early Methodists saw the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42-47) as a model for living together and sharing in their resources. This way of life, this way to live in Christ, propelled them to live in intentional community and share the resources of everyone in the community.

- How do you join with others in Christian community (maybe within your congregation) and share the resources experienced in one another's call to serve?

GLOSSARY

<i>sanctification</i>	growing in relationship with God
<i>tribalism</i>	cultural or ethnic identity that separates oneself as a member of one group from the members of another

Session **Three**

Women's Identity

THEME

Too often women's identities are defined by confining social prescriptions and roles by the world, rather than by knowledge and acceptance of one's identity as a child of God for ministry in the world.

INVITATION

How do we, in the Christian tradition, understand and interpret the story of Eve? Our interpretation will influence our understanding of women's identity in our world today.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Genesis 1:26-3:24, Exodus 38:8

BIBLICAL STUDY

As the writers of this study were conversing about women's identity in society and the church, one of the clergywomen said, "One of my active, male parishioners said 'My world has changed and it is amazing and wonderful. As a teacher in the school district, I have a female principal, a female doctor and now a female pastor!' This was the mid-1980s and he was celebrating women's leadership and identity."

Another clergywoman shared a most recent story of a female parishioner who asked her, "It says in Genesis 3:16 that a man will rule over woman. Explain why you are a preacher." She briefly shared the interpretation and translation of the creation story, indicating also that the translator has the power to choose which word to use as translation moves from Hebrew to a different language (English in this case). The parishioner, in her new understandings, said, "No one has ever shared this with me. We need to help men and women understand their identity and their ministry."

What does the Bible say about women's identity? As Christians, and in a culture highly influenced by the Christian faith, the interpretation of the story of Eve (Genesis) has influenced the status and role of women in the church and in society. Eve has been translated, defined and assigned a role. Much scholarly work, translation and interpretation have surrounded the stories in Genesis 1-3, and although this session cannot highlight all of this work, it offers interpretations that invite us into dialogue about our understanding of Eve and women's identity.

GOD CREATED HUMAN BEING

(The words in italics are Hebrew. Please read the glossary at the end of this session for clarification.)

The first creation story is found in Genesis 1, which the final editor wrote around the sixth century and placed it in its current place to serve as an introduction to the first five books of the Bible. The “Adam and Eve” narratives (Genesis 1:26-3:24) reveal much about Eve. In Genesis 1:26, we read the following: “And God said, ‘Let us make *’adam* in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that creep on the earth.’” This being *’adam* is made in God’s image, according to God’s likeness. The Hebrew term *’adam*, which is the subject, is also to be understood as a collective being which comprises more than just one person.¹⁵ *Adam* is created in God’s image, “according to our (God’s) likeness.” This generic term *’adam* designates a being, a kind of being that is distinct from all the living things of the sea, air and earth. It refers to humanity collectively, or possibly a human being individually, regardless of whether the person is male and female.¹⁶ Biblical scholars such as Phyllis Trible and David J. A. Clines also hold that *’adam* is not gendered.¹⁷

Other scholars will translate this passage using *’adam* as a male name and, therefore, will interpret this passage as God creating a gender-specific being which is male. So there is an argument and tension in the Christian tradition as to how to interpret the Hebrew text. This is a very important discussion because how we interpret this text will determine how we live our beliefs in our church and ministry, and how we treat one another. More will follow on this interpretation after we continue to look at the Hebrew words of Genesis and the creation of human beings.

GOD CREATED MALE AND FEMALE

(See the glossary at the end of this session.)

The narrator proceeds to describe God’s creative activity: “God created *háadam* in his image, in the image of God, he created him; male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*) he created them” (v. 27). The term *háadam* is referred to as “him” (masculine singular personal pronoun). Even though the term is gendered, it does not specifically designate a male or

15 Similarly, Christian translators understand and translate the Hebrew term *elohim* (which is in plural) as God, not as Gods or gods, but as a singular God. They understand God as a collective and inclusive Deity. As a result, they understand and explain the phrase “...in our image, according to our likeness...” in terms of the Trinity: “God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” even though the Hebrew text does not lend itself to this reading. If “God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” are three persons in one God, the collective *’adam* includes more than one person.

16 This is beautifully expressed in the Sanga or Swahili languages spoken in the Southern Congo. The term *’adam* is translated as *muntu*. *Muntu* is a gender-neutral term that refers to either male or female. Unfortunately, this is not the case with Hebrew, which is not a gender-neutral language, as is the case with many African languages.

17 David J. A. Clines, “*adam* The Hebrew for ‘Human, Humanity’: Response to James Barr,” *Vetus Testamentum* 3(2003): 297–310.

female.¹⁸ Some scholars refer to this creature as an androgynous substance/entity that God then separates into two human beings, male and female. The two terms, male (*zakar*) and female (*neqebah*), are the first gender-specific terms used, and they express biological qualities of male and female.¹⁹

In summary, according to Genesis 1:26-27, *'adam* is to be understood as including more than just one human being. The collective *'adam* was made in God's image. As already mentioned, God created humans male and female, and gave them responsibility to rule over non-human creatures. Both men and women have the authority and responsibility over God's creation (1:26, 28) and also share not only God's power, but also God's life.²⁰ As men and women, we are both parts of the generic *adam*.

GOD CREATES COMPANIONSHIP—GENESIS 2

(See the glossary at the end of this session.)

The second version of the creation story, Genesis 2, continues this same focus on the creation and nature of human beings. In Genesis 2:7, we read, "The LORD God formed *háadam* from the dust of *háadamah* 'the ground' and breathed into its nostrils the breath of life; and it became a living being." Again, this creature (*háadam*) is non-gendered until God's second creative activity in the formation of human beings (male and female) (2:15ff).

We learn that the LORD God takes *háadam* and places this being in the Garden of Eden to work it and to watch over it (v. 15). Then the LORD God sees *háadam* as standing in need of a companion. "It is not good that *háadam* should be alone; I will make this being a *ezer* 'helper' corresponding to it" (v. 18), says the LORD God. God's creation is incomplete without *ezer* "helper."

The term *ezer* occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. Four occurrences refer to military help and in 17 instances, God is the *ezer*. Nowhere in the Bible is this term *ezer* used to mean weaker or inferior. The translator's choice of the word "helper" (or "musaidizi" in Swahili, "aide" in French), implies and underlines female subordination rather than reflecting the earlier verse which indicates that both male and female are partners—articulated in the phrase "they will rule" in Genesis 1:26.

The LORD God causes a deep sleep to fall upon *háadam* and the being sleeps. While *háadam* is sleeping, the LORD God takes one of its ribs and closes up its place with flesh (v. 21). Now the Hebrew words change and this change is significant, indicating "man's and woman's interdependence." God builds *ishshah* "a woman" (v. 22).

18 Contra James Barr who maintains that *'adam* refers to an individual male and, when used collectively, that it refers to a group of males and may include women. See his "One Man, or All Humanity?" Cited by David Clines. Ibid.

19 Ilona N. Rashkow would agree with this reading. See her *Upon the Dark Places: Anti-Semitism and Sexism in English Renaissance Biblical Translation* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 80–96.

