



**YES!**  
CHURCH

An Informational  
Resource & Study Guide



**East Ohio Conference**  
The United Methodist Church

# A Message from Bishop Tracy S. Malone



Dear Beloved in Christ,

I invite us to reflect on the words that we hear over and over again when we gather as the Body of Christ and partake of Holy Communion:

“By your Spirit make us one with Christ  
One with each other  
And one in ministry to all the world  
Until Christ comes in final victory and  
we all feast at his heavenly banquet.”

These words of blessing bear witness to who we are called to be as the Body of Christ and speak to our need for an outpouring of God’s spirit. It is a recognition that we can do all things that God has called us to do through Christ who strengthens and empowers us to fulfill God’s purpose. (Philippians 4:13)

Every time we accept the invitation to come to the Lord’s Table, we are essentially saying **YES!** We’re saying **YES** to being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. We’re saying **YES** to remembering that we are loved unconditionally by God. We’re saying **YES** to following in the footsteps of Jesus. We’re saying **YES** to being like-minded, having the same love and being one in spirit with each other. We’re saying **YES** to our mission of extending God’s love, grace, compassion and hope to our neighbors and to all the world. And we’re saying **YES** to remaining faithful until Christ comes in final victory and the Kingdom of God is fulfilled.

Let us keep saying **YES** to Christ! God is able to do far more abundantly than what any of us can ever think of or even imagine with our collective **YES**. I can imagine lives being changed, communities being transformed, hope being reborn, and people being reconciled to one another through our collective **YES!** I can imagine a Church with a radical discipleship that is grounded in the love, teachings and example of Jesus Christ, a Church where everyone has a seat at the table and can belong and be regarded as God’s beloved. I can imagine a Church that transcends geography, borders, barriers and differences. I can imagine a Church that is diverse, and integrally connected—to each other, to our neighbors, to our communities and around the world. This vision can become a reality when we collectively say **YES** to Christ!



I invite every local church and faith community in the East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church to be a **YES** church! To be a church that is committed to worshipping, praying, loving, growing, serving, listening, and connecting.

## **WORSHIPPING**

The Bible tells us to not neglect meeting together, as some have made a habit, but we are to encourage one another, to spur one another on to doing good and to have hope. (Hebrews 10:25)

Worship is our form of highest praise. When we surrender our hearts to God in worship, our spirit is uplifted and our joy is renewed. We extend the gift of fellowship when we invite others to worship with us.

## **PRAYING**

Prayer is essential to our faith and our walk with Christ. The hymn writer wrote, “prayer is the soul’s sincere desire.” There are many times people feel powerless in their lives, especially when they experience loss, suffering and hardship. We pray for ourselves, pray for others and pray on behalf of others to petition God for healing, deliverance, peace, mercy, forgiveness and hope.

## **LOVING**

“For in Christ Jesus ... the only thing that counts is faith working through love.” (Galatians 5:6)

People will know that we are Christians by how we love. There is so much hurt, pain, hate, violence and division in the world and that people experience in their lives. The greatest gift and power that we can offer and embody is the love of Jesus Christ ... a love that can bring about healing, transformation and restoration ... a love that welcomes ... a love that extends community. “Though we cannot think alike, may we not love alike? May we not be of one heart, though we are not of one opinion? Without all doubt, we may.” (John Wesley)

## **GROWING**

Discipleship is a lifelong journey. As we study the Word of God and take time to pray, we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and grow in love and compassion for others. We have to ask the Lord to increase our faith (Luke 17:5). As we grow in Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives and is manifested through how we demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)





## SERVING

The Bible tells us that whatever we do for one of the least of these our sisters, brothers and siblings, we did for him. (Matthew 25:40)

We must keep our eyes on Christ ... focused on our mission of disciple-making, healing, hope and transformation. Let us not grow weary in doing good, loving our neighbors ... welcoming the stranger, serving the poor, dismantling racism, building beloved community, addressing violence and creating better and safer communities. People need Christ ... and the world needs The United Methodist Church.

## LISTENING

Taking time to listen to another person's story, perspective and experience is an act of faith and an act of grace. As the Body of Christ we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. (James 1:19)

We are called to exercise humility, not looking only to our own interests but to the interests of others.