20 Nowell, 132.

Háadam's reaction is one of wonder: "This, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called *'ishshah* 'woman,' for from *'ish* 'man' this was taken" (v. 23). This beautiful word play on *'ish* does not imply that the woman is created as a subordinate being to be marginalized. Instead, the man makes a declaration of solidarity and interdependence. The man doesn't use the generic term *'adam* from *háadam* that expresses his closeness to the ground. Rather, he uses terms that express his closeness, as well as the resemblance and likeness in nature, to *'ishshah* "woman."

In these verses, we hear relationship and not subordination. Through mistranslation, however, woman has been interpreted as inferior, sinful and temptress. This type of translation violates women. The Hebrew text actually offers an understanding of partnership and companionship, even of unity.

REFLECTION WITH THE SCRIPTURE

The two creation stories (Genesis 2 and 3) have been and continue to be used as proof texts²¹ to demonstrate not only the inherent sinful nature of humans, but also the inferiority of women. For example, they have been used to justify why women should not be in church leadership positions.

- What identity does the female have in Genesis 1:26-27? Considering what you know now through this word study, is there any hint of male supremacy or female inferiority? Explain.
- How do you see the divine image within you and how can you use it to help bring transformation in your house, community, church?
- Genesis 1:26 is commonly used to demonstrate that a man was created first. Is this supported by this particular text?

(If you have time and interest in further Biblical study, please see page 20.)

HISTORICAL

Too often women's identities are defined by confining social prescriptions and roles by the world, rather than by knowledge and acceptance of one's identity as a child of God for ministry to the world.

One of the most influential women of her time and one of the few women honored in the U.S. Capitol's Statuary Hall,²² Frances E. Willard (1839–1898) was a committed member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Willard's Christian faith, informed by the Wesleyan theme of holiness, grounded her roles as educator and reformer.

²¹ To "proof text" means to take Scripture out of context to prove a point.

²² Nancy A. Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 2.

Invited to serve as the president of the newly founded Evanston College for Ladies in 1871, Willard was the first woman in America to confer a college degree.²³ But it was her work with the NWCTU²⁴ (National Women's Christian Temperance Union) that reflected her greatest influence. Elected president of the NWCTU in 1879, Willard served in that role, challenging and leading the organization to fight the ill effects of alcohol, until her death almost two decades later.

Willard struggled throughout her faith journey often lacking assurance of her salvation. This struggle led her to actively seek such assurance through “doing good,” resulting in her focus on education and reform. Willard's international travels informed her desire to do good. During her travels, she witnessed the relationship of educational opportunities and economic resources (or lack thereof) to women's oppression.

Blocked from leadership as a woman in the academy and frustrated by a seemingly unanswerable call to ordained ministry, Willard channeled her Christian vocation of doing good into the trajectory of the NWCTU. Within the NWCTU, Willard engaged in and facilitated women's evangelistic ministries, implementing church ideas in the programs of the NWCTU.

In her text *Woman and the Pulpit*, Willard argued for the ordination of women. She suggested that if the current disenfranchisement persisted, women should consider ordaining themselves, effectively proposing a woman's church. Willard's proposal did not materialize, as some had feared and others hoped. There was not a massive exodus of female church members from mainline Protestant and evangelical denominations.

However, the NWCTU did provide women who had a Christian calling to preaching and other ministry roles with ministry training and practice. Through the NWCTU, Willard encouraged the reclaiming of the church's mission to train women in leadership and thereby brought recognition of women's ministry roles.

REFLECTION ON THE HISTORICAL MOMENT

Throughout the Methodist movement, there have been opportunities for women to be empowered in their call, to be mentored and to serve in leadership roles. Some of these have included the current and predecessor organizations of United Methodist Women and the Deaconess movement. Many women have discovered their unique gifts for leadership outside of the church, yet within the society. (For Frances Willard, this was through NWCTU.)

23 Ibid., 4–5. Carolyn Gifford, ed., *Writing Out My Heart: Selections from the Journal of Frances E. Willard, 1855–96* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 6. Frances Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 198–225. For a discussion of Willard's vocation to ministry, leadership of the NWCTU and encouragement of women's evangelistic ministry, see Lacey Warner, *Saving Women: Retrieving Evangelistic Theology and Practice* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

24 National Woman's Christian Temperance Union Mission Statement: The purpose of the NWCTU is to educate all peoples, with the help of God, to choose total abstinence from alcohol, illegal drugs and tobacco, as a way of life.

- If you are a woman in the church, how have you been encouraged to grow in your leadership, claiming your identity as a child of God, rather than by the confining social prescriptions and roles of the world?
- If you are a man in the church, how have you experienced women's identity as a beloved daughter of God, rather than be prescribed roles of society? How have you acted for the partnership of men and women in the call of Christ?

REMINDER NOTES

Students: You will need to save this lesson for the Old Testament Biblical references as you read and study Session Five.

FURTHER BIBLICAL STUDY

Two Different Scholarly Views

There are two scholarly views: the androcentric and the gynocentric.

- The androcentric interpretation maintains that *háadam* is a male being and champions the superiority of man over woman.
- The gynocentric interpretation contends that this *háadam* is not gendered; it is an “androgynous substance.”²⁵ This interpretation advocates an egalitarian (equal rights for all) position.²⁶ At times, it asserts woman's superiority to man.

From a Sanga²⁷ perspective, I see interconnectedness and interdependence in the creation activity of God. (The Sanga language has gender neutral language.) It takes two wings for a bird to fly; one wing is not superior to the other. The structure of Genesis 1-2 demonstrates this interconnected interdependence. Yet, a mystery remains that even the narrator fails to describe: What is the manner in which the three—*háadam*, *zakar* and *neqebah* (1:27) or *háadam*, *ʿishshah* and *ʿish* (3:23)—are related?

25 See Phyllis Tribble and David J. A. Clines. Phyllis Tribble also maintains that *háadam* “signifies a sexually undifferentiated creature: neither male (nor female) nor a combination of the two.” See her article “Not a Jot, Not a Title: Genesis 2-3 after Twenty Years,” in *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender* (ed. Kristen E. Kvan, Linda Scheearing and Valerie H. Zeigler; Bloomington: Indiana University, 1999), 439. David J. A. Clines, a biblical scholar, also holds that *ʿadam* is not gendered. See his article, “adam, The Hebrew for ‘Human, Humanity’”: Response to James Barr,” *Vetus Testamentum* 3(2003): 298.

26 Phyllis Tribble examines the structure of Genesis 1 and 2 and concludes, “In the Hebrew literature the central concerns of a unit often appears at the beginning and the end in an inclusion device. Genesis 2 evinces this structure. The creation of man first and woman last constitutes a ring composition whereby the two creatures are parallel.” See her “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (ed. Judith Plaskow and Carol P. Christ; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 75.

27 Sanga is an ethnic group of the Southern Congo in Central Africa.

The Fall

During their morning or evening walk, the man and woman run into a serpent who asks the woman if God had allowed them to eat from all the trees of the garden (3:1). The woman stands up to the serpent, who has twisted God's message by insinuating, in a form of a question, that God has kept them from eating of any tree in the garden (v. 1). She replies, "No, we may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch, lest you die'" (v. 3). No way, says the serpent, "You will not die" (v. 4) and "*elohim* 'God,' in fact, knows that the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened." And guess what? "You will be like *elohim* 'God' knowing good and evil" (v. 5). The woman helps herself to the fruit and shares with her husband, who was with her, (v. 6), although he says not a word.

This second creation story is full of ambiguity because the term *háadamah* or *'adam* is used at times as if it were the man's name. This reading deviates from the original meaning of the term as a generic non-gendered term. In God's pronouncement also, the text sounds as if the woman were alone when being tempted by the serpent. The man does not say that the serpent tempted him; he states that the woman whom God gave him caused this trouble in the garden. However, the ambiguity in the use of terms is dissipated in the concluding remark and decision in Genesis 3:22, where the LORD God says that *háadam*, the original creature, becomes "like us." Here Adam and Eve not only breathe the divine breath that was breathed into their original *háadam*; they also share in death because they are dust and will return to *háadamah*. It is fair to conclude that both man and woman hear the serpent's speech. They both enjoy the fruit and both share in the consequences of their actions. They are both expelled from the garden; however, they continue to carry on divine responsibility even through the struggle that marks the rest of their lives and all human life.²⁸

The Naming of Eve

The name "Eve" was given to the woman by her husband because "she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20).

After God's pronouncement, the narrator informs the reader that "*'adam* named his wife *havah*." The Hebrew word used here means "life." The name has traditionally been translated as "Eve" in English and French, and "Eva" in Sanga, while the Swahili keeps the Hebrew sound *Hawa*. The Hebrew word used for Eve sounds like the word for "life." The woman is named *havah* because "she is the mother of all living" (v. 20).

Genesis 3:16 is another passage that has been used to prove the inferiority of woman. It reads, "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pain and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children, and to your husband will be your longing, and he shall *mashal* 'rule' over you."²⁹ The Hebrew word *śśabôn*, here translated "pain," is the same

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Carol Meyers translates this verse as follows: Meyers maintains, the phrase "...your 'pangs' in childbearing" should read "...your work and your *heronek* 'pregnancies.'" See, "Eve," in *Women in Scripture*, 81. Some feminist biblical scholars interpret the "male rule over the woman" as a rule related to sexuality.

word used in God's statement to the man, "...in your *'s,abôn*, you shall eat of it all the days of your life" (3:17). God will multiply the already existing *'s,abôn* in both man AND woman. We read in Genesis 3:15-16 that the woman's desire will be for her *ish* "husband," and he will rule over her (v. 16). This passage has been used as a proof text to demonstrate male superiority over female. For listening to the voice of the wife, God curses *háadamah*, "the ground" (v. 17), out of which *'adam* was taken. To *háadamah* "the ground" *'adam* will return (v. 19). The woman's longing or desire will be to her husband. He will *mashal* "rule" over woman.

Note that this Hebrew verb *mashal* does not share the same root as *radah* used in Genesis 1:26 where it denotes "rule" or "dominion," which both male and female are mandated to have over the fish, fowl, cattle, and all over the earth, and over every creeping thing. When it comes to humankind, man does not *radah* over woman; he *mashal* over her instead.

This term *mashal* occurs two more times in the creation story, Genesis 1:18, where God creates two great luminaries: they both rule—the greater to (*mashal*) "rule" the day and the lesser to (*mashal*) "rule" the night. Reading the Hebrew verb *mashal* within its direct specific context of Genesis 1-3, what is the nature of *mashal* "to rule"? What does it mean to say that the sun or the moon "(*mashal*) 'rule' over the day and over the night"? (Genesis 1:18). The earth longs for light. Does it make the light superior to the earth? Woman's longing will be to her husband like earth's desire for light will be to the sun and the moon. For her to conceive, she will need her husband. Man will *mashal* over woman.³⁰ Does this make her inferior?

REFLECTION WITH THE SCRIPTURE ON FURTHER BIBLICAL STUDY

- Regarding the two views on gender and non-gender, androcentric and gynocentric view, what do you make of this?
- Reread Genesis 3 paying close attention to the word "rule" (*mashal*). How does the creation story in which the light (sun) rules (*mashal*) over day and the light (moon) rules (*mashal*) over the night, bring new understandings to the ways in which men and women need one another and relate to one another?
- Reflect now on woman's responsibility in childbearing (Genesis 3:16). Is there any indication in the text that childbearing is a curse? Is victory possible without childbearing? Do you draw any connection between Genesis 3:15 and 1 Corinthians 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive"? Explain.

³⁰ Here we see the power of the translator in his choice of words. *Mashal* should not be understood as male's domination over woman.

GLOSSARY

<i>ʿadam</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 1:26) generic, non-gendered term which designates a being, distinct from all the living things of the sea, air and earth; refers to humanity collectively, or possibly a human being individually regardless of whether the person is male and female; as men and women, we are both parts of the generic <i>ʿadam</i>
<i>androcentric</i>	believes in the superiority of man over woman
<i>elohim</i>	(Hebrew); God
<i>ezer</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:18); helper, not in the implication of subordination, but rather of partnership
<i>gynocentric</i>	believes in an egalitarian (equal rights for all) position; sometimes asserts woman's superiority over man
<i>hāadam</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 1:27): genderless; due to some translations, <i>hāadam</i> is used as a name (Adam) and is translated as a man. In this passage, this word is referred to as "him;" though it is masculine, it does not specifically designate a male or female. This is the entity that God then separates into two human beings, male and female.
<i>hāadamah</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:7); ground
<i>ḥavah</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 3:20); means "life;" usually translated as Eve in English; the woman is named <i>ḥavah</i> because "she is the mother of all living" (v. 20)
<i>ʿish</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:23); man; word reflects a closeness and resemblance to woman and not a domination
<i>ʿishshah</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:23); woman; words reflects a closeness and resemblance to man and not to subordination or marginalization from man
<i>mashal</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 3:16); to "rule;" not the same word used earlier in Genesis 1:26 with the connotation of dominion
<i>neqebah</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 1:27); female; first gender-specific term used that express biological quality of being female
<i>proof text</i>	to remove Scripture from its context in order to prove a point
<i>ṣṣabôn</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 3:17); "pain"
<i>zakar</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 1:27); male; the first gender-specific term used and expresses the biological quality of being male

Session**Four**

Inquiry ↔ Faithfulness/Knowing

THEME

Women, like men, come to their commitments to live their vocation sometimes through faith and sometimes through inquiry. The two are related; they dance together in our life in ministry with Christ.

INVITATION

Are there moments when you have been challenged to go deeper into faith and action, to live more intently this call of God in your life? We celebrate the women who call down through history and into contemporary life, “Come! Live your calling—not based on gender, class, culture, race, etc.—but on your baptism as a child of God!”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

See “Biblical Women” in this session.

INTRODUCTION

In the Biblical story, and throughout history, women have heard the call to minister. This calling has come through experiences in solitude or in community, worship and preaching and prayer, in a split-second moment or over a period of time, and in various experiences of God. Listening deeply to the call, they have set out in faithfulness, with a deep knowing.

This faithfulness has brought them to inquiry; a desire to study more intently the Biblical texts, the theology of our ancestors, the critical thinking of contemporary life. Sometimes faithfulness leads to inquiry.