## CONNECTING

Together, we say **YES!**

I encourage you – laity and clergy of the East Ohio Conference – to gather in your local church or faith community to work together through the **YES!** Church study guide so that you can build a welcoming community for others.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Yours in Christ,  
**Bishop Tracy S. Malone**



A Message from Bishop Tracy S. Malone



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The United Methodist Church



# YES! CHURCH TASK TEAM

## The Purpose of the YES! Church Task Team

During her Episcopal Address to members of Annual Conference 2023, Bishop Tracy S. Malone shared about having formed the temporary YES! Church task team:

“This multi-generational group was made up of clergy and laity with differing theological perspectives and cultural understandings. Their work was to assist our shared adaptive work in helping us shape our futuring conversations as we clarify our missional identity as people called United Methodists in the East Ohio Conference; helping us to do the adaptive work of cultivating an environment and a culture within the Conference and within every local church and faith community that is welcoming and inviting, where all persons will be fully welcomed and invited where they will know that they are loved unconditionally, a place where they can grow in grace and faith in Jesus Christ, a place where they can serve and be sent out as disciples of Jesus Christ who transform the world,” said Malone.

“Through this YES! Church task team’s work, conversations and consultations with clergy and laity and with people even outside of the walls of the church they came up with an immersive study guide for local church visioning. This study guide has been developed to provide local churches an opportunity to have the same opportunity that they had to engage in a process and to be able to come to experience, ‘what does it mean to be a YES! Church?’ where if anyone were to be invited to worship or to any event in your church they would, without hesitation, say, ‘Yes!’” Malone said.

In the fall of 2023 Bishop Malone will invite pastors, congregations, and faith communities on a journey using the work of the YES! Church task team.

## YES! Church Task Team Members

Doug Oplinger (convener)	Tenicia James
Andy Call	Angela Lewis
Steve Stultz Costello	Glen Needham
Lisa Courtwright	Blair Porter
Lee Ann Dunlap	Emily Suffecool
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# YES! CHURCH TASK TEAM REPORT

## **Embracing the Wilderness: Mission Narrative of the East Ohio Conference of The United Methodist Church**

The wandering of the Israelites from captivity to the promised land stands as a metaphor for all religious journeys. Though seemingly unified in identity and blessed as God's chosen people, they nonetheless experienced hunger, thirst, confusion of purpose, grumbling, exhaustion, and division. An entire generation, once enslaved, lived and died in search of a holy and prosperous place.

No tribe, no nation, no religion has escaped discord. Early Christians found themselves in disagreement over pork and jewelry. What traditions must continue? What traditions must change? A dispute erupted between Peter and Paul, the former anointed directly by Christ and the latter a messenger of Christ who likely had not been yet believed. Should one have more authority than the other? Roman Catholics excommunicated Galileo and Lutherans excommunicated Kepler, both scientists whose discoveries generated conflicts with long held and incorrect scriptural interpretation and disputes over unitary truth. The Puritans killed women believed to be witches because, "You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live." Presbyterians divided in the 1700s over tradition, and in 2009 the Episcopal Church divided over the ordination of women and gender issues.

Methodist denominations were and continue to be no exception. The author of Methodism, John Wesley, strongly opposed the American Revolution, placing colonial Methodists in grave danger of arrest or violence. One Methodist was hanged by revolutionaries. The historic St. George's Church in Philadelphia, which ordained the first Black minister, nonetheless relegated Black members to the balcony – behind the line – an embarrassment to our history. Methodist segregation propelled Black members to separate and form one of the most influential denominations in American history, the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodists have divided, segregated, reformed, joined with United Brethren and Evangelicals and to this day find reason to disagree.

Yet there is a distinct enduring strength of The United Methodist Church: We embrace the difficult journey. We embrace complexity. We grow from conflict. We make mistakes and with humility seek God's grace in assessing and correcting our errors. During this strife, United Methodists are asked to hold one another in love and encourage all to go on toward a prize.

This is the report of the **YES!** Church temporary task team commissioned to help develop an East Ohio Conference narrative that helps embrace our missional identity as a "big tent" conference of The United Methodist Church.



## We Were Asked: What Does God Call Us to Be?

In a five-month period of reflection of laity and clergy, the task team shared both the joy and agony that are beneath that question of purpose. We shared these emotions:

1. First, the love of Christ is beyond comprehension, to be joyously and humbly shared without hindrance.
2. We strongly believe that Methodists, Evangelicals and United Brethren together have a rich, instructive history whose continuing strengths and God's grace give The United Methodist Church a vital purpose in Christ's ecosystem of diverse beliefs.
3. We are cautious with answers and reluctant to judge, believing that through humble engagement and curiosity we open ourselves to reflection, personal growth, and a Holy Spirit who affirms and changes us.
4. We are saddened and hurt that some who intend to separate from The United Methodist Church are, as they depart, harming the church and those who remain.
5. We are troubled that the unchurched and many believers are repulsed by divisiveness.
6. We are most troubled that the unchurched and many believers may view themselves as unwelcome, or worse, rejected, in the midst of the divisiveness.