Yet, inquiry also leads to faithfulness and a deep sense of knowing. Through study of texts, through questioning within a trusting community, through dialogue with contemporary life, there is a deeper call to faithfulness. This faithfulness leads to commitments of ministry, of living out the vocation of our baptism.

Faithfulness leads to inquiry and inquiry leads to faithfulness. The *2004 Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, in the “Theological Task” (§104) invites us to be both critical and constructive as we live in faithfulness.

“It [our theological task] is *critical* in that we test various expressions of faith by asking: Are they true? Appropriate? Clear? Cogent? Credible? Are they based on love? Do they provide the church and its members with a witness that is faithful to the gospel as reflected in our living heritage and authentic and convincing in the light of human experience and the present state of human knowledge?”

Our theological task is *constructive* in that every generation must creatively appropriate the wisdom of the past and seek God in their midst in order to think afresh about God, revelation, sin, redemption, worship, the church, freedom, justice, moral responsibility and other significant theological concerns.”

As Christians, with a firm foundation in Christ, and living in a changing world, we must engage in critical thought and faithfulness. The two are woven together within the life of our vocation. Since many women have lived in societies that named women as inferior to men, women have chosen to follow the Gospel, to live the life of Jesus, to move in the direction of faithfulness—not based on societal rules of gender, class, culture, race, etc.—but on their baptism in Christ as a child of God.

Throughout history, women have listened deeply to the call to be faithful to God. Their risk-taking, courage, strength in the midst of differences, and integrity has given us stories that empower all of us to live the abundant life in God. Here are just a few of their stories, from the Bible, from history and from our contemporary period.

BIBLICAL WOMEN

Samson's Unnamed Mother (Judges 13:4-5)

- An angel of the LORD appeared to her and predicted her conception. The angel instructed her to refrain from wine, strong drink and unclean food. God needed Samson. Through a woman, God had Samson.

Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11, 22)

- A woman of prayer. She made a conditional vow to the LORD followed with a promise. Her prayer was answered and Samuel was born. Hannah dedicated him as a Nazirite to the LORD's service. She fulfilled her promise. Through a woman, God had prophet Samuel.

The Servant Girl (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18)

- She identified Peter as one of Jesus' disciples. Peter denied it. The servant girl set the stage with her challenge, and two other challenges followed, and three times, Peter denied Jesus. The woman's challenge to Peter was divinely destined.

Deborah (Judges 4-5)

- The fifth judge of Israel, a prophetess and the only female judge of Israel. Deborah was so powerful and successful that Barak, the general, refused to go into battle without her. She prophesied that victory will certainly happen through a woman, not through Barak. And it happened that it was by a woman, Jael, that Sisera was killed.

Rahab (Joshua 2)

- Rahab hid two Hebrew spies; became an ancestor of David and Jesus. She is remembered not for her prostitution but for her bravery and for trusting God.

Jezebel (1 Kings 18)

- Wife of Ahab, king of Israel (871–852 BCE) and daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Sidon. She is portrayed as strong-willed, domineering and quick to criticize, eager to take charge, slow to relinquish control, sharp-tongued, stubborn, impatient and

unwilling to own her mistakes. How can the positive aspects of a more aggressive personality be used for the cause of Christ as effectively as Jezebel used them for the cause of Baal?

Wife of Pilate (Matthew 27:19)

- A gentile woman who received God's revelation through a dream. Unlike Joseph and the gentile magi whose words are heard, Pilate's wife is heard indirectly through a male messenger. God uses both male and female regardless of their race or gender.

The Sinful Woman (Luke 7)

- Referred to as "the sinful woman," "the woman who anointed Jesus," or "the woman with the alabaster jar." She poured out her whole self. With her tears and the most precious oil she had in her alabaster box, she interrupted a men's dinner party, and washed and anointed Jesus' feet. Her acts are an expression of worship—beautifully articulated by Grammy Award winner, CeCe Winans, "You do not know the cost of the oil in my alabaster box."³¹

Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11)

- Bathsheba's words, thoughts and emotions are not recorded; only David's side of the story is heard. King David committed adultery with her. Did Bathsheba have an option to refuse King David's invitation? What does this story show you about the nature of power and abuse of power, then and now?

Woman with a Twelve-Year Hemorrhage (Mark 5:25-34)

- Instead of being referred to by her name, this woman is known by her disease. She approached Jesus from behind and by faith stretched out her hand expecting a miracle: a life-changing experience happened on the spot. Her action is a demonstration of her unshakable faith.

HISTORICAL WOMEN

See "Addendum One: Historical Timeline" for a more complete resource.

Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (1739–1815)

- Risked her family's support to nurture, preach and lead among the early Methodists in a context with no place for single women. (*See Session Two for more of her story.*)

Julia Foote (1823–1900)

- Risked her life and dignity to travel itinerantly as an African American woman in the 19th century to preach the gospel, which included advocating for women's ecclesiastic rights and racial reconciliation.

Anna Snowden Oliver

- Risked starvation to pursue her vocation to ordained ministry and theological education at Boston University and became the first woman graduate. Oliver was

31 "Alabaster Box," from CD *Alabaster Box*, by CeCe Winans, released 1999.

denied ordination in 1880. When she approached the bishop to inquire about next steps, Bishop Andrews said there was nothing to do but to get out of the Church.

Amanda Berry Smith (1837–1915)

- Born as a slave and the oldest of 13 children; risked embarrassment and safety to travel through Europe, Asia and Africa preaching and singing the gospel.

Lucy Rider Meyer (1849–1922)

- Became a physician when most medical schools barred their doors to women; revived the Deaconess movement; risked the disapproval of her denomination to provide training and ministry opportunities for women.

Frances Willard (1839–1898)

- Risked national criticism to advocate for not only for woman's suffrage, but also the opportunity for women to receive training and use their talents in ministry to the world; elected by her Conference as a lay delegate to the General Conference in 1888, but was denied a seat due to her gender. (*See Session Three for more of her story.*)

Belle Harris Bennett (1852–1922)

- Risked the disapproval of her denomination to encourage ministry opportunities for women as well as partnership between races in the south; energetic efforts brought about the granting of full lay status to women in the Southern Methodist Church; co-founded a school for training young women missionaries.

Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955)

- Risked impoverishment to start a school initially for young African American girls to educate, encourage and empower them for leadership and ministry in the world; served as an advisor to several American presidents and a champion for racial equality.

Georgia Harkness (1891–1974)

- Risked her career in theological education to advocate for woman's ecclesiastic rights including ordination. She was a pioneer in the 20th century as the first woman to teach in a mainline Protestant seminary in the United States, and as a social justice advocate in positions that were bold and prophetic. At the 1956 General Conference, when women received full rights (as clergy), she was recognized as a person who was faithful in bringing about the ordination of women. Yet, she was also "among the first theologians to interpret ministry as the calling for *all* God's people, not just of the ordained." (Keller, *Georgia Harkness*)

Marjorie Swank Matthews (1916–1986)

- Ordained elder in The United Methodist Church at the age of 49, she was the first woman to be elected a bishop in any denomination of Christianity; served as bishop in Wisconsin from 1980–84.

CONTEMPORARY WOMEN

Leontine T. C. Kelly

- Risked ridicule and failure to be elected the first African American female bishop by the United Methodist Church (1984).

Minerva Carcaño

- The first female Hispanic district superintendent (1986–1992) and the first female Hispanic bishop (elected 2004); speaks with boldness of her Christian faith as an immigrant and as a woman, and lifts her voice for many of the voiceless in our society and church.

Nobuko Miyake Stoner

- Currently a clergy member in the UMC, was the first Japanese-American woman to serve as a district superintendent, overcoming the obstacles of being the only Christian in her native family, and a woman called to Christian ministry.

Liatu Kane

- The first woman ordained in The United Methodist Church in Nigeria (mid-1990s), overcoming the struggles and tension of her culture and church regarding women in leadership, while at the same time raising a family.

Diana Eck

- A Montana-born, lifelong Methodist; has worked for years to open dialogue for common understanding among people of different faiths. She is the Harvard University professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies who is an “eloquent voice in the struggle for religious tolerance and understanding in American and around the globe.” She reminds us of our valuable global connections as she speaks of the need for common understanding between people of different faiths. (*GCSRW Bulletin Inserts, UMC, March, 2007*)

Jocelyn Elders

- The first black and first woman U.S. surgeon general (1990s), has always worked to change the way people think of health by putting prevention first. Growing up poor in the farming community of Schaal, Ark., she has been in the U.S. Army, the medical field and politics to fight for children, teens, families, women and older adults. She says, “We all know that the health and wealth of a nation is directly related to the health and education of its women...” (*GCSRW Bulletin Inserts, UMC, March, 2007*)

Katya Lyzhina

- A 16-year-old from Sherwood, Ark., who seeks to make a difference in her community. “Katya, who attends First United Methodist Church, North Little Rock, Ark., founded Baggage Claim, an effort to collect new or gently used suitcases, backpacks and duffel bags for children in foster care in Arkansas. Katya gives the donated bags to the state Department of Human Services for distribution.” Many times foster children can put everything they own in one suitcase—if they have one. Katya was adopted in 2000 when the young girl was living in Ekaterinburg, Russia. She was malnourished, had cerebral palsy, needed extensive surgery on her legs and back, and spoke no English. After numerous surgeries and adeptly learning English, Katya is healthy and happy and works hard to help others. (*Interpreter Magazine Online, UMC*)

LITANY FOR CELEBRATING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

See next three pages for the complete litany.

REFLECTING ON THE LITANY

The litany is a circle of witnesses, of our sisters who throughout the ages have been faithful to their call in the name of Christ. With whom do you identify? How has your story and her story been woven together in courage and risk? If you were to add your name to the litany, how would it read?

God Gives Gifts

[A modern-day litany, patterned after both Psalm 111, in acrostic form, and Psalm 136, with a common response; written by Delia Halverson]

An angel appeared to the **woman**, and she bore Samson. God needed Samson.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Because **Hannah** was a woman of prayer, she vowed a son to the Lord. God gave her Samuel.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Challenging his identity, the **servant girl** awakened Peter into ownership of his relationship with Christ.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Deborah's wisdom came from God, making her the fifth judge of Israel and a leader among the people.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Even with the history of prostitution, **Rahab** accepted God's gift of bravery and trusted God.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Faith made **the woman** well even though she had been hemorrhaging for twelve years.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

GratITUDE and love turned the **sinful woman** into one who worshiped Jesus. She expressed her awe by anointing his feet.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Helping the poor, nurturing and even preaching were natural gifts that **Mary Bosanquet Fletcher** exhibited.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Itinerant travel took the 19th century African American woman, **Julia Foote**, around the country advocating for women's ecclesiastic rights and racial reconciliation.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Justice and opportunity for young African American girls were more important than the risk of impoverishment for **Mary McLeod Bethune**.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Kinship and understanding among different faiths brought the Montana-born lifelong Methodist **Diana Eck** to her current position as professor at Harvard University.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Leontine T. C. Kelly risked ridicule and failure to be elected the first African American female bishop by The United Methodist Church.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Minerva Carcaño now serves as bishop in the Desert-Southwest Conference and speaks of her experience as an immigrant and as a woman, and is a voice for the voiceless.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

No other members of **Nobuko Miyake Stoner's** family were Christian. Yet she responded to God's call to become a clergy member of The United Methodist Church.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Opportunity for women was the theme of **Frances Willard** as she worked with woman's suffrage and risked national criticism.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Pursuing theological education at Boston University, **Anna Snowden Oliver** risked starvation to follow her calling to ordained ministry.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Questions of reason surrounded her as **Liatu Kane** struggled to raise a family and follow God's calling to become the first woman ordained in The United Methodist Church in Nigeria.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Risking the disapproval of her denomination, **Lucy Rider Meyer** provided training and ministry opportunities for women.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Safety was not an issue as **Amanda Berry Smith** traveled internationally preaching and singing the gospel.
God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Theological education gained when **Georgia Harkness** pioneered as the first woman to teach in a mainline Protestant seminary in the United States. She saw ministry as the calling for *all* God's people, not just the ordained.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

United States Surgeon General **Jocelyn Elders** fought for health for all people with special emphasis on prevention.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Vibrant and excited over her calling, 16-year-old **Katya Lyzhina** overcame malnutrition and cerebral palsy and founded "Baggage Claim," an effort to collect new and gently used suitcases, backpacks and duffel bags for children in foster care.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Wife of Pilate, this gentile woman received God's revelation through a dream.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

X-rated behavior by King David toward **Bathsheba** was displeasing to God. However, God used Bathsheba to raise up Solomon, the next leader of the Hebrews.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Young women of today are eager to follow God's call into ministry.

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

Zeal describes the manner in which our **foremothers** gave back to God. How does our zeal inspire **women of today** to follow God's vocation into lay and ordained ministry?

God gives us gifts; we give back to God.

What of my gifts can I give?

SessionFive

Brokenness-Wholeness

THEME

To affirm the leadership of women, particularly ordination, as an example of the church's trustworthiness

INVITATION

The United Methodist Church affirms the full participation of women, including ordination, through our Biblical and historical understandings. Yet, there are tensions within the Biblical text. Is there any way to find wholeness in the Biblical texts about the role and identity of women?

SCRIPTURE READINGS

1 Corinthians 11:7-12, 14:20-25, 14:33a-35; 1 Timothy 2:11b-15; Galatians 3:28

BIBLICAL

When the Southern Congo Annual Conference ordained its first clergywoman in 1983, tensions emerged and resulted in a formation of two opposing groups. One supported the idea of a divinely sanctioned male superiority over females, believing that it was established at the time of creation, at the beginning of the human race. Supporters of this view quoted Genesis 2 and 3 along with 1 Corinthians 11:7-12 and 14:33a-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11b-15. The other group supported the idea of male and female equality, believing that they were of equal worth and created to be interdependent. Just as no bird can fly with one wing, no church can be whole without both male and female—the two wings—in leadership positions, they maintained. Those holding this view quoted Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This tension and disagreement is lived out in Christian churches today, including The United Methodist Church. Let us examine both views of these texts from a literary perspective, hoping to find wholeness in the midst of brokenness.