Through prayerful reflection in scripture, respect for the wisdom of those who have gone before us, our own spiritual experiences, and the gift of reason, we recommend the following:

**Our Calling:** To love God with all our hearts and love others as we love ourselves. On these two commandments all else rests.

**The Effect:** We embrace the mystery that we are loved unconditionally as we imperfectly journey through life. This love is so stirring that we are compelled to likewise unconditionally love others.

**The Experience:** There is a timeless yearning for what is good and binds the people who today call themselves United Methodists. We wonder together: What should we believe? For what should we hope? What are the expectations of us? How should we act? And as we engage in those questions, often unanswered, we do not judge but remain steadfast in a call to exude Christ's love.

## The Work is Done in the Local Church

The United Methodist Church mission statement states that the work of Christ is best defined and conducted according to the needs of the local community. We see evidence of this in scripture and history.



Tabitha’s ministry in Joppa stands as an outstanding example. Her attention to the women of the community provided opportunities for community fellowship and cohesion. Peter, in what was to be a short visit, found this so compelling that he chose to extend his stay. Likewise, it was the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church at the steps of the Alabama capitol that unified the Black community of Montgomery in the 1960s in seeking justice and fairness – a transformative movement started by African Methodist Episcopal Church member Rosa Parks.

To be as successful as these few examples, congregations must be intimately woven into the fabric of their communities in ways that draw and hold people together. What does that look like? Christ told the disciples and the crowds, “let your light shine before others.” By doing so, he said, others see and want to experience for themselves the mystery of God.

### The YES! Church

The task force asked this question of itself and more than 100 United Methodists: If we were to ask anyone in our community to join us in an event at our church – any kind of an event – and the invitee, without hesitation, said “Yes!”, what would be the attributes of our church? This is an important image to have in our minds, because for this to happen there would need to be foreknowledge that our church is a place of acceptance, love, joy, stimulation, and safety.

The church member response to this question is reflected in the following word cloud, with the largest words representing the most frequent responses:





“Welcoming,” “friendly,” “caring” and “loving” are repeated most often. Analyzing the next tier of words suggests The United Methodist Church embraces engagement, inclusivity, and vibrancy, and a complex idea: “authentic.” This is the glue that holds United Methodism together. “Authentic” suggests that we are part of the community, we are doing, we are fallible, we don’t pretend to have answers to all of life’s complicated questions, and we care.

As the task force discussed these adjectives, or attributes, of the **YES!** Church, we concluded that these are not prescribed goals for a congregation, but they are the fruits of a United Methodist congregation that is intimately woven into the fabric of the community as members love God with all their hearts, and others as themselves.

We are fresh, sparkling, nutritious fruit – albeit with a little roughage. Humble. Complicated. Enthusiastic. Compassionate. Engaged. Fun. Missional. And all driven by a Spirit – a light – to which people are drawn. Is anyone, then, able to join this church? Is anyone able to serve and love others through this church? The answer is **“Yes!”**

## Is There a **“NO!”** Church?

A shocking discovery occurred when people who are **not** United Methodists were asked the same question: What would allow you to emphatically say **“Yes!”** to an invitation to a UM church? We learned that it’s what we don’t know about people in our community that can be most meaningful to understanding the reasons they don’t join us – and to which we must be aware.

While they listed “friendly” and “welcoming” as their top words, these new ideas surfaced:

- Do you have a well-lit parking lot?
- Will I be welcome? (asked by a Person of Color)
- Are there gun racks?
- Is there a dress code?
- What are your beliefs?
- What will you try to tell me?

And this observation was made as the **“YES!** Church task team was doing its work: A sign in front of a suburban church said, “Join us in worshipping the living God.” That raised two questions:

- To whom might that statement be appealing?
- To whom might that statement be problematic? In other words, does this suggest requirements for entry?

The task team discussed at great length our purpose in the community and how to best present ourselves to people wherever they are on their journeys – especially those whose path purposely avoids organized religion. In other words, how can God’s love, or “light,” best penetrate? And what are impediments?