Genesis 1-3

(See Session Three in this study. Session Three gives a review of the Biblical texts regarding the creation of human beings and the role of Eve. The New Testament texts, referred to in this session, point back to the Genesis passages in order to make their argument.)

I Corinthians 11:2-16

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you.

Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head.

In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice—nor do the churches of God. (NIV)

Keep in mind that these texts, 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:20-25, 33a-35, and 1 Timothy 2:11b-15, from the writings attributed to Paul, deal with the status and role of women in the church of his time. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, Paul speaks of both men and women praying and prophesying, making no distinction about one being more important than the other in the worship rituals. Women are mentioned as prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11:5, and that is merely a continuation of a tradition that stretches far back into the time of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament. (For example, there is the story of Deborah, in Judges 4:4.)

In this letter to the Corinthians, Paul's main issue was what he deemed improper according to the customs of the time—specifically, the symbolism of covering or not covering their heads during worship. In verses 14-15, he specifies that “nature” itself teaches that it is a “disgrace” for men to have long hair, but long hair on a woman he considered to be “her glory.”³² Yet from the beginning of time some men have had long hair. Paul speaks of his own opinions.

Some scholars have suggested that Paul was concerned about men and women dressing their hair in a manner that could lead to sexual ambiguity.³³ At any rate, Paul

32 This is a puzzling conclusion, with an unknown basis, since men of the Bible have long been portrayed with long hair throughout the Old and New Testament, and Christ himself is usually depicted as having long hair.

33 Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Sex and Logic in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980): 482–500 (especially 498).

certainly seemed to think it was very important for men and women to emphasize their differentness in this matter (v. 6), and he gave three theological reasons for this differentiation—reasons which he apparently based on his understanding of Genesis 1:26-27.

First, he believed that man is the image and reflection of God, while a woman is the reflection of man (v. 7). Second, “man did not come from woman, but woman from man” (v. 8); and third, man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man (v. 9). Paul, however, then concludes this reasoned reflection by affirming the interdependence between man and woman: “In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman;” and he accents this by saying, “but everything comes from God” (v. 11-12). Paul’s interdependent principles are underscored again in Galatians 3:28, when he asserts a Christian principle of equality that challenges racial, social and gender barriers. He declares: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

I Corinthians 14:20-25

Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults. In the Law it is written:

“Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me,” (Isaiah 28:11, Deuteronomy 28:49) says the Lord.

Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers. So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner, and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!” (NIV)

In the second text (1 Corinthians 14:20-25), Paul speaks of the whole church congregating in one place and prophesying among themselves, as believers (v. 23). Earlier in the same chapter, Paul described a prophet as one who uplifts, encourages and consoles the congregation (v. 4), and since he speaks of the whole church doing it, we could interpret that to mean that both men and women could step up and be leaders in these ways.

On the other hand, in 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36, Paul said, “women are to remain silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak but should be subordinate, as the law also says” (v. 34). “If they desire to know (or “learn”) [something], let them ask their husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church” (v. 35). This admonishment against women speaking in church could indicate that women had been not only prophesying in church, but also asking questions and making comments, and that Paul frowned on this. (One is usually not asked to be quiet unless one is speaking.)

1 Timothy 2:11-15

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (NIV)

In this last text (1 Timothy 2:11-15) that has been used to oppose women's leadership in the church, Paul directs that women are to remain silent (v. 11) and furthermore are neither to teach nor to have authority over men (v. 12). Paul surely maintained that a woman who teaches or who has authority over her husband violates the tradition about submission and he gave three theological reasons which he apparently based on his understanding of Genesis 3:15-16a.

First, he believed that "Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). Second, "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived" (v. 14a). Third, the woman became a transgressor (v. 14b). Paul then concludes his theological reflection by making a pronouncement about woman's salvation: "But women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." (NIV, v. 15).

Paul's understanding of Genesis 1-3 differs from the interpretation from the Hebrew (*see Session Three*) and challenges us to wrestle with the texts. How we interpret these texts will determine how we live our beliefs in our church and ministry, and how we treat one another.

REFLECTION WITH SCRIPTURE

Is there any way to find wholeness for women in the church as a whole in Paul's letters? Is there any way the wholeness we find in Christ can help us to reconcile Paul's teaching—regarding the role of women—with his role as divinely appointed apostle and missionary? Can we reconcile Paul's teachings with our understanding today of the teachings of Christ? If you and another Christian disagree about the meaning of these texts, can you find wholeness together in Christ, in spite of your disagreements over Paul's teachings about the role of women?

(If you have time and interest in further Biblical study, please continue reading below.)

FURTHER BIBLICAL STUDY

(Please see glossary at the end of this session.)

1 Timothy 2:11-15

There is an undisputable echo of the Yahwist creation account (Genesis 2, particularly verses 7, 21-22) in 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In this passage, the writer refers to Genesis 2 as proof text that supports the inferior status of women. This is clearly expressed in 1 Timothy 2:13-14 where the writer states the foundation for woman's subordination: 1) Adam was formed first, then Eve; 2) woman's link to the fall of humanity (transgressor

was a woman, not a man). As a result, according to this Biblical author, woman's redemption will be through giving birth to children.

This interpretive allusion is problematic for three reasons. First, Genesis 2 has no hierarchical connotation that the writer of 1 Timothy emphasizes. The fact that The LORD God formed *háadam* (masculine) from the dust of *háadamah* (feminine) "the ground" (2:7) does not make *háadam* inferior to the ground. Second, the writer of 1 Timothy fails to see that God's creation is incomplete without *ezer* "helper" corresponding to *háadam* (2:18). As mentioned in Session Three, the term *ezer* occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. Four occurrences refer to military help. In 17 instances, God is the *ezer*. Nowhere in the Bible is this term *ezer* used to mean weaker or inferior. Third and last, in 1 Timothy 2:14, "Also Adam was not deceived, but the woman...and became a transgressor." This sweeping claim seems unjustifiable. Adam had as much opportunity to refuse the fruit of the tree as did Eve.

This is an interpretation of Genesis 3:1-13. In this particular text, the woman assesses the situation and finds the tree good for food, pleasant in its appearance and desirable to make one prudent. As a result, she took the fruit, ate and gave some to "her husband with her and he ate" (3:6). Let us presuppose that the man astute enough to name every animal (2:19-23) could certainly think critically enough to evaluate and decide whether to eat the fruit or not. The writer of 1 Timothy 2:11-15, therefore, does not only distort the creation story, but also misrepresents both man and woman. His interpretation as expressed in verse 14 differs significantly from the narrator's and from the LORD God's understanding of culpability. The narrator reports that the eyes of both the man and woman were opened at the same time and they knew that they were naked (3:7) and the LORD God confronted both man and woman for their transgression. They each tried to acquit themselves before the LORD God and ended up in isolation from each other and from the Creator. Without discrimination, the LORD God pronounces a punitive statement on each of them.