What then do we make of The United Methodist Church mission statement that we are to “make disciples?”

*The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Local churches and extension ministries of the Church provide the most significant arenas through which disciple-making occurs.*

The task team concluded that this statement, while scripturally accurate, is likely problematic, perhaps a result of the evolving meaning of words in a contentious culture. For example, 90 years ago, “stay woke” was a cautionary statement in a Huddie Ledbetter song urging Blacks to be aware of dangers in white America. That was an effective cautionary statement until it was appropriated in the past decade.

First, “wokeness” became a widespread call to action by social-justice advocates, and now it is used as a pejorative by white political figures who say whites are the victims of racism. Likewise, in today’s charged climate, to “make disciples” may feel imposing. That causes us to revisit what is behind the non-United Methodist person who expressed reservation about joining us when he asked, “What will you try to tell me?” Moreover, it feels contrary to the humility that is the essence of United Methodism. We don’t portend to have the exclusive lesson plans for discipleship. To do so might limit our own ideas of who is a worthy witness. Yet, we believe that United Methodism nonetheless produces spirit-driven disciples who have the wisdom and grace to reveal Christ to others in ways that we cannot imagine.

Moreover, we expressed concern that viewing ourselves as disciples – perhaps in a context of seed planters – carries risk. In Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis warns that a feeling of stature, of pride, is the greatest sin because it prevents us from receiving. Tabitha was described by Luke as a “disciple.” What were her qualifications that he called her a disciple? Would she have called herself such? She shared highly coveted cloth with widows – women who likely had no stature in the political sphere. Did they meet often to make clothing? To talk? To support and test one another? As one local pastor said, “The gospel flourishes where all are equals, where there are no barriers.”

This opens discipleship to a blurry definition perhaps left best to the work of the Holy Spirit, which, as we learned on the Day of Pentecost, can be full of surprises. People who were never thought to be preachers suddenly were speaking. How often have we gained new knowledge or felt our hearts strangely warmed by simply being with others? Again, strengths that set The United Methodist Church apart – mystery, awe, humility – allow us to step back from planting seeds in “them” – the imagery of us vs. them – to ALL people, including us, being fertile ground for seeds planted by Christ through each other! Engagement with people in our community opens all of us to learning, respecting, loving, helping, and growing with one another.



## A Messy Journey to Perfection

There are critics of The United Methodist Church who suggest that the church today stands for nothing. This task force strongly disagrees.

God's creations – the common sparrow, the human brain, the ebbing tides, the circling moon, the humming black hole – comprise the pulsating cosmos that is beyond comprehension. Likewise, The UMC is a flourishing branch in a thriving ecosystem of religions that honor a supreme being who is beyond description.

There are those who ask whether the church must be redefined and discard its past. The task force argues that remembering our past should redefine the future. It can be painfully instructive. Black United Methodists already are asking whether the new church will remember the history of segregating Black members to the balcony and forcing Blacks to create their own denomination that in many ways defined American freedom. Will the church recall the embarrassment of Methodist pastors appealing to Martin Luther King Jr. to slow down, be patient, and “adhere to law and order?” Will the church remember that Blacks were segregated into their own conference? Will the church acknowledge that the closing of Black churches creates United Methodist deserts, just as there are food deserts? Will Black churches be heard in the new United Methodist Church? Acknowledging history brings us closer to God's grace.

For those who ask, “Must I leave?” the answer is “No.” Ours is a “both-and” ministry of diverse people. All are welcome. It is only in a human-directed “either-or-else” situation that people might find their joys and hopes limited.

There remain questions about the impact of denominational leadership on local churches once The United Methodist Church is realigned. Those questions include: “Will the UMC send us a pastor who is theologically at odds with the missional statement and beliefs of our congregation?” “Or send a pastor who introduces changes in religious tradition that our congregation does not accept?” “Or will The UMC demand changes in our beliefs?” “Must I change?”

There are two answers to these questions.

- First, The UMC has always and will continue to seek guidance from local congregations on their beliefs and needs in a local pastor. The UMC will continue to use local guidance in the appointment of pastors most likely to serve the local church community in the sharing and teaching of Christ's love.
- Second, the question, “Must I change?” has been answered through all of Christendom with, “Yes.” The UMC seeks to love, support, and encourage people wherever they are on the journey – whether they are taking a first step or have been toiling in the field all day. If our lives are not changed by the grace of God, and if we are not propelled to share the love of Christ, then is the Holy Spirit truly at work in our lives and our congregations?

Susanna Wesley defied her husband by preaching while he was gone, leaving an indelible mark on son John's appreciation for the vitality of women's voices. When John opposed laity as preachers, Susanna insisted that he listen to determine whether God might still be at work. He changed his thinking. In other words, John and Susanna Wesley, each on their own journey, recognized the power of the Holy Spirit when unfettered by their own arbitrary regulation. Yet, churches still build walls that grieve the Holy Spirit.

Frances Willard was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the late 1800s. She was a founder and long-time president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, whose mission was to end domestic violence. She also was an early leader of the women's suffrage and social justice movements, often breaking local rules on women speaking in public. When she was elected in 1888 by her local conference to be a delegate to Methodist general conference, she and four other women were refused seats – by men.

What did the Methodist Episcopal Church lose by blocking women's voices? Perhaps it failed to hear a call to save women and children from domestic violence? By opening ourselves to the whispers of the Holy Spirit from people unlike us, might we be more likely to welcome and help rather than harm "the least of these?" The Rev. Alfred T. Day III, General Commission on Archives and History said: "Frances Willard embodies that Wesleyan sense of practical divinity; that you just don't go to church to hear a religious message but the religious message you hear, changes not only your life, but changes the life of the world around you."

Our vibrant congregations quietly feed, provide clothing, offer time-outs for challenged parents, build and distribute beds, operate preschools, support community causes, and are warm, glowing places where all are welcome to communion – and to serve communion.

A story was told in our task force of a young man studying to become a UMC pastor. His heritage – native of India and not raised as a Christian – raised the question: Why did you choose United Methodism from among all the possibilities? His answer: Methodists don't talk, they do.

A local pastor in the East Ohio Conference embraces our complicated heritage with a monthly "messa church" in which children and adults join their Sunday School classes to paint, compete, and play. At first, there is doubt and stress about the inevitable chaos, but she encourages new relationships. Energy, fun and excitement prevail. Kids and adults laugh with one another. There are high-fives. Deep conversations and aha moments ensue.

The youngest member of our task team refreshed our hearts with this personal experience. She helps organize an evening out with youth and adults for lively, fun conversation about scripture and issues. Restaurants are called ahead to make space for 30-40 people. Others in the restaurant are moved to ask: "Who are you people and what are you doing that is so fun?" The lively yet deep conversation is infectious. They are "YES!" people, embracing the wilderness.



# YES! CHURCH STUDY GUIDE

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’  
The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.’” Mark 12:30-31 (NIV)

## Our Calling

To love God with all of our heart and love others as we love ourselves. On these two commandments all else rests.

## The Effect

We embrace the holy mystery that we are loved unconditionally as we imperfectly journey through life. This love is so stirring that we are compelled to, likewise, unconditionally love others.

## The Experience

There is a timeless yearning for what is good and binds the people who today call themselves United Methodists. We wonder together:

- What should we believe?
- For what should we hope?
- What is expected of us?
- How should we act?

As we engage in those questions, often unanswered, we do not judge but remain steadfast in a call to exude Christ’s love.

What does that look like in the local church?

## The Purpose

The purpose of this document is to help local churches, using the Wesleyan tradition of discernment, listen to the Holy Spirit’s call to engagement with the community. You are encouraged to begin and end each of these 90-minute sessions in prayer.

## Session 1: What Do We Know About Those in Our Group?

- Begin the session with prayer.
- Give self-introductions.

*NOTE: Be sensitive to each other’s sharing because every person comes with different life experiences.*

- Age ranges
- Occupations
- Schools attended
- Personal heritage

- Share the reasons you go to church and how long you've attended.

*NOTE: On a flip chart, write the reasons for going to church understanding that doing so will provide information that can be displayed in later sessions.*

- Share a story in the Bible – not a quote – that inspires you and tell the reason(s) that it does. When finished, discuss themes and differences that the group sees in the reasons the stories are important.

*NOTE: Write the stories on a flip chart emphasizing the reason that each is important.*

- Explain the reasons for these questions when we're done: To provide a benchmark for how the people of our church are or are not like people in our community.
- What do we need to know about our community to best understand the reasons why they do not come to church?

*NOTE: This question is important because it helps create anticipation for the conversations in Session 2.*

- Ask group members to volunteer for the topics to be addressed in the next session's conversation.
- Provide these and other resources for gathering data:
  - **Census Quick Facts**
  - **Ohio investigative reporters' Ohio county by county demographics database**
- End the session with prayer.