According to the writer of 1 Timothy 2:15, woman will be saved through childbearing, "provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty." Verse 15a echoes Genesis 3:16b, "I will greatly increase your pain and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children..." In 1 Timothy 2:15, woman's salvation through childbearing is conditional. She has to remain in faith and love and holiness, with temperance. The writer of 1 Timothy 2 draws from Genesis 3:16b to address his specific situation such as teaching different doctrines (1 Timothy 1:3) which led to spreading myths and genealogies rather than faith (1:4), following deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (4:1), and prohibiting marriage and abstinence from foods (4:3). The writer of 1 Timothy is compelled to give instructions pertaining to home, children and marriage of widows (5:9-10, 13-16). Women gossiped a lot in each other's houses (5:13). As he addresses his current situation, the writer of 1 Timothy 2 draws on his interpretation of the creation story to make a point, namely, a woman's salvation will certainly come by the bearing of children, if she abides in faith, love, holiness and modesty.

1 Corinthians 11:7-9

The distorted interpretation of the creation story in 1 Timothy 2 echoes that found in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9. According to 1 Corinthians 11:7-9, man is the image and reflection of God; the woman, however, is the reflection of man, “man is not out from woman, but woman out from man. For man was not created on account of man, but woman on account of man.” These two verses misinterpret the creation story (as we saw in Session Three) and also stand in tension with 1 Corinthians 11:11-12 which highlights the interconnected interdependence between man and woman as well as all things in the Lord. It reads as follows: “Nevertheless, in the Lord neither woman is separable from man, nor man apart from woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; and all come from God” (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). These two verses, along with the egalitarian statement in Galatians 3:28, are consonant with the two-winged understanding of how church leadership ought to be, for “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

REFLECTION WITH THE SCRIPTURE IN FURTHER BIBLICAL STUDY

Is there coherency in the Scriptures?

Please reread 1 Corinthians 11:2-16. Scholars have observed that this particular text is incoherent. Walker maintains that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 is an insertion consisting of three initially distinct units each addressing a somehow different though related subject. Walker contends that none of these units is authentically Pauline.³⁴

- Do you experience such a lack of coherence as you read the text?
- Does it change your understanding of the textual evidence established in 1 Corinthians 11:5, which clearly states that the woman performs the same functions as the man in v. 4 (praying and prophesying)?
- Do you see any contradiction in this particular case?
- Now, reflect on Paul's remarks about men and women regarding improper head-covering.³⁵ Is this implying in any way that women should not hold leadership positions in the church at Corinth?

34 See William O. Walker, Jr. “1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Paul's Views Regarding Woman,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1975): 94–109.

35 Pseudo-Phocylides, a Hellenized Jew and Paul's contemporary, advises parents as follows: “If a child is a boy, do not let locks grow on his head. Braid not his crown nor make cross-knots on the top of his head. Long hair is not fit for men, but for voluptuous women... (v. 210-14). P.W. van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides with Introduction and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1978): 81–83.

Are men and women equal—what does this mean?

Paul gives three theological reasons for his prescription about head-covering. Please reflect on each of them. The first states that a man is the image and glory of God while a woman is the glory of man (1 Corinthians 11:7). The second is “man was not made from woman, but woman from man” (v. 8); and third, “man was not created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man” (v. 9).

- After you have discussed and reflected on Paul’s theological understanding of the Genesis traditions about the order of creation of man and woman, do you think that Paul was proving the inferiority of women to men?
- What do you think of Paul’s conclusion in verse 12 where he declared that “For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God”?
- Paul follows the same pattern in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 where he commends women to “learn in silence with full submission” (v. 11), not “to teach or to have authority over a man;” to keep silent (v. 13). Paul drew on Genesis 3:15-16a to justify his command: “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Timothy 2:13); “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived” (v. 14a); the woman became a transgressor (v. 14b). Then Paul concludes with a declaration of the salvation of a woman through “childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty” (v. 15). What do you think about Paul’s interpretation of the Genesis passages both in the case of 1 Corinthians 11 and in this one?

What is your response to different interpretations?

Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE), a Hellenized Jewish philosopher who was a contemporary of Apostle Paul, also had something to say about women based on his understanding of the Genesis passage. He wrote the following:

“Why was not woman, like the other animals and man, also formed from earth, instead of the side of man? First, because woman is not equal in honor [*doxa*] with man. Second, because she is not equal in age but younger. Wherefore those who take wives who have passed their prime are to be criticized for destroying the laws of nature. Third, he wishes that man should take care of woman as a very necessary part of him; but woman, in return, should serve him as a whole. Fourth, he counsels man figuratively to take care of woman as of a daughter, and woman to honor man as a father...”³⁶

- Is Philo’s attitude toward women better, or worse, than Paul’s?
- Are both of them saying: “Keep women in their inferior place, but acknowledge that they are needed?” How do you feel about this interpretation?

36 R. Marcus, *Philo, Supplement 1: Questions and Answers on Genesis* (LCL; London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1953), 16.

Do you support women in leadership positions?

- Given the general interpretation Paul makes of the Creation story and the status of women in comparison to men, do you think or believe that he would have held women in very high esteem, to the extent of approving and supporting them in holding leadership roles?
- Do you believe that his opinions, rules and the customs of his time were meant to be for all times and places?
- To married women, can you imagine always keeping quiet in church and saving all your questions for your husband when you get home—and also addressing all your suggestions, comments, observations and opinions only through your husband?
- What about single women—to whom should they address their questions, suggestions, etc.?
- To husbands, picture your wife silent in church until you get home, then she can speak. What would that be like? Would you want the responsibility of always speaking for her, and of always teaching for her, and of always teaching her and answering her questions?
- Do the above texts demonstrate to today's church that women should be excluded from leadership positions?

GLOSSARY

<i>ezer</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:18); helper, not in the implication of subordination, but rather of partnership
<i>háadam</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 1:27): genderless; due to some translations, <i>háadam</i> is used as a name (Adam) and is translated as a man. In this passage, this word is referred to as “him;” though it is masculine, it does not specifically designate a male or female. This is the entity that God then separates into two human beings, male and female.
<i>háadamah</i>	(Hebrew) (Genesis 2:7); ground
<i>proof text</i>	to remove Scripture from its context in order to prove a point
<i>Yahwist</i>	the writer of a portion of Genesis that was likely written by a different author than the first chapter

SessionSix

Moving On...

THEME

To explore, challenge and claim our call to participate in God's Reign, where all are called to ministry.

INVITATION

How will you live faithfully the call of Jesus Christ in your own life? If you are a woman, how do you experience claiming your full participation in the Reign of God? If you are a man, how do you continue to live faithfully by opening the avenues for women's leadership?

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 28:19

BIBLICAL

As the women move on, they have a charge to explore, challenge and claim their call to participate in God's Reign that all are called. As mentioned in Session One, the Canaanite woman changed the direction of Jesus' ministry. This shift in paradigm appears at the end of the Gospel according to Matthew when Jesus says: "All authority has been given to me; Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). The Canaanite woman functions as a channel of healing not only for her daughter, but also for the community.

In the parallel account (Mark 7:24-30), the woman is a "Greek, a Syrophenician by birth" (v. 26). She approaches Jesus inside a house. The woman's direct speech is different from that in Matthew 15:21-28. Although the two accounts differ in details, they both deal with the same issue of "insider-outsider," or those who belong and those who do not. What if the Canaanite woman had accepted her place—that is, a little dog under or around the table wagging its tail with no room at the table? Do you answer this question the same way as you did in Session One? And now in your imagination, accompany the Canaanite woman. What do you see? What emotions do you discover within yourself?