## **Session 2: Reality Check**

- Begin the session with prayer.
- Ask for reports on the following topics:
  - a humorous fact about where you live.
  - demographics of the region and community in which you live/go to church compared with data from the U.S. and Ohio, and, preferably, with data from the 2000 census data:
    - incomes, such as median household income.
    - educational attainment.
    - homeownership.
    - poverty.
    - how the community voted for leaders and on issues in the 2000, 2008, 2016, and 2020 elections.

*NOTE: Discuss what may have influenced the community vote.*

- studies on who attends church and what we know about them.
- studies on people who don't attend church and what they say about church.
- polling for American opinions about top issues and attitudes towards religious institutions.

- Brainstorm about what all the above may say about the people in our communities. Did we have any aha moments?

*NOTE: Put observations about people in our community onto a flip chart to be used at a later time.*

- *Assignment for next session:*
  - Write down attributes/adjectives describing a church that, if anyone were to be invited to any service or event there, they would without hesitation say “**Yes!**” to the invitation to attend.

### **Session 3: The YES! Church**

*NOTE: Display the flip charts from the previous sessions.*

- What do you think would be the attributes, or adjectives, describing a church that, if anyone were to be invited to any service or event there, they would without hesitation say “**Yes!**” to the invitation to attend.
- What would make them see that place as a good place to be?

*NOTE: Write the attributes on a flip chart. What motivates people and congregations to exude these attributes?*

- What are some scriptural stories that speak to these attributes? Are any of them the same stories we identified in our first session as our favorites?
- Compare these attributes with what we learned in the previous session about the reasons people don’t attend church.
- *Closing learning moment:*
  - Compare these attributes with the list we created the first week showing reasons we joined the church. How are they different? How are they the same?
- *Assignment for next session:*
  - Call someone who serves the community (ie social worker, school employee, librarian, justice system employee, food bank, mental health employee, etc.) and listen to the needs they see in the community, focusing on community challenges that a small group could help to address.

### **Session 4: What Do We Need to Change to be a YES! Church?**

- Ask a few participants to tell a story about a time they were moved, educated, and/or inspired by someone who they were helping. In other words, what did the person they were helping teach them in return?
- What did you learn from the community phone call you placed in preparation for this week’s session and how could a small organization help fill that need?
- How do the attributes of our **YES!** Church compare with the needs described by the community worker you called this week?
- Make a list of the assets of our church.

- *Closing learning moment:*
  - What must we change about our church so that our assets and resources and attributes of our **YES!** Church are in harmony with the needs of the community and the people in it?
- *Assignment for next session:*
  - Bring ideas that help us embrace conflict.
    - Identify topics or issues that easily ignite conflict locally.

## Session 5: Embracing Conflict

- Share the topics or issues that easily ignite conflict locally.
- Arrange for someone to recall a conflict that today seems humorous, but nonetheless was tense at the time.
- Where in the history of the church have we seen conflict?
- What is the outgrowth of conflict? Where in history and in scripture can we find examples of learning from conflict?
- Can you give examples of working alongside others with whom you were diametrically opposed on some issues? What brought you together? What did you learn from that?
- Is there anything in our previous four conversations on which we think we can find agreement? For example, can we identify a common need in our community that may be inherently controversial but there remains something that Christ might dive in to show mercy and love?
- *Assignment for next session: What visions do you have for how our church can put into action the ideas we have discussed? What do we need to change about ourselves to be a **YES!** Church?*

## Session 6: The Day of Pentecost

- Based on what we have learned in past sessions, list ideas for how our community can move from thought to action.
- Vote on these ideas to identify which ones have the greatest potential for serving and loving all people in our communities as Christ would do, and thus becoming the **YES!** Church we defined in our previous sessions.

*NOTE: It's imperative that we not reverse those two ideas. Being a **YES!** Church happens because we are doing as Christ asks us to do.*

- Small group solutions-oriented conversations on the ideas that receive the most votes. How do the solutions invoke Christ's call to care for the people around us, to love everyone, show grace, be humble, receive as well as give. What assets can we use? Who should take responsibility? How do we make this sustainable so that "making disciples" is a natural outgrowth?
- Talk about your visions for a world in which each United Methodist congregation is equally intent on worshipping, praying, loving, growing, serving, listening, and connecting with the people in its community.