In Session Two, we discovered anew the calling of women for full participation in their life in Christ and in their service through the church. In Session Three, we studied together the various interpretations of Genesis 1-3 regarding the creation of human beings, and in Session Four, we were invited to think critically in order to live in faithfulness. As you stand with the Canaanite woman in this story, how would you respond? Can you answer the same as you did in Session One?

The Canaanite woman's persistence had constructive results not only for herself and her daughter. Her story reaches across time and place; even today, it is an eye-opener helping us to see how we may rise above destructive labels, discrimination, prejudice and oppression. We rise into the fullness of our baptism, call and general ministry of Jesus Christ. In our time, we may not be able to eliminate sexist, colonialist³⁷ and racist interpretations of Jesus' mission, for example, but we can rise above such destructive human behavior and claim our rightful place as children of God. The Canaanite woman got her heart's desire by thinking outside the box into which circumstances of time and place had forced her. How has that happened in your life?

HISTORICAL

(Please see Addendum One: Historical Timeline.)

Throughout the ages, women have been choosing to live the Word of God—through worship, Bible study, social justice and acts of mercy. They have chosen to live the Jesus story, oftentimes waiting for the church to catch up to the vision of God.

In 1956, The Methodist Church, through the decision-making body of the General Conference, was confronted with an overwhelming number of petitions calling for the full rights of women as clergy within the church. Through much discussion, and a session that went longer than anticipated, the General Conference affirmed the full rights of women. *(See Addendum Three for a Reader's Theatre from the 1956 General Conference.)* This Conference consisted of one-half clergy (all males) and one-half laity (males and females). No clergywoman was a voting member and, yet, the church was called to act on their behalf.

Through individuals, groups, organizations and the church, we have heard the call to live faithfully the teachings of Christ.

CONTEMPORARY

Today, The United Methodist Church has made a statement through our Social Principles regarding women and men. (The Social Principles are a “prayerful and thoughtful effort... to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation...” *2004 Discipline*, p. 95.)

¶161. II The Nurturing Community: F) Women and Men

We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God. We reject the erroneous notion that one gender is superior to another, and that one gender must strive against another, and that members of one gender may receive love, power, and esteem only at the expense of another. We especially reject the idea that God made individuals as incomplete fragments, made whole only in union with another. We call upon women and men alike to share power and control, learn to give freely and to receive freely, to be complete and to respect the wholeness of others. We seek for every individual

³⁷ Colonialism is the system by which a country maintains a foreign country, often for economic exploitation.

opportunities and freedom to love and be loved, to seek and receive justice, and to practice ethical self-determination. We understand our gender diversity to be a gift from God, intended to add to the rich variety of human experience and perspective, and we guard against attitudes and traditions that would use this good gift to leave members of one sex more vulnerable in relationships than members of another.

What is our story? As a woman, how have you been empowered to serve through the church? As a man, how have you opened doors of understanding, welcomed women's experience of faith and called women to leadership?

Are you a woman who has said yes to leadership in a position that has never been held by a woman?

- Dr. Anne B. Kerr was unanimously selected as the 17th president of Florida Southern College, a United Methodist school, in February 2004. In a press release by the college, Dr. Kerr stated: "It is a great honor to be chosen as president of one of the nation's flagship United Methodist colleges.... The institution is poised for greatness, and I look forward to leading its continuing evolution."

How are you called to leadership in a position of authority and responsibility, within the church or within your daily life?

Are you a woman who needs the community of other women and men to say yes to your call?

- Linda Mobley was born to teenage parents, lived with grandparents for a period of time, and was the oldest of seven children. "School was hard too. I had no friends and was at the bottom of the social pecking order, the target of many adolescent jokesters... I was also extremely shy... But then in the fall of my junior year, two girls decided to befriend me. They began walking the halls with me and talking to me as if I were a real person with real feelings. They actually risked their social standing in an adolescent culture to sit with me in the cafeteria. After about two months, they invited me to something called MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship)... I had very little concept of what the church was. But I did know these two girls; and so, even though I was scared, I went."
"I dare say *if* it had not been for those two high school girls who decided they would live an authentic faith and be my friends, *if* it had not been for those adults that taught them how to live their faith... I would not be here today." (*What Is a Youth Minister?* from *YouthNet*, Fall 1994)

Linda, at the time of this writing, was a Diaconal Minister in The United Methodist Church in the area of Christian education.

How has the community called forth the gifts of women in your congregation? How have you needed the community in order to see the fullness of your life in Christ?

Are you a man who has empowered women to live their calling in faithfulness, who has opened doors of understanding in your own church and in your community?

- In 1956, when the petitions came before the General Conference of our predecessor denomination, The Methodist Church, both clergy and laity were seated with vote. All the clergy delegates were men. They had the courage to call forth God's vision within the church, the willingness to make a dynamic change within the 20th century, and embodied a faithfulness to the Gospel call of Jesus Christ: The GC voted "Yes" for full rights for women as clergy within The Methodist Church. A new era was dawning.

If you are a man, how are you called, with your position and authority, to speak the truth of the call of Christ for women in leadership within your congregation or within your daily life?

What is your own story? How have you lived the "waters of baptism" in claiming your call to ministry?

What is your congregation's story? How has your congregation claimed to be The United Methodist Church, with John Wesley's openness to women preachers, and our statement that "We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God" (*2004 Discipline*, ¶161.II.F)?

REFLECTION ON THE STUDY

At the 50th anniversary celebration of women receiving full rights within The United Methodist Church (Chicago, August 2006), the closing worship service included this "Charge" read by the author, Keya Sheri Belt, the daughter of a clergywoman. As you read this, you are invited to reflect on how you will mentor the daughters and granddaughters who will come after you.

Imagine the voice of a young woman or girl—your daughter, your granddaughter, a niece, a child in your congregation, a little girl who has recently been baptized—and hear her voice as you read the Charge (see next page).

Write the name of the one whose voice will be imagined:

The Charge

Show me, I pray.
Show me the way; show me how to walk proudly.
Show me how to speak as women speak,
for the spirit of the Lord is upon you, and God has anointed you.
You've survived the worst the world and the church has thrown your way,
so pass your anointing like Elijah, put your mantle on me
and mark me like Elisha,
for without your wisdom, I am helpless and without your spirit,
I lack the boldness to stand as a woman called by God to preach.
For 50 years, you have spoken, the chain has been broken
and now your daughters preach and sing their song.
I want to preach and bind the strongholds,
but who will teach me, take my clay and begin to remold me?
Where is my guidance, my light in darkness?
Will you hone my skills through your own example and gentle hand?
Will your life echo the gospel, as we change this land?
Will you remind me that the trail has already been blazed;
the price has already been paid?
Equip me with the weapons I need to continue to stand for the Lord,
so that I can pick it up when you lay down your sword.
For the spirit of the Lord is upon me also,
but without you I really don't know which way to go.
Show me, I pray, my mothers in the Lord; prepare your daughters.
Take us under your wing, so that in the end,
we all may stand and sing.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
for God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor,
for the dispossessed and blind—I'm called to open the door.
Let the Spirit continue to guide us, I pray—
O mothers, sisters, trailblazers—show me, I pray.

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